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function get_style16940 () { return "none"; } function end16940_ () {  
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From the archives of Liberal's hometown newspaper since 1886.

Researched and compiled by Amira Coleman, L&T Reporter



1964

Suicide, gang fights and power outages trouble town

As June began, Liberal residents continued to mourn the death of Zed Coffey, whose death was observed in a front-page feature.

A former lawman of Liberal, Coffey had given unusual service and courage in the sheriff's department. Coffey died of a self-inflicted head wound from his .38 caliber service revolver. He died in Epworth Hospital a few minutes after inflicting the wound. Coffey's wife found him in their garage at around 8:30 p.m. that morning.

During his years as an officer, Coffey was known throughout the community for his courage in taking prisoners and preventing escapes from custody.

The annual free Vehicle Safety Inspection by the Seward County Safety Council had taken place through the month of May. Liberal Mayor Lloyd Harp proclaimed the month of May to be Safety Check Month.

Officials set up inspection lanes on Fourth Street across from the police station, as was customary. Police officers and highway patrolmen would inspect vehicles each Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Inspection officers checked window glass, windshield wipers, horns, all lights, brakes and rear view mirrors free of charge. No tickets were issued for flaws found in vehicles inspected.

Even as they worked to prevent traffic accidents, local law enforcement officers expressed growing concerns about gang activity breaking out in Liberal.

Two teenage boys and one teenage girl were treated for lacerations following a large-scale brawl held on Blue Bell Road where chains and pop bottles were used as weapons along with fists and feet.

Agencies set up various assemblies and counseling sessions to help isolate the reason for such violent activity, and help weed out the reasons teens would participate in brawls.

Parents were also partially responsible, said law enforcement officers, because they had allowed their children to be out of their homes until all hours of the night.

The State Highway Department attempted to conduct a traffic survey for Liberal, but some citizens seemed to be opposed to such a thing. Vandals cut the rubber hoses used for counting traffic along Kansas Avenue. Officers announced the hoses weren't used to record the speed of drivers, simply the number of cars passing by.

"Hopefully, this announcement educated those opposed to the survey towards the true purpose," the Southwest Daily Times noted.

A power failure kept Liberal in the dark for periods ranging from 8 to 20 minutes long due to lightning striking somewhere along the main transmission line between Liberal and Dodge City.

Fred Moffett, the local manager of Western Light & Telephone Co., said later that the line remained "hot" despite the lightning bolt and service was later resumed over the same line, a circuit at a time, over Liberal.

The line "locked out" automatically, due to the lightning strike, but the line was still active, so employees manually restored power to Liberal. Thankfully, the lights weren't out for too long.

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