



# OLATHE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September 2016

## Calendar

**September 8, 9, 10, 2016**

**Old Settlers Days  
Downtown Olathe**

**September 15, 2016**

**OHS General Meeting**

**Program: Olathe Memorial Cemetery  
Heritage Center  
7 p.m.**

**September 30, 2016**

**Jefferson Highway film viewing  
Olathe Community Center**

**Room A  
7 p.m.**

If you plan to attend the meeting and are in need of a deaf interpreter, please contact Bob Courtney by email at [bobandlilacourtney@att.net](mailto:bobandlilacourtney@att.net) at least 48 hours in advance.

**October 13-15, 2016**

**Fall Cemetery Tours  
7:00 – 8:30 p.m.**

**913-971-5111 for more information**

**October 20, 2016**

**OHS Board meeting  
Heritage Center  
5:00 p.m.**

If you would like to receive your newsletter by email, please contact the Olathe Historical Society at [olathehistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:olathehistoricalsociety@gmail.com). If receiving the newsletter by email, be sure to set your inbox settings to recognize this email as not being junk mail. Newsletters and meeting announcements can also be found on the Olathe Historical Society website at <http://www.olathehistoricalsociety.org>

## Olathe Memorial Cemetery

Brian Nilges and Norman Pomerence will present a program on the Olathe Memorial Cemetery at the Heritage Center on Thursday, September 15<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. They will provide updates on the cemetery including changes to the entrances and new informational kiosks. An application was recently submitted to the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office as one of the final steps to have the cemetery named to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Olathe Memorial Cemetery at its present location was founded in 1865. When the founding fathers in 1858 laid out the City of Olathe, no provision was made for a cemetery. Since church yards were the traditional burying ground, someone suggested that burials be made in the Church Square. "Church Square" was bounded by Willie, Prairie, Walnut and Mulberry streets.

In 1865, Mr. Watts Beckwith announced that with or without support of the city, he was setting aside ten acres for cemetery purposes. This is the reason why the first burial in the present cemetery is from the Beckwith family. However, the city was slow to make changes, and it wasn't until the railroad right-of-way cut through Church Square that it was necessary to move the graves to the present location. This accounts for the fact that several stones in the cemetery bear dates earlier than 1865. No trace remains today of Church Square burial plot. After some years the city bought the Beckwith tract, and later additional acreage.

You can learn more about early Olathe history by meeting some of the characters resting in the historic Olathe Memorial Cemetery during the Fall Cemetery Tours. These will be held Thursday, October 13<sup>th</sup> through Saturday, October 15<sup>th</sup>. The tours are scheduled on the half hour from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The theme this year is early Olathe politics and features Olathe's first mayor, a presidential candidate, and a governor. Tickets are \$6 each for ages 5 & up and may be purchased by calling 913-971-5111.

A Walking Tour Guide for the cemetery can be found online at <http://cemetery.olatheks.org/pdf/Tour-Guide.pdf>. In addition, the Olathe Garden Club, working with city arborist Rick Spurgeon, has recently updated the *Trees of the Olathe Memorial Cemetery* walking tour brochure. It can be found online at <http://cemetery.olatheks.org/pdf/Tour-Tree.pdf>.



OLATHE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEETING  
AUGUST 18, 2016

Attending: Bob Courtney, Karen Beets, Ann Johnson, Anne Seitz, Mary Cochran, Ken Roberts, Mary Jo O'Brien, Jayne Jones, Vickie Holdman, Margaret Endecott

MINUTES

CORRECTIONS from the June 16, 2016 minutes are as follows:

Display Case: *Olathe Trail Riders* will be the new theme for the OHS display case at the Heritage Center in September.

Old Settlers: The theme for the Old Settlers event this year is "National Parks" in honor of the 100th anniversary of the National Parks. Old Settlers Days will be September 8, 9, and 10th.

The minutes of the June 16, 2016 meeting were approved as corrected above.

NOTE

Minutes of today's meeting are not yet approved. If corrections are needed they will appear in the following bi-monthly newsletter.

FINANCIALS

The Financial Report was approved as read.

CORRESPONDENCE

Robyn and John Gorrell of Australia contacted Bob concerning a calendar dated 1906 with a picture of the First Congregational Church of Olathe, Kansas. John Gorrell found the calendar while digging in the dirt in 1950 in New South Wales, Australia and has kept it in his possession. The church subsequently burned and a stone church was then built on the same site in the 100 block of South Chestnut. The stone building was purchased by the American Legion and that building was later demolished during urban renewal. The calendar has been now been given to the OHS.

Carol Knox of Wisconsin contacted Bob concerning a tin type that she has in her possession of two men holding shotguns. The name of T. G. Tuttle Olathe, Kansas is noted. Bob responded that T. G. Tuttle was an Olathe photographer.

OLD BUSINESS

Film series now under production include TRAINS THROUGH JOHNSON COUNTY and RAILROADS IN OLATHE

Future films will include Hyer Boot Company, Buddy Rogers, and Urban Renewal.

DISPLAY CASE

The Olathe Trail Riders exhibit is planned to be on display September 1, 2016.

OLD SETTLERS

Theme NATIONAL PARKS

Date: September 8, 9, 10

The Olathe Historical Society will have a booth at Old Settlers along with the Olathe Alumni Association. Your help is needed to staff the booth in periods of two hour shifts. If you could volunteer, please contact Bob Courtney at 913 764-2494.

OLATHE MEMORIAL CEMETERY

The Olathe Memorial cemetery is in the process of applying to be registered as a National Historic Site. A grant was received in the amount of \$18,000 and a firm from New Orleans was hired to help obtain the information needed.

The process is now in the hands of the Kansas State Historical Society. A vote will be taken in November.

COLLECTIONS REPORT

An itemized listing of various projects completed during the year along with financial donations and monies spent was provided along with a thank you to each one who attended the Collection Committee meetings. Thank you to our historian for the many hours she gives to make the Olathe Historical Society a valuable asset for our community.

NEW BUSINESS

*History* will be the theme of the 4th Friday event held in "downtown" Olathe at the intersection of Park and Cherry, Friday evening August 26th from 5 p.m. until 7 p.m. This is a monthly event sponsored by the merchants and citizens of the Olathe Core. The Olathe Historical Society will have a booth at this event.

Darrell Johnston and Josiah Laubenstein drove a vintage car and traveled the entire length of the Jefferson Highway from Canada to New Orleans. A film documenting their journey will be shown at the Olathe Community Center in Room A on September 30th at 7 p.m. This event is free and open to the public. The Jefferson Highway extended from Winnipeg Canada to New Orleans and came right through Olathe, Kansas.

Next General Meeting - September 15, 2016 7 p.m. at the Heritage Center

Next Board Meeting - October 20, 2016 5 p.m. at the Heritage Center

## “He Dared to Make a Difference”

The headline from the June 28, 1996 Sun Newspapers explains why Dr. Hugh Speer was nominated for and will be named to the Olathe Alumni Wall of Honor on October 4, 2016. Written at the time of Speer’s death, the paper declared that “It was a fitting epitaph for the educator, civil rights advocate, and Johnson County Community College founding board member”.

In the same article, Speer was remembered as saying, “If they ever put up a plaque about me anywhere, I would want them to mention my involvement with Brown vs. Topeka, my running the Kid Farm, my Fulbright experiences and perhaps my long-range efforts to try and make education more experience-oriented. Experience is the magic word in education. I hope I may have peddled that idea a bit in my teaching, my administration and at the community college”.

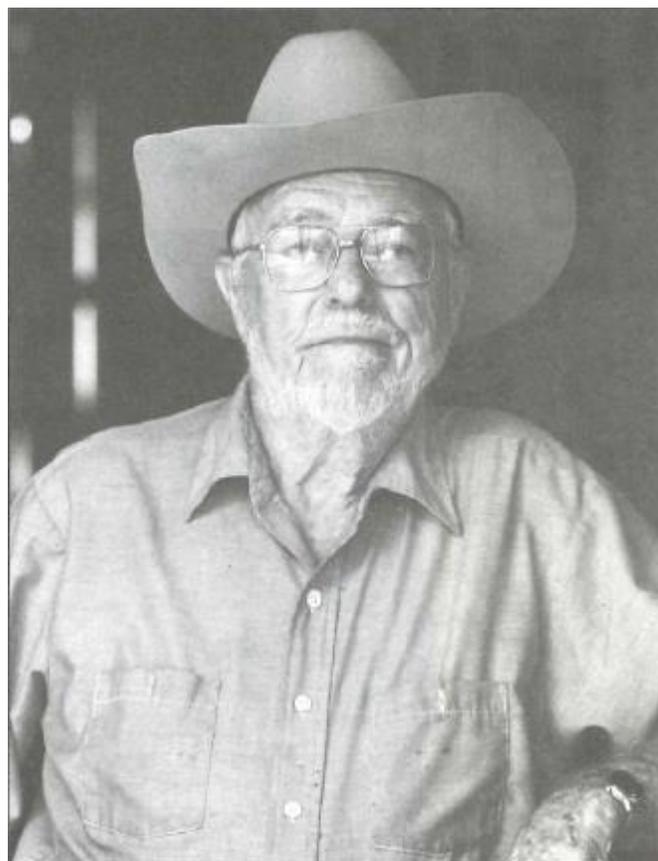
An article from the May 25, 1988 *Johnson County Star* described Speer’s involvement with those activities in more detail. Speer’s parents had taught at a black college in Tennessee before he was born. When Speer joined the University of Kansas City (later UMKC) faculty in 1945, he escorted black students into the student dining area, despite protests from other faculty. In 1951, he was asked to survey the Topeka school system for inequities between blacks and whites and to round up other expert witnesses. “People thought I was crazy for getting involved,” Speer said. Fellow faculty members would not help him. A Topeka school administrator warned Speer that his participation might hurt him professionally.

The case emphasized the social science view that segregation was a psychological handicap. Speer’s testimony took up 50 pages of the 170-page court report. He told the court that curriculum meant the total experience of a child, and school had to prepare blacks to live in a society that was 90 percent white. “The more heterogeneous the group in which children participate, the better they can function in our multicultural and multigroup society,” Speer testified.

The lower group ruled against Speer’s side, but the presiding judge, Walter Huxman, later told Speer that he had worded his opinion so the Supreme Court would find segregation unconstitutional, which it did in 1954. “He did a very important and courageous thing at a time when it was extremely constructive,” said Jack Greenberg, the former director of the

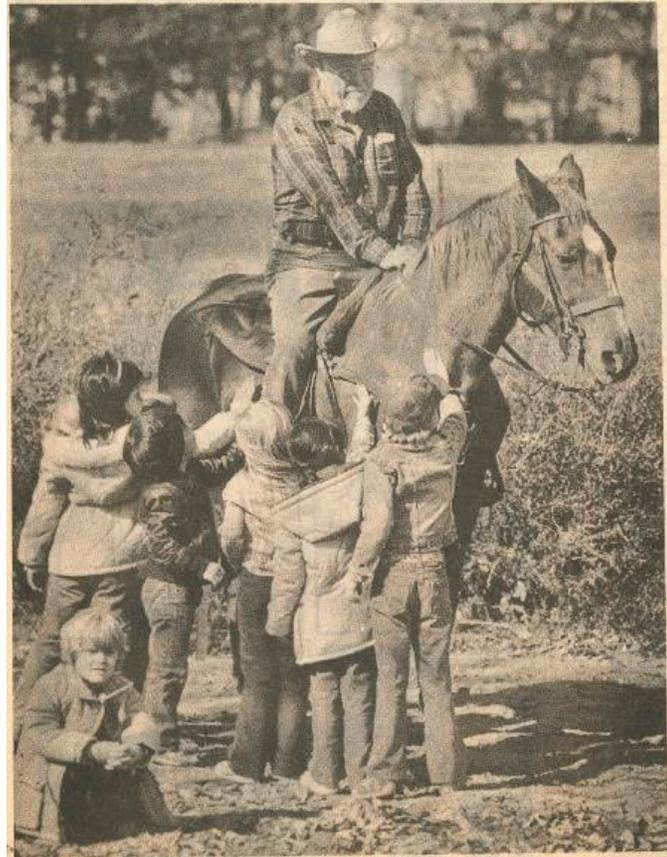
NAACP Legal Defense Fund and author of “Race Relations and American Law.” “He deserves a lot of credit.

The history of the Speer Kid farm stretches back to 1868 when W.S. Speer, Hugh’s grandfather, a Civil War veteran, settled on land near what is now 119<sup>th</sup> St. and Black Bob Road. His parents took over the farm in 1906, the year Hugh Speer was born. For over twenty-five years, from the 1960s through the 1980s, Speer shared his childhood with children by letting them visit his farm on school field trips. They could pet sheep and goats, chase peacocks, ride horses and experience a little bit about the way farm life used to be. Speer estimated that over time, between 30,000 and 40,000 children had come to see the farm. The visits only stopped when liability insurance became a problem.



Speer served as dean of UKC’s new School of Education beginning in 1954. Speer believed that, “In recalling something important that we have ‘learned,’ most of us refer to some active experience in the outside world rather than a textbook.” His program required students to spend a semester both teaching and in a public welfare agency – “to see how the other half lived.” He taught at UKC until his retirement in 1976, but in the meantime began to

promote the development of community colleges and especially pushed to create one in his home county, Johnson County.



The children pet Dr. Spear's horse after a riding demonstration.

As a member of the JCCC board of trustees, a position he held from when the college was formed in 1967, Speer wrote the final draft of the college's philosophy and goals. The mission statement has served as a model for other community colleges. He was instrumental in establishing programs at JCCC for hearing-impaired students. Speer was named the first recipient of the Dr. Hugh W. Speer Award for Distinguished Service to Johnson County Community College.

Dr. Hugh W. Speer will be honored at the annual Wall of Honor banquet on Tuesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>. The dinner honoring Speer and other honorees will begin at 6 p.m. (socializing and seating at 5:30 p.m.). Tickets are \$35 per person. Event sponsorships are available for \$1,000. Contact Diane Gossage (913) 780-8182 for tickets or sponsorship information.

The 2016 Wall of Honor inductees will be recognized by the Board of Education during its Oct. 6 meeting at the Education Center, 14160 Black Bob Road, Olathe.

## Olathe Historical Society

### Officers

President	Bob Courtney (15-17)	764-2494
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President	Maureen Donegan (16-18)	782-0960
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President	Jayne Jones (15-17)	764-8039
Secretary	Margaret Endecott (16-18)	782-0269
Treasurer	Vicki Holdman (15-17)	764-5076
Historian	Anne Seitz	768-6954

### Board of Directors

Mary Cochran (15-17)	829-5078
Karen Sutton Beets (16-18)	
Ann Johnson (16-18)	829-2299
Ken Roberts (16-17)	
Mary Jo O'Brien (16-18)	782-4270
Max Beets (16-17)	