

# Settlers had best intentions for city

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Contributing Critic

"An exemplary free soil society...a city on a hill." Thus did Harvey Hougen characterize the hopes and dreams of the original founders of Manhattan. Hougen, a visiting assisting professor in the Department of History, KSU, was speaking at the Riley County Historical Society as part of its lecture series on Riley County history, *Looking Backward Toward the Future*.

Speaking on the topic, *Manhattan: the Covenanted Community*, Hougen showed that in addition to reflecting the general Puritan influence of covenants of the period, the first settlers of this community had more specific goals—"to do justice, to live wisely, and to follow a Christian way of life."

Before listing these specific aims, Hougen explained that there appeared to be two categories of towns settled in the Midwest.

The first type of town was the "cumulative" community. This type of settlement tended to grow fortuitously at locations of particular significance, such as river crossings and crossroads.

The second type of town was the "colonized" settlement, founded for ethical, moral, ethnic or other altruistic reasons. Such a town was Manhattan, he said, and its covenant was twofold—to be a free soil community, and to be a center for higher education.

In illustrating this aspect of Manhattan's development, Hougen concentrated on the lives of two men with backgrounds as fascinating as any encountered in the small hours of the night on the reruns of *Gunsmoke*.

Samuel D. Houston appears to have been the first man to have settled on what was later to become the

Manhattan townsite. He came to Kansas in 1855, and recognizing the future site of purple pride when he saw it, staked out the town of Canton at the foot of Bluemont Hill. It could well have been the Canton Wildcats, or the Boston Wildcats, if it had not been for that sandbank. Houston later joined with Issac T. Goodnow in establishing the Boston Town Association.

Colonel George S. Parks is an even more colorful character. Some of the incidents in his life really would provide material for episodes of *Gunsmoke*. For instance, during the Spanish-American War, when Parks was a member of the Texas army, captured by the Mexicans, he and a group of other prisoners faced a firing squad. At the first shot, Parks threw himself to the ground and played dead. He subsequently escaped and founded Polistra, on the north bank of the Kansas river, which also became incorporated into what would be Manhattan.

Hougen illustrated his lecture with fascinating slides of early Manhattan.

It is sad that a more suitable location than the Historical Museum cannot be found for this important series of lectures. And it is tragic for the future health of our heritage that there are not more young faces in the audiences.

Earle Davis facilitated the discussion that followed the formal lecture, and reminded the audience that "Manhattan is a nice, but distinguished place. And it seems to me that we ought to be proud of that, don't you think?"

True. But he also reminded us that Dorothy Parker once said:

*Manhattan is an island,  
Manhattan is a drink,  
Manhattan is a city,  
Or so the Kansans think.*