

VETERANS

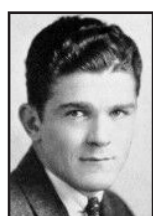
Out of the shadows



Lyle
Murphy



Dale
Johnson



William
Hemphill

It took a village to save a sundial

Gloria Freeland
Contributing writer

Sunflowers, roses, daisies, and mums were blooming, while butterflies and bees flitted among the native flowers and grasses lining the sidewalks. Like many others, husband Art and I were enjoying the September Stroll — one of the events celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Kansas State University Gardens. Fountains, sculptures, and the reflecting pool added to the beauty.

But what had brought us there was an old sundial. It had been installed southwest of the pool just a week before. Nestled among the varied greens of nearby plants, it almost glowed in the early-evening light. Its recently-repaired white pedestal gave no indication of it having endured 78 years of Kansas' changeable weather. The gnomon — the "finger" that points to the sky — sat atop the bronze face, surrounded by the signs of the Zodiac and the words, "I count none but sunny hours."

The pedestal's engraved plate hints at the dial's purpose:

*In Memory Of
Lyle Moyer Murphy, '37
William Andrew Hemphill, '38
Dale Edgar Johnson, '40*

The K-State Horticulture Club purchased the memorial in 1947 to honor three of its own who had been killed in World War II.

Until the late 1970s, the sundial's home was the university's formal rose garden. When that land was needed for Bluemont Hall, the dial was temporarily placed in the enclosure of Seaton Court, waiting for a spot in the new gardens.

But during the passage of roughly 35 years in a quiet corner of the campus, the significance of the sundial was lost. So when Seaton Court renovations began in 2015, disposal was considered.

In August of that year, Susan Metzger was working in Manhattan as an assistant secretary for the Kansas Department of Agriculture. Someone contacted her agency to see if they knew anything about the sundial. Being unfamiliar with it, she contacted Nancy Knopp, a local Daughters of the American Revolution regent. In turn, Nancy reached out to fellow DAR member Kathy Dzewaltowski. Kathy recognized the names of two of the men from her work with Manhattan's Peace Memorial Auditorium. Since Kathy knew Art was working on biographies of local men killed in World War II, she emailed us.

On Aug. 26, I went to get photos of the sundial. It was gone! All that remained was a bare spot in the Seaton Court grass.

Luckily, a university facilities worker



Photo courtesy Gloria Freeland

A restored sundial stands in its new home in the K-State Gardens. The sundial, missing for years, is a memorial to three local men who died in World War II.

there told me Lisa Shubert from the College of Architecture had "adopted" it. Lisa said I should contact Candice Shoemaker, then the department head of Horticulture, Forestry and Recreation Resources. Candice then directed me to Scott McElwain, the director of the K-State Gardens.

Scott told me the sundial had been moved to a gardens maintenance area and would remain there until the new reflecting pool had been installed.

Whew! It was safe!

On Aug. 29, 2015, I updated Kathy, letting her know that Art was working on the history of the sundial and biographies of the men.

From time to time, we checked in with Scott to see how things were progressing. The sundial needed some restoration, as the pedestal had some fine cracks, the gnomon was missing, and both the face and the plaque needed some serious cleaning.

With the work on the new gardens accelerating during this past year, efforts directed toward the dial increased. Don Glaser, a Friends of the Gardens board member, bought an old sundial disk with a gnomon for parts. Pete Reid from Blueville Nursery contacted companies to see what it would take to replace the pedestal, if needed. Art took careful measurements of the sundial and pro-

duced engineering drawings. He even spoke with Richard Turner of the Castle Fine Arts Foundry in Wales to see if the company could re-create a gnomon and to discuss how to attach it. Fortunately, Don's purchased gnomon matched almost perfectly, and he and Scott worked together to repair and seal the original pedestal.

All of this pleased Art and me, but the most exciting part for us was that several members of Hemphill's family were present to see the sundial at the September Stroll. Art used his researching skills to locate them, many of whom live in the Kansas City area.

Hemphill's son Andy was only 1 when his father died, so he didn't really know his dad. But Andy's wife Maureen said he "was always very sentimental about the sundial, hoping to find it someday, and I always felt it was because it was a very important connection with his father ..."

Unfortunately, Andy died in 2023. But Maureen and their children — William Andrew "Drew" III and Deena Hemphill-Abramson, and other relatives were able to see the sundial in its new home. Maureen was ecstatic:

... The people, the gardens, the weather — the whole evening was amazing. Our family still feels like it was a miracle that the sundial was not only found but restored, and we were able to see it after all these years. ... We can never thank you enough for your interest, detective work, and perseverance. It has taken a lot of work behind the scenes for us to get to see the sundial again and we thank you! ... We will be visiting it whenever we are in Manhattan!

In my 2015 email to Kathy, I said, "... I'll eventually write a column about it — maybe when it's installed in its new home! ..."

That day is today!

It had taken a village to save the sundial. When I spoke with Lisa recently, she told me that the deans of Agriculture and Architecture, as well as many other individuals across campus, had been involved for at least a month before Art and I were aware of it.

Now, this small memorial is tucked safely in its new garden home, and continues to honor the three men who died serving their country in a war that ended 80 years ago.

Gloria Freeland, a professor emerita in the A.Q. Miller School of Media and Communication, writes a weekly online column, "Kansas Snapshots," at www.kansassnapshots.com. This column originally appeared on Nov. 7, 2025.



Photo courtesy Gloria Freeland

Members of the Hemphill family gather beside the sundial honoring William Hemphill, a relative who died in World War II. They are, from left, Max Knopp and wife Kaleen (Maureen's cousin), Drew, Maureen, Deena Hemphill-Abramson and husband David Abramson, Bonnie Manuel and husband Kent Manuel (Maureen's brother).