

Payouts mushroom in Kansas newspaper raid, but officials still haven’t taken responsibility

By CLAY WIRESTONE
KansasReflector.com

Three years after the law enforcement raid on the Marion County Record newspaper, serious settlement money is flowing.

Reporter Phyllis Zorn just resolved her case against the town for \$850,000. Late last year, Marion County paid out \$3 million to journalists and a city councilor. Lawsuits against the city by Record editor and publisher Eric Meyer and councilwoman Ruth Herbel continue.

What hasn’t happened, so far, is a full-throated apology from those who authorized and conducted the raid, from the people who shredded the First Amendment in their vendetta against the Record. We can’t put the raid behind us — we can’t hope to move forward as Kansans — until those responsible take accountability.

There have been feints toward a reckoning, but they have been few and far between.

Last year, the county apologized for its part in the raid, writing: “The Sheriff’s Office wishes to express its sincere regrets to Eric and Joan Meyer and Ruth and Ronald Herbel for its participation in the drafting and execution of the Marion Police Department’s search warrants on their homes and the Marion County Record.”

In other words: We’re sorry for helping with a thing that wasn’t really



SHERMAN SMITH/KansasReflector.com
Marion County Record editor-publisher Eric Meyer takes a smoke break Oct. 15, 2025, at his newspaper office after a preliminary hearing for former Marion Police Chief Gideon Cody.

our idea. Never mind us paying 3 million smackaroos.

Marion Police Chief Gideon Cody resigned from his job and has been charged with a low-level felony based on his conduct after the raid. And a mere five days after the 2023 raid, officials returned the property they seized.

That’s about all that officials have done to right the grievous wrongs done that sweltering Aug. 11, 2023. A handful of payouts. One apology. One vaguely connected charge. Private property grudgingly returned. Believe me, I looked for more official gestures

of regret and contrition from law enforcement’s blatant abuse of our nation’s founding document.

I didn’t find them.

The costs were not just theoretical. Marion residents paid a heavy personal price. Meyer’s mother, Joan, died from the stress of the raid. Zorn has grappled with a seizure disorder. Herbel’s husband, who suffers from dementia, was traumatized.

So where does the buck stop? Whose fault, ultimately, was it? Powerful forces in Kansas law and government arrayed to ensure that no one would pay a lasting price, or ever face

tough questions about their role. A 2024 report from special prosecutors outlined an immaculate deception absolving law enforcement of any legal responsibility.

Kansas Bureau of Investigation director Tony Mattivi pontificated shortly after the raid that “no one is above the law, whether a public official or a representative of the media.” He was subsequently nominated by President Donald Trump to a federal judgeship. That’s all despite the fact that reporting from Kansas Reflector editor Sherman Smith showed that the KBI was intimately involved in planning the raid.

Some dire consequences, huh?

Accountability was skirted in even more cases. Magistrate Judge Laura Viar, who authorized faulty search warrants, escaped censure from the state Commission on Judicial Conduct.

Kansas Attorney General Kris Kobach, who oversees the KBI, stayed mum. His office didn’t acknowledge further requests for comment. GOP leaders in the Kansas Legislature couldn’t overcome their hatred of free speech to voice even mild disapproval.

Don’t get me wrong: I’m glad that Marion County and Marion itself are paying up. Meyer, Zorn, Herbel and former reporter Deb Gruver all deserve what they’ve received and far more beside. But they also deserve — and what I imagined three years ago that they would have received — is a plain-spoken apology for harm done.

No, the attempt to intimidate journalists didn’t work. For that, I’m grateful to the gritty community journalists of Marion and beyond. But I had hoped for better from those who purport to serve the public.

Regret. Remorse. An iota of self-reflection.

I’ll give the final word today to Eric Meyer, who exchanged email messages with Smith earlier this week. He was less concerned than I about apologies and more about sending a lasting message.

“They were trying to weaponize law enforcement in much the same way as we see happening now with the federal Justice Department,” he said. “The question is, when will anyone learn that such tactics ultimately will fail? So far, it’s a lesson that’s cost city and county insurance companies more than \$4.5 million locally.

“I don’t know how much the federal government has spent trying to justify similar actions. The only thing any of us can do is stand up and just say ‘No,’ even if it tosses us into expensive turmoil for years to come. That’s the price of living in a democracy when there are others who try to abuse their power.”

Clay Wirestone is Kansas Reflector opinion editor. His first book, “Opinionated: Kansas Journalists Who Proved Why Commentary Matters — Then and Now,” comes out Sept. 29 from the University Press of Kansas.

William Cook

FROM FRONT PAGE

Houses were very simple in those days, and easily moved, if necessary. There were no water pipes, electrical wire, gas lines and such to worry about. Just hoist the entire structure onto a sled or wagon of some sort then head to the next site.

Some towns grew large enough to justify establishing a power plant and running power lines throughout the developed area. That was no help to those living across the countryside. Too few users and too many miles of transmission lines made up the problem. Help in the development of electric power plants and rural distribution systems began with the

U.S. Congress' approval of subsidized loans beginning about 1935.

Much of rural Neosho County had no home and farm electrification until after World War II. Installing lighting and electrical outlets in existing homes was both difficult and expensive. One light and one outlet per room was common practice. Most lights used a pull cord type of switch to avoid the cost of installing a switch in or on a wall near a doorway. Most homes were not wired for 220v systems, such as required for kitchen ranges and clothes dryers or shop equipment.

Many existing houses required rewiring and larger serv-

ice lines to take advantage of multiple large appliances. Many houses were abandoned for residential purposes as the owner who rented the house to renters chose not to install the expensive electrical wiring.

Providing heat to the home was another challenge. The standard unit was a single stove located in a central location that burned firewood, coal or both. Towns located near a source of natural gas had the option of offering service to houses. A few rural homes had their own gas wells to supply the need for heat.

Rural electrification provided some new supplemental heating options.

People live in houses and people must have facilities handy to meet their restroom needs. In the country and in the towns, outhouses were everywhere.

Churches, schools, other public buildings, commercial buildings and houses all required outhouses. Many also used the outhouse pit to dump broken glass and many small items of household junk. Flammable waste items were typically burned on the ground or in a metal barrel.

Most farms could find a spot to store larger junk items. The County at some point designated dump sites around the area to do away with the large

number of on-farm piles.

Town-based telephone systems with many users spread over a small area made economic sense. Many rural homes had no such luxury. However, small telephone systems began to appear as lines were strung to connect farms within economic reach of one another.

The poles used were simple, long branches cut from nearby trees. The "central" operator could connect each caller to the intended recipient. Over time, each "central" office would connect with another "central" office of a neighboring system to widen the area of service. Long distance calling was com-

plicated, slow and expensive, if available at all. The line maintenance crew consisted of the users themselves. Obviously, these systems were relatively expensive due to the low number of users. But, the alternative could be more expensive in time of emergency.

The means to advance with rural and smalltown development came about slowly, largely due to the need to make the utilities possible at an acceptable expense. See Part 2 next week in The Record for a look at how all of this has changed since 1960.

***Editor’s note:** See Part 2 of this feature in next week’s edition of The Erie Record.*

DAUGHTERS OF ISABELLA

St. Luke’s Circle, Daughters of Isabella met Tuesday, Aug. 4, at St. Francis Parish Hall, St. Paul.

Linda DeGarmo, Regent, chaired the meeting. Cheryl Trepagnier gave a spiritual reading on Prayer Petitions. Linda DeGarmo read the long form Mission Statement of the D of I. Ten officers were present.

For the special school project this year members gave monetary donations to help with student needs at St. Patrick’s Catholic grade school in Chanute.

It was reported that the July breakfast of the group at the Highway Inn, Girard, was well attended. Members were reminded to send their volunteer hours for this quarter to Linda DeGarmo no later than August 20th

The state D of I Conference

will be held in Great Bend, Oct. 17. Regent Linda shared ideas for a possible auction item from our circle for the conference fund raiser.

The annual food drive will be held at the September meeting with food collected going to the Erie Food Bank. Cindy VanLeuween thanked all who worked at the recent blood mobile. Mary Jane Gouvion announced the annual Fatima Rosary, a nation-wide prayer event, will be Oct. 10, in the St. Francis church parking lot. More details later.

Frances Bohrer was named “Daughter of the Month. Members closed the meeting by saying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

Hostesses were Diana Woldum and Mary Jean Zandler

Lois Carlson
Scribe

Legal Notices

First Published in The Erie Record on August 14, 2026

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF NEOSHO COUNTY, KANSAS CIVIL DEPARTMENT

Carrington Mortgage Services, LLC Plaintiff, vs. Amanda J. Hunter; Unknown spouse if any of Amanda J. Hunter; United States of America, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; John Doe (Tenant/Occupant); Mary Doe (Tenant/Occupant) Defendants.

Case No. NOC-2025-CV-000087 Court Number: Pursuant to K.S.A. Chapter 60

NOTICE OF SALE

Under and by virtue of an Order of Sale issued to me by the Clerk of the District Court of Neosho County, Kansas, the undersigned Sheriff of Neosho County, Kansas, will offer for sale at public auction and sell to the highest bidder for cash in hand, at the of the Courthouse at Erie Neosho County, Kansas, on September 8, 2026, at 10:00 AM, the following real estate:

LOTS 10 AND 11, BLOCK 4, EDEN PARK ADDITION TO THE CITY OF CHANUTE, NEOSHO COUNTY, KANSAS, commonly known as 1009 S Santa Fe Ave, Chanute, KS 66720 (the “Property”)

to satisfy the judgment in the above-entitled case. The sale is to be made without appraisal and subject to the redemption period as provided by law, and further subject to the approval of the Court. For more information, visit www.Southlaw.com
Greg Taylor, Sheriff
Neosho County, Kansas

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IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF NEOSHO COUNTY, KANSAS CIVIL DEPARTMENT

Rocket Mortgage, LLC Plaintiff, vs. Drake Anderson; Unknown spouse if any of Drake Anderson; John Doe (Tenant/Occupant); Mary Doe (Tenant/Occupant) Defendants.

Case No. NOC-2026-CV-000016 Court Number: Pursuant to K.S.A. Chapter 60

NOTICE OF SALE

Under and by virtue of an Order of Sale issued to me by the Clerk of the District Court of Neosho County, Kansas, the undersigned Sheriff of Neosho County, Kansas, will offer for sale at public auction and sell to the highest bidder for cash in hand, at the Front Steps of the Courthouse at Erie Neosho County, Kansas, on September 17, 2026, at 10:00 AM, the following real estate:

Lots Six (6) and Seven (7) and the West Thirty-five feet (W.) of Lot Five (5), all of Block Six (6), in the Town, now City of Thayer, Neosho County, Kansas, commonly known as 320 Greenwood St, Thayer, KS 66776 (the “Property”)

to satisfy the judgment in the above-entitled case. The sale is to be made without appraisal and subject to the redemption period as provided by law, and further subject to the approval of the Court. For more information, visit www.Southlaw.com
Greg Taylor, Sheriff
Neosho County, Kansas

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NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

Prairie Mission Retirement Village Annual Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 25, 2026, at noon at:
310 Mission Driver, St. Paul, KS 66771

We’re nuts about the community!
The ERIE RECORD
Reach Eddie at 244-6030

