

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Episode 9: "SHSMO Kansas City Research Center"

Guest: Lucinda Adams

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. Today, we are speaking with Lucinda Adams. She holds a master's degree in library science as well as master's and bachelor of arts degrees in history from Indiana University. Prior to rejoining the State Historical Society of Missouri in 2014 as the Associate Director of the Kansas City Research Center, she served as state coordinator of National History Day in Missouri and later as senior archivist of the Missouri Valley Special Collections with the Kansas City Public Library. Welcome to the *Our Missouri Podcast*, Lucinda.

LUCINDA ADAMS: Thank you for having me.

SEAN ROST: Now, as the associate director of the Kansas City Research Center, could you tell us a little bit about that facility and where it's located at?

LUCINDA ADAMS: Yes. The Kansas City Research Center is located on the campus of the University of Missouri-Kansas City. We're located in Newcomb Hall, which is on the quad of the campus. It's the oldest part of campus. Ironically enough, we're located in the building that was the first library on campus.

SEAN ROST: How long have you all been at that facility?

LUCINDA ADAMS: We opened in 1980. We were originally in the university library, but moved to this building. But, we have been actively collecting in Kansas City history since 1980.

SEAN ROST: Now, Kansas City history you're collecting and also portions of northwestern Missouri. What kind of collections do you have housed at the research center?

LUCINDA ADAMS: So, we collect for twenty counties in Missouri, and if you are thinking about a map of Missouri, we are as far south as Saint Clair and Vernon counties, and then we go

all the way up to the northern border of the state to Atchison and Worth counties. So, we collect in those twenty counties that are the northwest, western, left-hand side of the state. Obviously, we collect a lot of Kansas City history. But, we collect other materials dealing with the history of Missouri, the metropolitan area, western Missouri, the Midwest, and a lot of different collections based on things like transportation, architecture, early Kansas City history, the founding of Kansas City. We have a lot of collections that highlight the unique architecture of not just Missouri, but the entire country. We have about 17,000 sets of architectural plans. It's one of our larger collecting area that we have. We also do a lot with transportation. Things like the TWA archives. Our Cassidy Streetcar collection. So, we're really kind of varied in what we have. We also collect materials around organizations, institutions, and everything from letters and diaries—you might be able to come in and find a letter that your great-grandfather wrote to your great-grandmother in World War II, maybe. So, it's really everything from social history, political history, industrial history. We kind of run the whole gambit.

SEAN ROST: You mentioned some of them, but what are some of the more notable, or kind of well-received collections that you have there?

LUCINDA ADAMS: So, we have all of our various architecture collections. We get a lot of people coming to use those—they're rebuilding parts of a historic house. Or, we have an architect or an engineer that's working on rehabbing a building. So, we have a lot of people that are looking for plans of businesses and buildings. I really think that if Kansas City were to ever burn to the ground we could probably rebuild it with our architecture collection. Also, one of our more prominent collections—we have the J.C. Nichols Company Records. J.C. Nichols was the builder of the Country Club Plaza. That's probably what he's most well-known for. And then, we also have the Miller Nichols Papers. Here on campus that is who are university library is named after. It's the Miller Nichols Library. So, we have his papers. Probably one of my top two favorite collections that we have—one of them is the Native Sons and Daughters of Greater Kansas City. They were a collecting organization themselves, and documenting the founding of Kansas City all the way up—they're still an active organization—but they collected all the way up through probably until about the 1980s. So, late 19th, early 20th Century, all the way up to the 1980s. Contains scrapbooks, photographs, artifacts. It's just a fabulous snapshot of Kansas City history. And then probably my favorite collection that we have that I love to bring out and show people when we're doing like a show-and-tell is our Nelly Don collection. Nelly Don is the founder of the Nelly Don Garment Company. It's just fabulous. A female owned business. She was known for treating her employees very well. There's a lot of intrigue. She was kidnapped. We also have her husband's papers as well—[James] Alexander Reed Papers.

SEAN ROST: Could you tell us a little bit about the collections that you have related to the city and really the region's Jewish history? How did the Kansas City Research Center come into contact and serving as the main repository for those?

LUCINDA ADAMS: So, the Jewish Community Archives of Greater Kansas City is a partnership between Jewish Community Archives and the State Historical Society of Missouri. We're working to preserve the stories that compose our region's Jewish history. Basically, we are trying to preserve American Jewish history in context with the Greater Kansas City and the

Midwest by encouraging [and] supporting a collection of documents and photographs and other materials concerning Jewish life, history, and Jewish culture in the region. This type of collection really provides researchers, teachers, students, even the general public an opportunity to engage with a very diverse and dynamic culture. And also, preserve, in essence, the stories that are composing Kansas City Jewish history. The Jewish community have really played a significant role in the Kansas City community for many generations. They've made individual contributions to businesses and culture. Collective contributions to welfare and education and social concern. It's really impossible, I think, to understand Kansas City history, or the history of our nation, without understanding how people of the Jewish faith have interacted among themselves and in broader society. So, what we're trying to do is collect, preserve, and make available this range of history, and demonstrate how it fits in with the broader society of Kansas City history. Special emphasis we have in collecting—we're also going to try and do more programming and gather primary source documents to promote an understanding and appreciation of Jews in the Kansas City region.

SEAN ROST: Now, if someone were interested in looking in to some of those collections that you mentioned, what are some notable ones from this Jewish Community Archive that people could access and find important information on?

LUCINDA ADAMS: So, some of our more notable collections are we have a couple of different congregations' papers. So, the Beth Shalom. We also have the congregation Beth Israel Abraham Voliner Collection. We also have a lot of different personal papers that detail the social life of Jews in Kansas City. One great thing that we're doing right now is we recently were awarded a grant to digitize materials from the Jewish Community Archives. And so, we are going through all of our materials related to the JCA, and we're selecting individual items—mainly photographs—to digitize and put on our website. The goal of this is let's get these materials out there so people can see them, but if we have ones that are identified we're hoping that the public will be able to help us identify some of the people, places, events in these photographs. Our hope is then kind of like take this show road and go out to places like Village Shalom, which is a retirement community, and maybe have some of the people there help us identify some of these photographs. So, we're really trying to highlight all of the different collections that we have with the Jewish Community Archives.

SEAN ROST: Before we return to our conversation, let's take a step back in time with Bob Priddy to an event from this week in history in a "Missouri Minute."

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute." The red flag flutters in the middle of the railroad tracks. A signal for the 540 to stop at Gads Hill, 100 miles south of Saint Louis. It's late afternoon when the train stops, and as the conductor and engineer climb down, they find themselves facing gaping barrels of pistols. Missouri's first train robbery has begun. January 31, 1874. Five robbers were there. The hands of male passengers were checked for calluses. The robbers saying they didn't want to rob working men or ladies—just gentlemen in plug hats. The total take is estimated at \$2000-\$2200. The gang ordered the engineer to take the train on to Little Rock, and gave him a piece of paper—a press release from Jesse James—with the headline, "The Most Daring Train Robbery on Record." Posses were formed from Piedmont, but

it was far too late by that time. The outlaws were long gone. The governor put out a \$2000 reward, but it all went for naught after Missouri's first train robbery at Gads Hill—part of the legend of the James Gang and the Younger Brothers. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

SEAN ROST: Now, in kind of your larger collecting area, if someone was interested in donating materials to the Kansas City Research Center, what is the best way they can go about doing that?

LUCINDA ADAMS: We will accept phone calls. If you want to stop by. But really, we just need some information about what it is you're wanting to donate. We like to have to some type of context of how does it relate to our mission of collecting. The mission of the State Historical Society is to collect and preserve and make available Missouri history. So, how does that relate to our mission? And then, we have a process that we go through of appraising collections. What is the potential for use of the collection? Is this a collection that we'll be able, basically, to save? Are we saving history by accepting this collection? But really, it just starts with a conversation between myself and the donor and getting some more information. We would love to talk to people about collections that they may have and are interested in donating to us.

SEAN ROST: Now, you mentioned the Jewish Community Archives and some various organization affiliated with that. Is the Kansas City Research Center working with any other groups in northwestern Missouri or even Kansas City to build up other collections?

LUCINDA ADAMS: We do. Different institutions we have their collections. So, say a club organization. Sometime we will work with various clubs that are still in existence and we collect their papers. Every year we'll receive more papers from them. We also work with organizations—I mentioned the Native Sons and Daughters of Greater Kansas City. They're still an active organization. And so, we still work with them collecting materials. That type of collection it's not just about their organization, but it's about the actual history of Kansas City. We work with a lot of other archives. Local historical societies that are in our collecting area. We work with them because sometimes someone would want to donate a collection but another institution already has materials like that. So, we refer each other back and forth. Sometimes a smaller historical society might decide it's too large of a collection for them to take, and so they'll contact us thinking that we might be the best repository for that collection. So, we really do work with a lot of the area, local archives in the Kansas City area, and the western side of Missouri.

SEAN ROST: Could you tell us a little bit about some of the efforts that the Research Center is making with various entities in Kansas City to move the Research Center back in to Miller Nichols Library?

LUCINDA ADAMS: We've just kicked off a fundraising campaign to move back into the Miller Nichols Library, which is really ideal when you think about where an archive should be. Most people when they think about going to visit an archive you kind of automatically think about a library. So, it makes a lot of sense. There is some space set aside for us in the library on the third floor. What we're hoping to do is basically raise the funds to move, and be able to almost double our current space that we have. Right now, our materials are stored off-site in Columbia at a records center and we rely on a courier to bring materials back and forth. One of the great

things—and probably one of the things that I'm most excited about moving—is that the majority of our materials will be stored in the robot that is in the Miller Nichols Library. And I know that sounds really weird that there is a robot in the library—it's actually called the "roobot" for the Kansas City Kangaroos—but it's an automated retrieval system. It's fantastic because it is specifically designed for libraries and we will be able to at the touch of a button have our materials basically moved right down to us in I would say probably five minutes it would take for us to get a box for someone. That is probably one of the best things about our move is that in an essence we are bringing our Kansas City collections back home to Kansas City where they belong. Our collection consists of about 16,000 cubic feet of material. And so, if you think about that, that's all stored off-site that we have to retrieve for people when they like to view materials. But, we'll be able to have that—the majority of it—on-site. And then when we do move—if you've ever visited the Kansas City Research Center before, when you come in you're in a reading room that most people associate with archives. We're going to be able to double that space and have space for more researchers. We're going to have more staff space. And then, we're also going to have classroom space available in the library so we can work with more student groups and community groups. We're really kind envisioning how can we reshape what we're doing to fit the community better. If you're interested in helping us with our endeavors to move into the Miller Nichols Library, we would love to have your support, whether that is financial support or if you would like to be a community advocate for us, if you'd like to connect us with people that you might think are a good fit for this project to help us. We're really kind of starting from the ground and working our way up. We've never really undertaken this type of financial campaign before in the Kansas City Research Center. So, we're looking for any help that people would be willing to give us. I think that by us moving to the library we're going to be able to provide greater service for our patrons, and, ideally, that is why we exist. We're here to provide access. Yes, we're here to save materials and keep them safe and collect them, but we're here to provide that access because why are we saving all those materials. This move will allow us to reach more of the community. We're going to be able to reach more students on campus, but just the community in Kansas City and Missouri, we're going to be able to provide that better access for materials. That's why we're all in this business—to provide that access to our material. After we do move into the Library, one of the new things that we're going to start doing is we're going to be sharing exhibit space on the third floor of the library. That's going to be something new for us. We recently acquired some small exhibit cases and so we're starting to do what we like to think of as "mini-exhibits." So, right now, we have an exhibit up that's highlighting the Priest of Pallas in Kansas City. Priest of Pallas was Kansas City's answer to Mardi Gras. So, we have some great artifacts on display and some photographs. But, that's just really a small, little, mini exhibit. In the library, we're going to be able to do proper panel exhibits that you would think of going to a museum or an archive. We're going to be able to highlight different things about Kansas City history, Missouri history. We also see this as an opportunity where we could even have a temporary exhibit from another institution or something that's on display. We'll also be able to have programs surrounding some of these exhibits. We'll be able to expand that programming base that we would love to do here in Kansas City. We're trying to get back to having public programs and the community involved and teaching people about Kansas City history.

ROST: Well, thanks for being on the podcast with us, Lucinda.

ADAMS: Oh, thank you very much. It was a lot of fun.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events:

With the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center slated to be closed from spring to midsummer 2019 for the move to the newly constructed Center for Missouri Studies, you only have a few weeks left to view three featured art exhibits. In the corridor gallery, the exhibit "Work Artwork" consists of art by staff members and volunteers from the Historical Society's six research centers across the state. In the Main Gallery, visitors will find two exhibits, "Benton's Perilous Visions" and "The Aesthetic of the Monumental Figure." To learn more about these, and other, exhibitions, please visit shsmo.org/art/exhibits/.

National History Day in Missouri is looking for educators, historians, writers, filmmakers, museum staff, and community members to join them at this year's state contest to judge student projects. The state contest will be held on April 27, 2019 at the University of Missouri-Columbia. To thank you for your essential participation in National History Day in Missouri 2019, the State Historical Society of Missouri will provide a light breakfast and lunch, plus a travel stipend of up to \$50 for judges whose round trip mileage exceeds 75 miles. National History Day in Missouri is a unique opportunity for middle and high school age students to explore the past in a creative, hands-on way by producing a documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website on a topic of their choosing. To learn more about National History Day in Missouri, including judge orientation and how to start a program at your own school, please visit shsmo.org/nhdmo/.

On February 4th, join the State Historical Society of Missouri's Joan Stack and Faith Ordonio in Room 114A of the University of Missouri's Ellis Library for a curators' presentation of *Exodus: Images of Black Migration in Missouri and Beyond, 1866–1940*. This exhibition explores how thousands of African Americans came to and through Missouri while seeking greater political, economic, and social opportunity. Images from the Historical Society's collections offer insights into the movement of African Americans from their first great exodus out of the South after the Civil War to relocations sparked by violence, repression, natural disasters, and the turmoil of the Great Depression. Viewed together, the artwork, including fine art prints by George Caleb Bingham and Thomas Hart Benton, creates an overall picture of American life in an era of dramatic change. This event is sponsored by the University of Missouri Libraries and the MU Black History Month Committee.

On March 2, join Joan Stack, Curator of Art Collections for the State Historical Society of Missouri, at the Arrow Rock State Historic Site Visitors Center for "United We Stand" a public presentation on how George Caleb Bingham's Election Series paintings showcased his views of America's constitutional democracy in the mid-19th Century.

The sixty-first annual Missouri Conference on History, hosted by the University of Missouri–Kansas City and Park University and sponsored by the State Historical Society of Missouri, will be held March 6–8, 2019, at the Holiday Inn Country Club Plaza in Kansas City. For more information about the Missouri Conference on History, please visit shsmo.org/mch.

If you are interested in learning more about Missouri's upcoming bicentennial in 2021, there will be two opportunities in March to hear from bicentennial coordinator Michael Sweeney. On March 12th, Michael will be at the Friends Room of the Columbia Public Library. On March 16th, Michael will be joined by senior archivist Claire Marks at the Jefferson County Library's Northwest Branch in High Ridge. To register and learn more about these events, please visit the State Historical Society of Missouri's website at shsmo.org/events.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.