

By the fifth day, much food was enjoyed, pre-pageant activities were in full swing, and *Prairie Portrait* debuted. The following days featured arts and crafts, four additional performances of the pageant, children's activities, and a threshing bee and machinery exhibits at the Fairgrounds.

included the dedication and burial of a time capsule, judging of the Beard Growing Contest, and tours of the Motherhouse. A grand Centennial Parade, barbecue and, one final performance would conclude the week's events.

It was as grand an event as Concordia has ever seen.

The final day, August 14th,

150 YEARS

Concordia spent over a year preparing to celebrate her Sesquicentennial—150 years. Plans and activities had begun in 2020, with several thoughtful nods to the Centennial in the works. A Beard Growing Contest commenced, meetings were in full swing with ideas and a yearlong series of events and merchandise was ordered. Excitement was building steadily.

Then, mid-March 2020, the world shut down. COVID-19 reared its ugly head, and everything came to a sudden pause.

Plans continued, despite uncertainty. Those who recall the shutdowns remember how often life attempted to resume, only to be delayed again. Yet by October 2020, a schedule of activities was released. Though smaller scale than originally planned and shaped by social distancing and other mandates, the committee remained hopeful.

March 13, 2021, the first event was held at the Cloud County Museum—a program on the Cloud County Bank Robbery of 1932. A play on the subject had been performed in 2006 and filmed at that time. It was presented in a special one-time screening the following

week on March 20th. The second event, a gospel sing-along, took place in May and the Beard Growing Contest carried on.

A schedule of events was finalized for a celebration in August at the City Park.

A month ahead of schedule, the Time Capsule from the Centennial was opened, without the fanfare it deserved. After recovery, it was found heavily water damaged. The contents that could be salvaged were removed and placed on display at City Hall. New items to place in a new time capsule were requested to be opened in 2071.

August 14th arrived, and the Sesquicentennial commenced in City Park. A free public meal was served along with a beautiful cake decorated with photos spanning 150 years of Concordia's history created by Clyde's Wendy Genereaux.

October 2021, a new steel time capsule, designed and fabricated by Concordia Technologies was placed.

Perhaps it was not the grand celebration Concordia had planned, but it endured, once again her resilience in the face of difficulty.



Lady Shirley's

SOCIETY PAPERS

Season II: Seventh Edition, July 2026

EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY STORIES

Dearest Reader,

"O beautiful for spacious skies,
for amber waves of grain" ...
Katharine Lee Bates knew just
the right words to describe our
country. For America is
beautiful—and so, too, are her
people, as declared in the line,
"Crown thy good with
brotherhood."

Brotherhood, however, is less
easily achieved than it is sung,
for it requires, above all things,
participation.

With July 4th and America's
250th before us, one longs for
these lines to be more than
ornament, but a true reflection
of patriotism and belief in
America herself. Dare we hope
for such things in the month of
our Independence, when they
ought to be most evident in her
people and celebrations?

Concordia has, over the years,
made several admirable
attempts at festivity. And, if
Lady Shirley may venture a
delicate observation,
participation is more easily
proposed than achieved. This
author wonders: are these
celebrations of the past seen
through rose-colored glasses, or
were people simply happier to
participate?

Concordia's Centennial was
met with enthusiasm and
costume and fanfare. Her
Sesquicentennial, alas, was
almost denied its moment
altogether. Now, as the nation
approaches its 250th year, one
might expect mounting
excitement for such a
milestone, for the nation has
been celebrating since January.
And yet, here, the feeling is
gentler—quieter, not entirely
absent, but it is curious.

Perhaps the fault lies not in the
moment, but in our
expectations. For celebration
need not be grand to be
meaningful. In the search for
spectacle, perhaps what we
truly require is connection—
that people gather, participate,
and choose, however briefly, to
belong to one another.

Concordia has done this before.
She can do so again. She has
endured much, yet she
remains.

And if this season calls us to
anything, it is not perfection in
festivity, but persistence in
connection—for it is there that
brotherhood is truly crowned.

*Yours truly,
Lady Shirley*

YEAR ONE

If we are to begin, we should do so at the beginning. Imagine a town in its humblest state, and recall that Concordia became a paper town in January 1870. Six months later, the land office opened, and by the end of that first day, 106 homesteads had been entered and 180 pre-emption declaratory statements filed. About six months later, June of 1871, the first festival was held.

The ladies of the Presbyterian church, along with ladies of other churches, hosted a "fruit and ice cream festival."

50 YEARS

In October 1920, Concordia held a Fall Festival—a grand three-day event and the first of its kind in our town. Other communities had long celebrated festivals and grand affairs, and Concordia wished to be counted among their number. The festival committee reached out across Northwest Kansas for guidance and invited neighboring towns to attend as guests. Atchison was among those who agreed.

Preparations began in earnest. A patriotic color scheme of red, white, and blue was selected, and businesses and residences alike were asked to decorate as a show of unity. Booths were constructed along the downtown streets for merchants and demonstrations. The *Concordia Blade-Empire* reported that downtown would be completely transformed by their presence. Days before the festival began, more than fifty booths had already been erected. This author cannot help but wish that a photograph existed, for her imagination can only stretch so far before

The *Concordia Empire* reported that the ladies, being experienced in such affairs, were "*determined to make this, the first festival ever held in Concordia, a perfect success.*" Later editions of the *Empire* confirmed that it was indeed a success, and it became an annual occurrence for a time. It was in those later editions that this author learned the fruit served—varieties not found in the area—had to be sent long distances to arrive in Concordia, and was therefore considered quite a rare treat.

overexaggeration takes hold.

Speaking of overexaggeration, some expected 20,000 people per day to attend the festival. Others suggested a more modest 10,000; thus, a compromise of 15,000 was agreed upon. This author did not uncover final attendance figures. However, according to the *Concordia Press*, 239 old settlers registered to return for the occasion, with expectations that more than 500 might attend. The *Press* thoughtfully printed each old settler's name along with the date of their arrival in the area.

The E. A. Brown Electric Company of Kansas City held the contract for the new White Way highway being constructed through Concordia, extending along Sixth Street. Today, the White Way Car Run still honors that early roadway. The company promised that new lights would be installed before the festival; however, that promise was not fulfilled. With no funds to

light three blocks, no desire to hold a festival in darkness, the committee appealed to the city for assistance. The city council contributed \$50, and men were sent to local businesses to solicit further donations. The Concordia Electric Company ultimately agreed to complete the work at a discount, ensuring the festival would indeed be illuminated.

The festival committee undertook extensive advertising, including what was described as "papering the state" with posters and handbills across the surrounding region. Posters traveled by train, and letters of invitation were sent to former residents. Reports claimed these notices reached as far as Narka to the north, Colby to the west, Atchison to the east, and Wichita to the south.

100 YEARS

Concordia's Centennial celebration lasted an entire week. August 6–14, 1971, was filled with events and history.

A book titled *Prairie Portrait* was created and has proven a valuable source for this author over the course of these Society Papers, offering a wealth of information on Concordia's history, including a detailed schedule of events and photographs.

Photographs of the event are quite spectacular. A costume company was engaged so that townspeople might be fitted in period attire. A historical pageant, also titled "*Prairie Portrait*," featured more than 400 cast and crew and served as a centerpiece of the festivities. A Centennial costume contest was also planned drawing upon both these garments and homemade creations.

Day One was American Legion Day, beginning with a band concert and concluding with fireworks and a military ball.

FIRST DAY'S PROGRAM	
American Legion Day	
10:00 A. M.—Band Concert	
11:00 A. M.—Free act, funny janitor	
1:30 P. M.—Band Concert. Parade of Atchison and Concordia Chambers of Commerce.	
2:30—Free Act, Gus Henderson.	
3:00—Free Act, Allen & Allen.	
3:30—Athletic Exhibition.	
3:30—Ball Game.	
4:30—Ebenezer, Ham Tree Mule, Free Act.	
7:00—Athletic Exhibition.	
8:00—Free Vaudeville.	
9:00—Fireworks.	
9:30—Free Military Ball.	

Day 2 was Old Settlers, featuring a parade led by the earliest residents. The community was asked to provide automobiles for their comfort. Decorated floats, comic entries, and schoolchildren followed in procession.

Day Three marked Concordia's fiftieth anniversary with events to celebrate.

Businesses participated in "Old Fashioned Bargain Days," deemed "*the greatest sale ever*," while free buggy rides for children were offered, downtown entertainment, a hospitality center at the American Legion, an art show at Cloud County Community College, and dancing, complete with Centennial Queen coronations filled the first days.

Interfaith services, picnics, and gatherings rounded out the weekend.

City Park was temporarily renamed Centennial Park, where events were held, with the pageant site set up at the Concordia Athletic Field. Frank Carlson served as the Centennial Committee president. Kansas Governor, Robert Docking, was on the schedule as well as several visiting dignitaries.