

# Museum

## MEMOS

Vol. IV, No.3

Editor: Grace Kensa

September 2025

# We're Ready for



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# Are You?

# It's That Time of Year Again!



With your help, we could secure \$2,000 in matching funds during Gather for Good Match Day on September 18th!

Gather for Good Match Day offers us a chance to receive up to \$2,000 in matching funds from the Clay Center Community Improvement Foundation for donations made to our fund.

Here's how it works:

**In Person:**

When: September 18, 2025

Where: Clay County Museum, 518 Lincoln Ave.

Time: 12:00 - 8:00 PM

**Online:**

Online gifts can be made with a credit card between 12:00 am to 11:59 pm on September 18 by visiting [GatherForGoodCC.com](http://GatherForGoodCC.com).

**Mail In:**

Write one check payable to CCCIF for your entire donation. Fill out the donation form to specify amounts for participating organizations. Mail donations to the Clay Center Community Improvement Foundation, PO Box 251, Clay Center, KS 67432, received by September 22, 2025. Download the form at [GatherforGoodCC.com](http://GatherforGoodCC.com).

Gather For Good is an opportunity to grow our fund for charitable and philanthropic causes, so that we can enrich our programs for even greater impact in our community for years to come. This is truly a missed opportunity if we don't take full advantage. Your gift is vital to help us maximize the match.

Sincerely,  
Jeff Gaiser  
Museum Director

## Piotique plus Sneak Peak

With Piotique coming up, we don't want to spoil the fun of our new exhibits. I'm not going to say much about our two new exhibits, but I will give you an overview.

Our new permanent exhibit is Coats of the Prairie: Real Fur, Real Facts, Real Fun. It's an interactive fur display where you will be able to touch furs from different animals and guess what animals they came from. Along with this will be facts on Kansas animals and their furs.

Our new rotating display is Stars & Rainbows & Swords, Oh My! It showcases the local Masonic chapter along with other affiliated organizations like the Order of the Eastern Star, International Order of the Rainbow for Girls, and more.

We know that a lot of people are busy during Piotique and might not have time to stop by the museum. That's why this year we are offering "sneak peaks" of the new exhibits the week before Piotique.

### Opportunity 1

Wednesday, September 24th  
6-8PM

### Opportunity 2

Friday, September 26th  
2-5PM

The sneak peaks are open to everyone, so bring a friend! We will also be providing punch and cookies, in case you need another reason to come!



## THE DEXTERS ARRIVE

### **\*Note to Readers**

*This is our version of the story. It's based on real people and real events, but we couldn't find enough records to fill in every detail. So, we worked with what we had and wove it into a story that connects the dots. The people, places, and major events are real - the rest is our way of bringing the past to life.*

This story begins in Illinois in the spring of 1862. Siblings John, Aaron, and Betsey have just received a letter from their brother Alonzo in California. He's struck it rich in the gold fields and, restless as ever, is ready for new adventures. After a series of letters back and forth, John and Alonzo agree to meet that summer at Fort Kearny, Nebraska.

On his way east from Placerville, California, Alonzo rides a stagecoach driven by a talkative veteran of the trail, Enoch Cummings. Enoch, who has hauled passengers between Missouri and California countless times, offers a bit of advice: "When you reach Fort Kearny, take the military trail down to Fort Riley."

When the brothers reunite, they catch up on all that's happened since they last saw each other. John talks of the family still in Illinois and of his new bride, Susan. Alonzo, meanwhile, shares news of his own upcoming marriage—his fiancée Emma is waiting for him in California. During their conversation, Alonzo repeats Enoch's advice. John considers it and simply says, "Why not?"

So off they go. Buying two horses and supplies, the brothers strike southward along the Republican River Valley. After several days, they find themselves captivated by the wide, fertile land in the heart of what would become Clay County. Further along the trail, they stop at the home of Orville Huntress, whose family runs a small store along Huntress Creek. In talking with the Huntresses, John and Alonzo decide this is where they want to plant their roots. Orville directs them to the nearest land office in Junction City.

There, the brothers purchase land from a broker—spending \$2,000 for 3,000 acres in Clay County. With deeds in hand and excitement for the future, they head back to see their new holdings. But the season is turning. Summer is

slipping into fall, and winter will soon arrive. They waste no time. A. C. Pierce, a surveyor from Junction City, is hired to survey the land and lay out a town site - what will become Clay Center. Two men from Fancy Creek are brought on to build a cabin near where 4th Street and Lincoln Avenue stand today.

With the work underway, Alonzo leaves John in charge and returns to California to marry Emma. They wed in September. Back in Kansas, John tends to preparations for their new settlement, readying the land for the couple's arrival in the spring of 1863.

Once Alonzo and Emma return and settle into their new cabin, John is free to journey back to Illinois. Overjoyed to see his family again, he soon arranges for his wife and Aaron and Betsey's families to join Alonzo in Kansas. He himself stays behind a while longer to gather a herd of cattle. The families arrive in the fall, leaving Alonzo and Emma free to travel east to purchase a steam engine and boiler for the mill they dream of building.

It isn't until the summer of 1864 that John begins driving his cattle herd toward Kansas. Around the same time, Alonzo and Emma return from the East Coast with their new steam engine in tow, eager to start their next venture. But trouble has flared. Native American raids strike settlers along the Little Blue River in Washington and Marshall Counties, part of what becomes known as the "Colorado War."

Fear spreads quickly. Families from northern Clay and southern Washington counties gather for safety at the Huntress farm. After several tense weeks, the raids subside and the settlers cautiously return home. Hearing of the unrest, John decides to winter his cattle in southern Iowa rather than press on.

Finally, in the late spring of 1865, John drives the herd into Kansas. The family—after years of separation, detours, and dangers—is at last reunited and ready to begin the next chapter of their lives.

*\*Unfortunately, we do not have any photos of John Dexter.*

*Alonzo  
Dexter*



*Aaron  
Dexter*

# YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

In recent years we've seen a decline in membership, both new and past members alike. As a non-profit organization we count on donations and memberships to keep us going. I know we've said this before, but we rely on supporters like you.

The Clay County Museum is very much running on a "bare-bones" budget. We do what we can to make the museum look nice and create good exhibits, but we don't have the funds to make it as great as we know it could be. We would also love to be able to bring in traveling exhibits, but we don't have a few extra thousand dollars sitting around to pay for one.

Recurring donations and memberships are the only way that our museum survives each year. We are looking at grants but they take time we don't always have as well as they aren't a guarantee or a long time solution.



## **Please Remember...**

The Clay County Historical Society and Museum was created by citizens of your community who believed that their history mattered, your history mattered. Investing in your local museum and historical society is an investment in your children's future. By supporting your local Clay County Museum, you help ensure that future generations have access to their heritage. Your contributions help enhance educational programs, expand access to collections, and improve facilities, making your history more accessible and engaging for all.





## Benefits

For All Members

- *Museum Memos*, our Quarterly Newsletter
- Special Event Information
- Invitation to our Annual Meeting
- Discounted Event Tickets
- 5% Discount in the Museum Gift Shop

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email\*: \_\_\_\_\_

\*By providing an email address, you consent to receiving newsletters, event notifications, etc. from the Historical Society by email.

## Memberships Support:

- Museum Operation
- New Displays
- Special Events
- Buildings on Heritage Row

### Please:

- Add \$5 to your membership dues if you would like correspondence by mail.
- Make checks payable to Clay County Historical Society.

## Levels

- ☐ Individual - \$15
- ☐ Family - \$60
- ☐ Patron - \$250
- ☐ Sponsor - \$500
- ☐ Benefactor - \$1,000
- ☐ Historian - \$3,000

All memberships are annual (12 consecutive months).  
Memberships are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

# MUSEUM MEMOS

## Contact Us

### Address

518 Lincoln Ave  
Clay Center, KS 67432

### Museum Hours

Tues - Sun 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm  
Free Admission

### Contact

(785) 632-3786  
ccmuseum@twinvalley.net  
www.claycomuseum.com

### Museum Staff

Director: Jeff Gaiser

Curator of Artifacts: Diana Shaner

Curator of Documents: Grace Kensa

### Board Members

President: Mike Bulk

Vice-President: Marlin Mugler

Treasurer: Terri Parry

Secretary: Linda Cunningham

Louise Yarrow

Nicole Liby

Lynn Greenlee

Brad Fowles

Pat Gilbert

Tom Nelson

Marcus Seirer

Frankie Murrin



Clay County Museum

518 Lincoln Ave  
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Return Service Requested