

Why a Museum About Post Rock?



Early pioneers were faced with an unusual difficulty on the expansive plains of Kansas; lack of trees. These industrious pioneers discovered a layer of rock, located only a few feet below the soil surface, that could be used to make permanent, weather resistant, beautiful buildings. This rock layer is known as limestone and due to the geological formation is just the right thickness (8 to 12 inches) for building stones and posts. When limestone is first exposed it is soft and chalky, making it easier to drill and dress (form). However, once the stone has been exposed to air, the edges become hard making it an exceptional building material for the plains pioneer. At first, limestone blocks were just used to form the walls of dugouts. As the pioneers recognized the structural potential of limestone, more permanent all-stone buildings were constructed. Limestone blocks quickly became a common building material throughout north central Kansas. Stone blocks were used to build schools, churches, homes, bridges, posts, decorative stone, window trims, steps, hitching posts, troughs (feed and water), tombstones, and walkways.

Become a Part of the Society...

To become a member fill out this form and mail to:

Rush County Historical Society
P.O. Box 473
La Crosse, Kansas 67548-0473

(Name)

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

Check one:

- Annual Membership \$ 5.00
- Lifetime Membership \$ 25.00
- Other Contribution \$ _____

10/2014prm

© 2014 Rush County Historical Society

Content and design by: Bradley Penka

Produced in cooperation with:

Rush County Economic Development

The Rush County Historical Society, Inc.

History of...

The Post Rock Museum



202 W. 1st Street
La Crosse, Kansas

www.rushcounty.org/RCHS



History of the Museum

The idea for the *Post Rock Museum* may not so much have been conceived by the citizens of Rush County, but by the curiosity of passers-by who noticed the strange stone posts that lined the highways and back roads of the county.

For years, locals noted that visitors to Rush County often had questions about these peculiar “monuments” made of stone. Mrs. Alma Vaughn, curator of the museum for many years, once told the story of a woman who was passing through and commented, “every place has a different way of doing things, but this is the first place I've ever been that has its cemeteries beside the highways.”

Bill Appel, longtime La Crosse barber, also fielded numerous questions about the limestone posts from his customers. Appel decided that something needed to be done. Before long, he had captured the interest of Harry Grass, president of the *Farmers and Merchants State Bank*, Roy Ehly, local manager of the *Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.* office, and others in the community. After a little “barber shop talk” and \$100 seed money from Appel, the group agreed it was time to come up with a more formal way to tell the story of Post Rock - a museum.

To give the project a governing structure, the group reactivated the *Rush County Historical Society*. The society had been originally organized in March, 1960 for the purpose of promoting a county observance of the Kansas centennial celebration, but had become inactive at the conclusion of the festivities. The society was reactivated and incorporated on May 1, 1963, this time with plans to develop a museum to preserve the history and tell the story of Post Rock. The first officers of the society were chosen with Roy Ehly as president; Oliver Wilhelm, vice-president; Harry Grass, secretary, and Stan

Merrill, treasurer. Starting with donations of just over \$7,500 and a strong will to succeed, the group went to work.

The first task was to determine a location for the new museum. The site selected was a parcel of ground located in southwest La Crosse now known as Grass Park. The park was originally donated to the town by the family of Harry Grass, Sr. and named in his honor, in 1956. Grass was a prominent local citizen who had contributed much to Rush County in the early twentieth century including serving as president of the *Farmers and Merchants State Bank*, and representative to the Kansas Legislature. Harry Grass, Sr. was also grandfather of Harry Grass III, the society's secretary. Later additions to the park were donated by David Clymer, Mildred Brandt and family, John Luft, and Joe Herrman. Once the grounds were cleared of long overgrown brush and other debris, its traversing stream and numerous shade trees created an ideal setting for picnics and family outings and the perfect site for the new museum.

To house the museum, the Society chose a old native stone house standing on a homestead



southwest of Nekoma, Kansas. The house was originally constructed about 1883 by Dan Haley. Stone by stone, the house was carefully dismantled, moved to La Crosse, and reassembled on the south edge of Grass Park.

To develop exhibits, the group consulted Myrl V. Walker, director of the museum at *Fort Hays Kansas State College*. Not only was the museum geared toward attracting and educating tourists,



A 1960s postcard depicting the museum.

the intent was, according to Grass, “to preserve what is rapidly disappearing.” The centerpiece of the museum was to be a diorama of an outcropping of Greenhorn limestone with a partially quarried fence post bed exposed. The museum also was to include an assortment of artifacts composed of and related to post rock.

To further tell the story and to enhance the building, various artifacts were placed on the museum grounds. A fence of post rock and split rail provided a frame for the stone house and a wooden windmill supported by post rocks. A flagstone walkway, watering troughs, hitching posts, well covers, and tombstones made from post rock illustrate both the versatility of this stone and the ingenuity of the pioneers.

Through donations of time, labor and money from citizens of Rush County, the plan was fulfilled and the *Post Rock Museum* was officially dedicated May 17, 1964. At the conclusion of his address that day, Merl Walker dedicated the museum “to a single feature, a stone fence post, whose presence here in western Kansas never fails to impress the distant visitor, and remind him that he is now in western Kansas, The Land of the Post Rock, the place of the stone fence posts.”