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Library Hours:
Tuesday and Saturday
10 to 4 pm.

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AN UNUSUAL RELATIVE

My uncle was the family character. Every family has one. The slightly batty relative, the one who didn't espouse conspiracies, he was a conspiracy. I remember visiting my mother's sister's family in Little Rock, Arkansas in the 1950s. They were living in an apartment and my uncle introduced me to MAD magazine.

I was fascinated by the story of the Lone Ranger as told in MAD. Then the story of Superman, Plastic Man, and other characters I thought I knew, but were so different in MAD.

In later years, I learned of his eccentricities. He didn't have a career, in fact didn't work. I heard my grandfather and father express opinions about his parentage, or his avocations. My grandfather opined that he was the illegitimate son of his (my grandfather's) detested oldest brother. My father speculated that he was a hit man for the mob, or maybe for the CIA. They were NOT kidding! My uncle did strange off-kilter things.

He was in the local newspaper describing himself as a Modoc Indian named Tawani Wakawa who had found rock carvings done by his ancestors. Later on, he was a German who insisted on adding "Von" to his name to prove his ethnicity. He tried to organize an expedition to northern Canada to search for the underground world he knew existed there.

His shenanigans were mostly overlooked until he was caught aiming a rifle at another uncle from a darkened room. He was reacting to a perceived slight by my uncle's wife. From then on, he wasn't present at family get togethers.

I never had the chance to know him well enough to understand his motivations. I still wonder how much of his behavior was truly neurotic, or if he thought he was just being MAD

Jim Scharnhorst

ANTI HORSE THIEF ASSOCIATION

At the end of the Civil War, when lawmen were few and far between, Kansas settlers were often threatened by gangs of outlaws and horse thieves who raided their farms and towns. Communities responded by forming legal vigilante groups who were sworn to uphold the law, apprehend the criminals and bring them to justice. These men were known as the Anti Horse Thief Association, or Antis for short.

The Antis actually had their beginning in Clark County, Missouri in 1854, when Major David McKee and a small group of men got together to fight lawlessness just prior to the Civil War. Their group formed a lodge and called it the Anti Horse Thief Association. Their work was cut short by the outbreak of the war, but in 1863, when McKee returned home after his discharge, he and his group created a national order. Although Ft. Scott, Kansas lays claim to organizing a group of Antis in 1859, October 1863 is the official founding date of the Anti Horse Thief Association.

The association was formed to supplement local law enforcement. Its groups of armed, trained men could be dispatched quickly. A messenger would ride to a member's home and rouse the Anti who would then kiss his wife, saddle his horse, and head to a pre-arranged meeting place to join the rest of the posse. The group would then take off at a gallop, following the lead of their trackers. It was the Old West's version of the Minute Men of 1776.

The organization had a reputation for honesty, integrity, good planning, and successful outcomes. Their emblem, the horseshoe, stood for humility, charity, and justice. Their motto was: "Protect the innocent; bring the guilty to justice." Any man of good character who was 18 or older, regardless of profession could join. Women could apply to have their property protected, but they were not allowed to take part in pursuits.

The Antis weren't limited by city, state, or county jurisdictions as most lawmen were. They could—and did—track criminals until they caught them. At that point, the crooks were usually turned over to the proper authorities, although at times it was a "dead or alive" situation, and a long rope and a handy tree concluded the chase.

The AHTA grew rapidly, with orders in Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. The orders (or Chapters) maintained the structure of a fraternal organization with a constitution and strict by-laws—quite a contrast to the image of a thundering posse relentlessly pursuing horse thieves across the open prairie.

Around 1903, an enterprising young newspaperman named W. W. Graves started a weekly newspaper called the Weekly AHTA News, based in St. Paul, Kansas. He also wrote a pocket-sized rule book for posse members called, Law for Criminal Catchers. Both the newspaper and the guide book gained acceptance by Antis and lawmen alike.

Graves designed and produced small AHTA emblem pins and belt fobs. These were sold by the thousands! Graves' publishing company also sold thousands of larger AHTA horseshoe emblems that could be nailed to fence posts or barn doors to warn potential thieves to look elsewhere for their loot. A few years later, these emblems could be found affixed to the grilles of members' automobiles.

By 1906 when the state convention was held in Wichita, the AHTA members were said to number around 30,000. By 1912, Antis were found in 16 states, and a Ladies' Auxiliary had been added. About that time, as automobiles grew in popularity and the use of horses declined, the H in AHTA was dropped, and the name was changed to the Anti Thief Association (ATA).

By the 1920's the ATA was involved in modern crime fighting like auto theft, fraud, and assaults, and sometimes they were even called upon to help the famed Brinks Detective Agency. But as the '20's turned into the '30's, the association's membership declined. World War I had created a lack of manpower and word of an infiltration by the Ku Klux Klan was demoralizing to members. At the same time state and national law enforcement agencies had developed to the point that the posse of the Old West was no longer needed.

By the end of the 1930's the Antis could look back on a long and colorful history knowing that they had done their job and done it well. In the Kansas Cyclopedia, Frank Blackmar summed up the AHTA's place in history: "Courts recognized its value, criminals feared it, and press and pulpit endorsed and praised its work in the apprehension of criminals". The AHTA remains in existence today as a fraternal organization.

June Johnson

"Citizen Lawmen," catholicmission.org, 2021 Oklahoma Historical Society; Beccy Tanner, Wichita Eagle, Sept, 22, 2008; Kathy Weiser, "Legends of America," Jan 2020

NEW ADDITIONS TO OUR LIBRARY COLLECTION

A spell created: A Sesquicentennial History of Wichita and Sedgwick County	R-210 SG 276
Comanche County History; Comanche County, Kansas	R-210 CM 04
Patrick Dimond/Diamond/Dimon	G-D 085
DNA for Native American Genealogy	R-680 010
Living in a Storied Place: Walnut Grove, a memoir	R-210 SG 275
Stout and Allied Families	G-S 165
Iconic eats of Wichita: surprising history, people and recipes	R-210 SG 277
Mexican Americans of Wichita's North End	R-210 SG 274

ATTENTION MHGS MEMBERS!!!! REX RILEY - PRESIDENT

ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING TO BE HELD IN MAY

Please mark Saturday, May 21, 2022 on your calendars. That is the date when Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society will be holding its Annual Members Meeting.

The meeting will be at our library, 1203 N. Main, Wichita, Kansas beginning at 1:00 p.m.

At this meeting we will be conducting our usual elections and any other business that requires a vote by our membership.

If it is possible for you to come, we would really like to see you there; though this year, members will have the option to vote by proxy if they wish.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020-2021

President: Rex Riley (president@mhgswichita.org)	Alert Editor: Micki Wright Stephans (alert@mhgswichita.org)
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	Membership: Kathy Kirk (members@mhgswichita.org)

Library open Tuesday & Saturday 10 – 4 Email library@mhgswichita.org

Please see the Google calendar or our Facebook page for details.

GENEALOGY ROUNDTABLE SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP	RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE, BUSINESS OR A FARM
Second Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Led by Julia Langel	Second Saturday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Led by Julia Langel January, February, March
PHOTO MYSTERIES	DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
Third Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Led by Rex Riley	Fourth Tuesday @ 1:30 pm Led by Twila Ackley Brown

Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society

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