

Uncovering forgotten

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PHOTOS BY THOMAS PARISH '03, '12, PARISH PHOTOGRAPHY



With retro patterns that are replete with daring orange and green hues against drapes of white, Room 108 in Leasure Hall presents a flashback to the 1960s just behind a nondescript wooden door.

A vintage white sofa, rotary dial phone and other throwback features in the waiting room of the Chapman Center for Rural Studies are carryovers from one of its museum exhibits. Since its inception in 2008, the Chapman Center has specialized in displaying glimpses from the past, with recovering the lost stories of small-town Kansas at the heart of its mission.

The center's beginnings occurred when MJ Morgan, research director and teaching professor in Kansas State University's Department of History, enlisted more than 40 undergraduates to conduct research inspired by K-State alumnus Mark A. Chapman '65, whose parents farmed near Broughton, a small community in Clay County, Kansas.

Under Morgan's direction, the students

conducted four years of research that culminated in a 2010 book, *Broughton Kansas: Portrait of a Lost Town 1869-1966*. The book was underwritten by Chapman, who also donated seed money to create the Chapman Center for Rural Studies before he died in 2014.

"We founded this center with very little ... and we were able to grow and develop this undergraduate research center," Morgan said.

The Chapman Center has gained an expanded role, moving from a small, donor-driven undergraduate research arm of the history department to a fully funded unit supported by an endowment from the KSU Foundation. Now known as a Center of Excellence in the College of Arts and Sciences, the center encourages faculty and students to undertake interdisciplinary projects.

Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, the center's executive director and an associate professor of American history, stressed that the center is not a repository but a digital archive that employs the talents of undergraduate students who produce annals of

Kansas' cultural impact and legacy.

Lynn-Sherow has credited much of the center's success to the undergraduates' research as part of their course requirements or as part of their duties as paid interns.

Every semester, student interns earn three credit hours and \$2,000 by working on independent projects that become exhibits, poster presentations or material for showcases centered on Kansas history.

"The originality of the research is the primary focus, things about the state that's not appeared in print before," Morgan said.

Some of the state's earlier days are captured in a light box hanging in the center's main office. The box, which was commissioned for an exhibit called *Going Home: Hidden History of the Flint Hills*, holds four identical screens that flash digital slides of original photos and postcards from Kansas' yesteryears in places such as Alma, Cedar Point, Newton, Paxico and Volland, among other small towns. Lynn-Sherow served as curator of the exhibit that was presented at the Flint Hills Discovery

histories



Center in Manhattan.

The Chapman Center earned notoriety in 2017 when one of its initiatives, *Lost Kansas Communities*, was recognized by the National Humanities Alliance. That same year, it won a \$100,000 award from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support efforts to help Kansas' rural historical societies and museums collect, restore and preserve portraits of the state's heritage. The award was Lynn-Sherow's second as the principal investigator; the center gained its first NEH grant for digital humanities in 2009.

The center's contributions to the preservation of Kansas history is in concert with K-State's land-grant mission. Lynn-Sherow said that through experiential learning, discovery and curiosity, students who work for the center become links between the university and the state.

"I consider us to be a resource across the state of Kansas," Lynn-Sherow said. "We're sending back the stories about the places that they don't have the resources to research themselves." 🐾

