

A Step Back in Time:

Life in Kansas During the Dust Bowl

By Tonia Cliffman,
Youth Services
Librarian

The Wellington Public Library invites the community to an evening of history, storytelling, and reflection with “Life

in Kansas During the Dust Bowl,” a fascinating presentation by Katie Keckeisen on Thursday, August 14, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. in the library’s Community Room (lower level). Light refreshments will be served, and

admission is free.

Imagine living in Kansas in the 1930s, when a single dust storm could darken the sky and reshape daily life. On April 14, 1935—Black Sunday—one of the worst storms in U.S. history swept across the Plains. But the story of the Dust Bowl is more than just the storms—it’s about how Kansans endured and adapted.

Using powerful photographs and firsthand accounts, Keckeisen will guide the audience through one of Kansas’s most challenging chapters and explore the lasting legacy it left behind.



Katie Keckeisen

Katie Keckeisen is the local history librarian at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library and a former Collections Archivist for the Kansas Historical Society. She is a frequent speaker with Humanities Kansas, offering rich insights into



Kansas’s past, including other topics such as the history of Spiritualism. This program is made possible by Humanities Kansas as part of their Speakers Bureau, which brings engaging, humanities-based presentations to communities across the state.

Don’t miss this opportunity to learn more about Kansas history and connect with fellow community members through a shared story of resilience.

For more information, contact the Wellington Public Library at 620.326.2011.

Wellington City Council Meeting – August 5, 2025

By Ally Wysocki

The City Council meeting opened with the call to order and pledge of allegiance. Reverend Bob Nusser of First Baptist Church led the invocation. An amendment was added to the agenda under Reports of City Officials by the City Manager Jeff Porter regarding occupancy of the former hospital.

During Reports of Mayor and Council, Councilman Kevin Dodds would like to issue either an ordinance or resolution to allow the Wellington Police Department more enforcement upon squatters. Dodds stated that he would

do more research upon this stating “It’s kind of a passionate topic to me right now because I’m currently helping my son clean out a residence where there were squatters.” He also gave a shoutout to Mike Yoder owner of Trigger Guard for the events he recently hosted on his shooting range.

Councilman Mike Westmoreland asked City Building Official Jamie Cornejo for an update on the building downtown with barricades around it. Cornejo stated that there are currently no updates, as a public hearing is coming up regarding the building.

Mayor Joe Soria discussed



that he attended the Caldwell Fair and how many Sumner County people he saw there. Soria also asked Cornejo for an update on the burned down house on East Lincoln. He stated there was no change.

During reports of City Officials, City Clerk Heidi Theuer reported that the KMGA Board has two member terms coming up on August 31. The City staff recommends reappointing Roger Estes (Director) and Ryan Hayne (Alternate)

for two more years. The Council unanimously approved.

Sean Gordon of Gordon, CPA, gave a summary of the Report on the Wellington 2024 City Budget. Gordon CPA issued a clean (“unmodified”) opinion on city’s finances; \$24.6M cash on hand at year-end; single audit on federal grants also received a clean opinion; one recommendation from an auditor on outstanding encumbrances.

City Manager Porter reviewed updated state budget forms; reserves showing stress due to rising utility costs. Budget work session

scheduled for Aug. 21 at 6:30 p.m.

City Manager Porter discussed a hospital-occupancy workgroup, as the county is interested in using part of the facility. A workgroup was formed with Councilwomen Mary Lucas and Jan Grace as representatives and Councilman Dodds and Mayor Soria as alternates.

An Ordinance amending Article III section 4-128 of the Code of the City of Wellington, Kansas pertaining to drinking establishments was discussed. This would be expanded to include microbreweries, microwineries, and

microdistilleries as drinking establishments. The Ordinance was passed with a unanimous 6-0 vote.

A Resolution authorizing the City Manager to sign a cost-plus agreement with PEC for design services on the North A Street CCLIP project (90% KDOT grant; city responsible for ~10%, or about \$12,000 for design). Sidewalk accessibility will be considered. The Resolution was passed with a 6-0 vote.

Future agenda items include the upcoming 2026 budget review Work Session on August 21, 2025.

The City Council meeting was adjourned.

JERROD HAYS

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said, “but I kept telling my guys we were on ‘movement to contact’—we were on Combat Patrol.”

As assistant platoon sergeant, Hays led mostly 19- and 20-year-olds. Their work schedule was “36

hours a day, nine days a week.” The “extra” day was for maintenance—cleaning weapons, vehicles, and gear, and making calls or writing home.

Patrols were tense. “Three months of boredom surrounded by 15 minutes of sheer terror,” Hays described.

Sometimes the danger was personal. After befriending a local family, Hays was seen holding a friend’s grandchild. Shortly after, Iranian forces killed the man’s son, daughter-in-law, and the baby. “That’s a different kind of scar I carry,” Hays said quietly.

On the day of the attack, Hays’ team was responding to mortar fire. There were only two approach roads, and he had warned his commander weeks earlier the area was perfect for an ambush. “It was stupid—a kindergartner could have set up that ambush,” he said. “It was artillery. How do you defeat artillery? Counter artillery. You don’t drive up on them.”

An IED detonated

under their Humvee, followed by ground fire. The first explosively formed penetrator (EFP)—an Iranian-made device capable of destroying an M1 Abrams tank—struck Hays in the face. A second EFP tore through the vehicle, killing Berry instantly. “I was the last one to see him alive and the first one to see him dead,” Hays said.

The enemy swarmed the vehicle, attempting to take prisoners. American forces arrived and were forced to fire dangerously close to their own men to drive the attackers off.

Hays, badly injured, was evacuated by medivac. The Florida National Guard crew admitted later they had landed under fire against protocol. “You guys were our boys,” they shared with him. “We would listen to you Kansas guys, monitor your radio. When we heard you were hit we were already in the air when we got the call.”

At the hospital, Hays collapsed before reaching the ER. They couldn’t find



Camp CSC (Convoy Support Center) Scania, Iraq.

a pulse.

Pronounced dead, he was sent to “morgue pickup”. The ER was in chaos with the nine casualties coming in, Hays rolled off the gurney and the place went quiet. “A Lieutenant ordered them to put me back on the table and get an IV started. They cracked me open and found that I had a hole in my aorta,” said Hays. “That won me a scar competition at Walter Reed,” he joked.

President George W. Bush personally awarded Hays the Purple Heart.

Today, he wears a cross made from the EFP shrapnel that nearly killed him. He believes it’s a reminder

of the guardian angels that day—the mortar rounds he’d left camp to stop landed directly on his bunk.



Rob and Alayna Kempf took second best hand.



KANSAS STATE FAIR

SEPT. 6-15
HUTCHINSON, KS

ADVANCE
TICKET PRICES

THROUGH SEPT. 4	
Adults (13-59)	\$7 (\$10 Value)
Children (6-12)	\$4 (\$6 Value)
Seniors (60+)	\$4 (\$6 Value)
Midway Wristband	\$30 (\$35 starting Sept. 1)

*Additional processing fee applies for online and phone orders
Tickets are available online or at the KSF Ticket Office.
Gate Tickets are also available at any Dillons store.

KansasStateFair.com



Join us for a Humanities Kansas presentation!

“Life in Kansas During the Dust Bowl”



Katie Keckeisen
Local History Librarian

Thursday, Aug. 14 - 6:30 p.m.
Library Community Room

Light refreshments will be served.

Grace & Glam
FALL GIVEAWAY

FREE EVENT

Saturday, August 23, 2025
11:00 am - 3:00 pm
First Christian Church
123 West 9th Street
Wellington, Kansas

Shop for beautiful dresses, jewelry, and shoes for Homecoming, Winter Formal, or Snowball. Enjoy a few refreshments all at no cost to you!