

# Kansas Preservation

Newsletter of the Cultural Resources Division • Kansas State Historical Society



*Four terms that are often used interchangeably by the public actually have very specific meanings when applied to historic properties: preservation, restoration, reconstruction, and rehabilitation.*

*Learn more on pages 13 -16*



# An Internship Leads to a Career Shift

*"This is not going to be like other internships. You won't be doing any copying or filing."*

Intended as a warning, the City of Lawrence's Historic Resources Administrator (HRA) summarized one reason that I so fervently wanted to become the Historic Preservation Planning Intern. While enrolled in "Historic Preservation Planning," a course offered by the Masters of Urban Planning program at the University of Kansas, I learned of the opportunity to intern for the city. I immediately applied.

After one semester of learning about urban planning, I knew that my concept of good planning required the preservation of historic buildings, landscape features, and overall layout of the built environment. Communities that successfully preserve their historic resources are infinitely more livable, attractive, and sustainable than their anti-preservation counterparts. Tourists and new residents flock to Paris, London, San Francisco, Charleston, and Savannah for many reasons, one of which is indisputably their excellent preservation of historic buildings and landscapes.

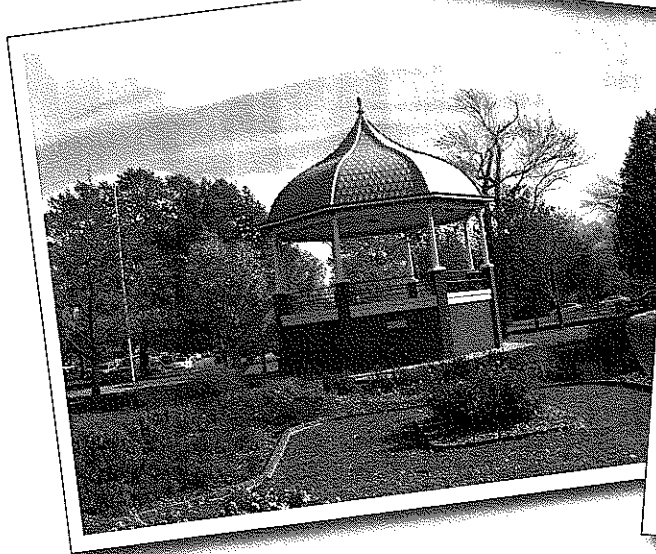
In April 2006, I started work at the Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Department. As promised, I was immediately thrown into the real world of working in a planning office. After the requisite "new job" reading and exploring of documents, I began reviewing incoming projects. When a project requires a building permit for a National Register of Historic Places or Register of Historic Kansas Places listed property or its environs, a Historic Resources Review is mandatory. In a city such as Lawrence, which has more than 500 designated historic properties, the workload is tremendous for one full-time staff person and a part-time intern.

I began by looking over the applications for Historic Resources review, studying the drawings, and

comparing the proposed projects with the standards and guidelines with which they must comply. During this pre-review process, and after several months of work and guidance, I learned to "read" architectural drawings and construction documents—an impressive feat for someone whose design experience had been limited to drawing very simple site plans. Next, I visited sites and property owners to get first-hand knowledge of the proposed project. Here again, I gained valuable experience. I encountered all types of individuals: some friendly, others difficult; some professionals in architecture, preservation, construction, or planning, others laypersons. Adapting my manner of talking with each of our applicants was necessary to establish credibility with urban planners, architects, and preservationists who have their own professional lingo. As a 22-year-old, I felt intimidated at first. With

practice, the discomfort began to ebb, and I began to enjoy discussions in this new world in which I now lived.

Although it sometimes required difficult explanations, I enjoyed interactions with laypersons much more. When talking with typical members of the public, my vocabulary contained less jargon but my message was always the same: Let's figure out a way to meet your needs, while preserving the historic character of this property. These interactions gave me the opportunity to actually help someone, whether that was to achieve better design (at no cost to the applicant), an understanding of preservation, or a better opinion of city government. Often I felt like an ambassador for the City of Lawrence sent out into the community to



*Laura Waggoner is putting her internship experience to work as a survey coordinator in the Cultural Resources Division.*

*Two of the many projects that Laura Waggoner worked on during her internship were this residence at 1008 Ohio Street and the gazebo in South Park.*

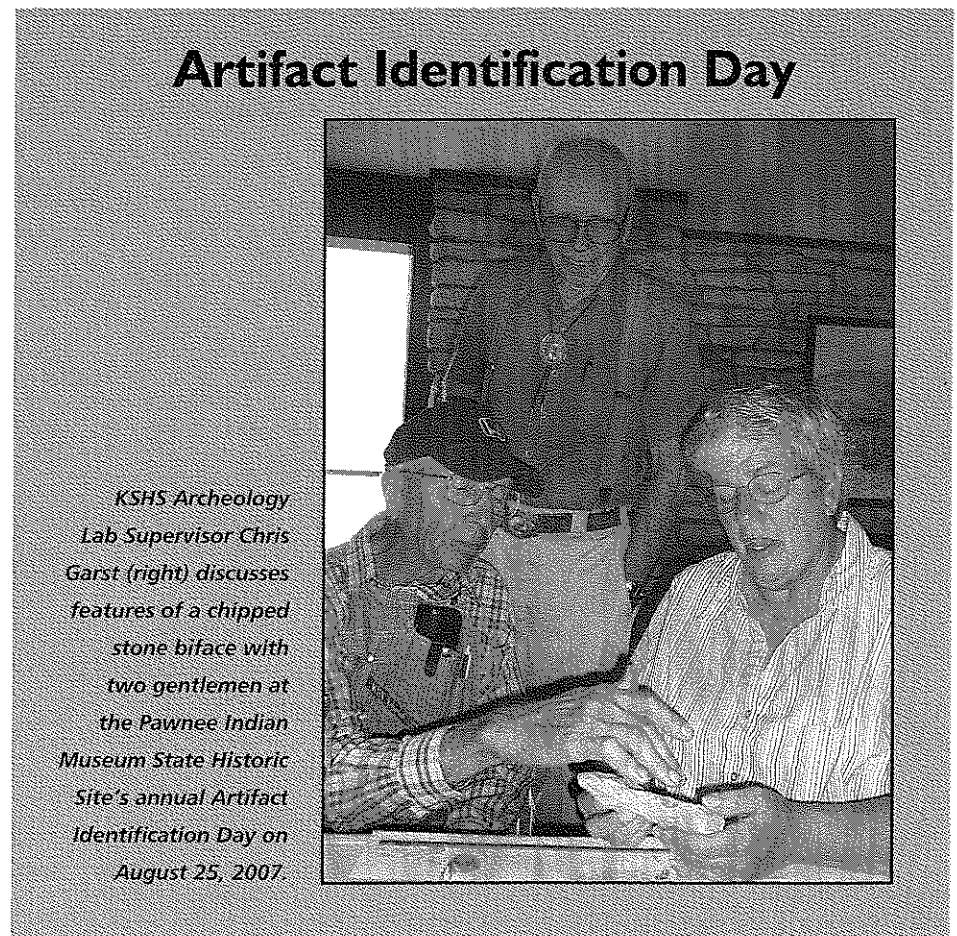
show that preservationists can be helpful, efficient, and knowledgeable. Great satisfaction follows an interaction that starts rocky—often because the person begrudges dealing with perceived governmental hoops—but ends with mutual understanding, even amicability. I was lucky to develop several such friendships with members of the public, an excellent job perk.

After meeting with an applicant and developing an understanding about the project at hand, I prepared a report, including the summary of a project, its compliance with applicable standards and guidelines, and staff recommendations. Often projects were so complicated, and sometimes controversial, that knowing where to begin was difficult. I learned another valuable lesson: just type. It is always possible to edit and revise, or even rewrite, later. The HRA dispensed this advice to me early in my internship; and to this day, it still serves me well when writing difficult papers.

Beyond reviewing applications, making site visits, and writing staff reports, I had many other tasks. I was fortunate to work on the research for a National Register district. Like any other staff member, I attended a variety of weekly and monthly staff meetings, and occasional planning and city commission meetings. I had responsibilities and duties of my own, but could get help whenever I asked. I really appreciated this atmosphere.

By working 25 hours a week while going to school full-time, juggling meetings and reports, and interacting directly with city staff, city officials, and the public, I learned so much more than many of my contemporaries. I made contacts, learned to voice my opinion (often among people twice my age), and witnessed the role of preservation and planning—and sometimes the struggle involved—outside the academic world.

My internship was funded by a Historic Preservation Fund grant, which stipulates that the end result must be tangible and measurable. Typical results are downtown survey projects or National Register nominations; however, the end product for this grant was a historic preservationist. I believe this result is as valuable as any document resulting from an HPF grant. By the time my internship with the City of Lawrence concluded, I felt that a career in preservation would be the most effective manner for achieving “good” urban planning. I realized that not nearly enough people know about, care about, or work toward preservation. By leaving the field of urban planning for



*KSHS Archeology Lab Supervisor Chris Garst (right) discusses features of a chipped stone biface with two gentlemen at the Pawnee Indian Museum State Historic Site's annual Artifact Identification Day on August 25, 2007.*

a career in preservation, I am working toward a better built environment.

Even now, months later, I am still comprehending the impact of such an extraordinary internship. During the year I worked for the City of Lawrence, I was keenly aware of the influence it would have on my career. Now, given what I know about the inutility of many internships, I find it quite impressive that my internship helped me gain enough experience and contacts to begin a career in a field different from the focus of my graduate work. About one month before I left the City of Lawrence, the Kansas SHPO hired me as a survey coordinator.

Too often, people consider historic preservation to be fluff—an extra, if a city has a budget surplus. I certainly believe this a poor approach to preservation planning. By working in preservation and understanding its valuable economic, aesthetic, and community-building benefits, this urban planner became a participant in, rather than just an admirer of, historic preservation. My experience leads me to believe that grant funding that directly and measurably adds members to the field of historic preservation is the most beneficial of all.

*The Lawrence Historic Resources internship is funded by the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) of the National Parks Service (NPS) and administered by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Intended for cities, counties, universities, and preservation organizations, HPF grants are allotted to activities that further plan for the preservation of the built environment. In addition to preservation interns, HPF grants are used for surveys, National Register nominations, preservation plans and ordinances, design review guidelines, and educational activities.*