

Verl Coup – Talmage Museum

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

When a bank and a school both close, what is to be done with the two buildings? Today we'll learn about a rural community which seized the opportunity to convert a former school into a library and a former bank building into a museum. These help preserve and promote the history of the community's citizens. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Verl Coup is director of the Talmage Historical Museum. He grew up near Talmage and lived here his whole life, other than during his service in the Army. Verl was a long-time rural letter carrier. He started collecting artifacts of the Talmage community.

"When the older people would move to the nursing home, they knew I was interested in history so they would pass some of their things along to me," Verl said. "Otherwise, when they pass, their money and artifacts go to the big city," he said.

One day in 2010, he got an important call. "A lady who used to live here said the bank was closing and they would give us the building and most of the furniture," Verl said. Sure enough, the Talmage branch bank closed and the building was donated to the Talmage Historical Society to become a museum.

"My wife (Kathy) was happy to get all these things out of our house," Verl said with a smile. Kathy now volunteers at the museum. A local farmer left an endowment to support the new use for the building. In December 2010, the new museum opened its doors.

"The museum highlights the stories of the people from here," Verl said. The old bank building was organized into various displays. The teller area has places for various area families to display their family trees and photos. The bank offices have been organized into different types of rooms.

For example, there is the school room with various artifacts from school buildings and classes through the years. I had to laugh when I saw the hairstyles, eyeglasses, and short basketball shorts of yesteryear.

There is the picture room with lots of images from around the county, and a place for photos of farmers and their equipment. The vault has safety deposit boxes which are used for storage of pictures and memorabilia. There's a veterans area, a memorial wall where people can honor someone with donations that help sustain the building, and much more.

Artifacts continue to be donated. One morning Verl found a box left anonymously on the front step. Among the contents was a homestead certificate signed by President Chester A. Arthur.

The grade school in Talmage had closed in 2000 and then served as a church for a time. It has now become the Talmage Library and Events Center. Shawni Sheets, a board member of the Talmage Historical Society, is director.

The Talmage Library and Events Center is located up the street from the museum. In addition to the library's own collection, the Manhattan Public Library loans a rotation of books to the library every two months. As one might guess,

the former school building has a kitchen and dining area. The big gym is available for recreation, and an additional game room has pool, foos ball, ping pong, and exercise equipment. The facility is for rent by donation. Shawni Sheets said that many volunteers have donated books and other resources.

In spring 2019, the Dickinson County Community Foundation conducted a Match Day where donations to various worthy projects in the area were matched and doubled. “By noon that day, we had matched our \$10,000 goal,” Verl said. “The community support is there,” he said.

It is impressive to see such remarkable, repurposed facilities in a rural community like Talmage, population 99 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to www.talmagekansas.com.

When a bank and a school close, what is to be done with the buildings? In Talmage, they are being re-used in creative ways. We commend Verl and Kathy Coup, Shawni Sheets, and all those involved with Talmage for making a difference by repurposing and maintaining these buildings in ways that benefit the community. They could school other communities – you can bank on it.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.