

# Pony Express kicks up dust

KAN. CITY TIMES 4-3-85

## Monument's oxidation stirs ire

By Fred Mares  
Of the Mid-America Staff

ST. JOSEPH — One hundred and twenty-five years ago today, the Pony Express galloped off from St. Joseph bound for Sacramento, Calif. — and into history.

That historic ride, and the 307 that followed it, are commemorated in downtown St. Joseph by a 4-ton bronze statue of a wiry young man atop a galloping pony, heading west, of course.

But the Midwestern winters that made passage to the West difficult for the ponies have made the passage of time difficult for the Pony Express statue in St. Joseph. And that's to say nothing of the annoying crows that use the statue as a dropping-off station of their own.

And now, about 100 miles down the trail, another town — Marysville, Kan. — is planning a brand-new statue to the riders St. Joseph so proudly claims.

So residents in St. Joseph marked the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Pony Express on Tuesday night with a fundraiser to clean up the 45-year-old statue. The birthday party at a local hotel included an auction and a dance, complete with a live pony in the ballroom.

President Reagan, in a letter read at the party, said St. Joseph and other cities along the 2,000-mile route can take pride in the Pony Express runs.

It was on April 3, 1860, that the first pony with buckskin pouch left St. Joseph. In all, nearly 90 riders rode 400 to 500 horses, relayed in more than 100 stations, across what is now eight states, from Missouri to California.

But after 19 months — 308 runs made each way, 616,000 miles and delivery of nearly 35,000 pieces of mail — the freight and express company folded.

Although short-lived, the travels were instrumental in binding California and the pioneer plains to the Eastern population, and they blazed the trail for a trans-continental transportation and communication system.

So you won't get any argument here over the historical significance of the statue. But there is some dispute over how much cleaning is needed. That dispute revolves around something called patina.



The Associated Press

For 45 years this statue has marked the start of the Pony Express, but its greenish hue makes some residents see red.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines patina as "a fine crust or film on bronze or copper, usually green or greenish-blue, formed by natural oxidation and often valued as being ornamental."

Whether patina is ornamental — or just an eyesore — literally is in the eye of the St. Joseph beholder.

"That green color is ugly," said Richard Harvey, a member of the Pony Express Chapter of the Jaycees.

The group has started a \$12,000 fund drive to restore the statue to a natural dark bronze color. Mr. Harvey's most recent total, which did not include money raised Tuesday, showed nearly \$4,000 has been raised.

Others say that the greenish tint is natural aging and that 45 years of history should not be tarnished.

An editorial Oct. 4 in the *St. Joseph News-Press* agreed that the statue needed an annual bath but warned against tinkering with the patina.

"Antiquarians all over the nation are decrying moves to pretti-

fy bronze and copper statues," the editorial said. "Thank heavens the Statue of Liberty, now being structurally repaired, will retain its green patina. No doubt some people would like to see it painted red, white and blue."

Don Reynolds, the 66-year-old longtime curator of the Pony Express Stables and Museum, said, "We have a small argument going on about it that I would rather stay out of."

Mr. Reynolds, who recalls the unveiling of the statue on April 20, 1940, has retired from full-time work at the museum where, since 1959, he has greeted tourists from around the world.

Mr. Reynolds did say, "I don't know really if (the statue) needs much of anything."

Because St. Joseph was the starting point of the Pony Express, the statue depicted a horse and its rider starting on a run pointing west. About 10 years ago Sacramento city officials erected a statue depicting a horse and rider finishing the run.

The equestrian St. Joseph bronze statue weighs 4 tons.

## Next stop: Line Creek Park

# Board picks site for mini-train

By James C. Fitzpatrick  
A Member of the Staff

A proposed miniature railroad that residents around Lakewood Greenway strongly opposed has found a home in Frank Vaydik Line Creek Park — but only over the objections of archaeologists and soccer players.

After a public hearing Tuesday, the Kansas City Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners authorized a non-profit group to construct the miniature railroad at the north part of Line Creek Park, 5700 N.W. Waukomis Drive.

The board took its action after representatives of a soccer group that uses the park said they feared that the railroad, a children's attraction, would consume the soccer field.

In addition, members of the Kansas City Archaeology Society objected to the railroad, saying the park contains important archaeological items dating to the time of Christ.

Two weeks ago, the park board decided against building the railroad at Lakewood Greenway, at Vivion Road and North Norton Avenue, because area residents complained that the railroad would cause traffic and parking problems in the area.

One reason the park board turned to Line Creek Park was that

The action was "a big load off my shoulders, I'll tell you."

George W. Craig Sr.,  
railroad group president

it is in a less developed area of Kansas City, North. The park's features include a museum of Indian artifacts and a wild-animal exhibit with buffalo, deer and elk.

After Tuesday's hearing, officials of the railroad organization said it seemed as if there would be opposition to the railroad at whatever site was considered.

"I wouldn't have been surprised if I had walked in and seen some of those buffalo and deer sitting in those chairs," George W. Craig Sr., president of the railroad group, said of the public hearing.

Mr. Craig said he was happy that the railroad finally had found a home.

"A big load off my shoulders, I'll tell you," he said.

Mr. Craig leads a group of people who last year volunteered to refurbish five 17-foot-long railroad cars and a locomotive that formerly chugged around the Kansas City Zoo at Swope Park. The old cars were removed when a new train

was installed at the zoo in 1972. The volunteers are now working on the old cars in a North Kansas City warehouse.

Mr. Craig said it would take a year to 18 months to lay the 2,300 feet of track and get the train running. Volunteers will operate the train, and rides will be free. About 12 children will be able to ride in each car.

To complement the miniature railroad, the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department will construct a playground at the park. The department also will landscape the site and provide parking. As part of the resolution adopted by the park board, a representative of the archaeology group will be allowed to participate in the planning of the railroad to minimize the disruption of archaeological sites.

The archaeologists said that no digs are now being conducted at the park, but they said an area in which University of Kansas students had dug several years ago was surrounded by a fence. The fenced area is not part of the railroad site.

Park board members also told representatives of the soccer league that another park would be made available to the group if the railroad's presence made soccer impossible at Line Creek Park.

# Statues offer glimpse of past

5-27-00

Harrah's installation renews interest in art

By MARSHALL WHITE  
marshall@npgco.com  
St. Joseph News-Press

The recent installation of a statue at Harrah's North Kansas City Casino and Hotel has focused attention on the bronze tributes to the Pony Express scattered around the West.

William Harrah commissioned noted sculptor Avard Fairbanks to create two identical statues in 1963.

A Harrah's spokeswoman said the statue is meant to be no disrespect to St. Joseph.

Mr. Fairbanks chose a stance similar to the first Pony Express bronze created by Herman A. McNeil for St. Joseph.

The 15,000-pound Fairbanks bronze shows a rider at the gallop carrying the mail across the prairie. All four of the horse's feet are frozen in motion at the base of the statue.

The statue was cast in Pietrasanta, Italy, according to a Harrah's employee who declined to give her name.

In addition to the North Kansas City statue, a duplicate graces the entrance to Harrah's in Lake Tahoe, Nevada.

In 1947, Mr. Fairbanks created a model for a large Pony Express monument showing a rider as he leaves the station keeper with his tired horse. His sons would eventually finish that monument in 1998, and it is installed in Salt Lake City.

With the help of a \$28,000 grant from the federal Works Progress Administration, St. Joseph raised \$63,000 for a similar statue here.

Mr. McNeil, the sculptor, was well qualified for the work.

According to a file at the Riverbluffs Library, he had been fascinated with Western history and much of his early work included depictions of the American Indians.

He created a 7,200-pound bronze that stands 12 feet tall on a two-piece pedestal of Vermont granite.

The equestrian statue depicts a horse galloping to the West, and the rocky piece under his feet represents leaving the prairie and crossing the mountains.

It is "natural therefore that the horse should be represented in as rapid an action as possible," Mr. McNeil said at the time.

Please see Statues/Page B3



IVAL LAWHON JR./St. Joseph News-Press

ABOVE: The Pony Express statue in St. Joseph was dedicated April 21, 1940, and faces to the west, the direction that riders traveled carrying the mail. LEFT: Harrah's Casino in North Kansas City has dedicated a new Pony Express monument, stating its casino is the closest to the starting point of the Pony Express — although the express began in St. Joseph, and the St. Jo Frontier Casino is in St. Joseph.



FILE PHOTO/St. Joseph News-Press

In 1940, St. Joseph residents gather at the triangle of land off Frederick Avenue in downtown St. Joseph to see the new Pony Express statue at its unveiling.

# Statues offer glimpse of the past

Continued from Page B1

The Roman Bronze Works of Long Island, New York, cast the statue.

It was installed in St. Joseph on April 20, 1940, and has not been moved since that day.

In 1974, Thomas Holland cre-

ated a bronze statue for Sacramento, Calif., the western terminus of the Pony Express. This statue depicts the completion of a run.

No matter whether a Pony Express statue is in Kansas City, St. Joseph, Sacramento or Lake Tahoe, Judge Merrill Otis

explained why the bronze statues captivate all of us as citizens.

Some 60 years ago at the dedication ceremony, he said, we come ... "to see one figure revived out of the fabled past" and "catch a glimpse of events forever gone."

## Weatherproofing

Maintaining the Pony Express Statue in downtown St. Joseph, Robbie Sipes puts a sealer of lacquer on the statue Tuesday. Mr. Sipes is the curator of exhibits with the St. Joseph Museum. He uses three steps to prevent the statue from weathering.

TODD WEDDLE  
St. Joseph News-Press

7-7-99

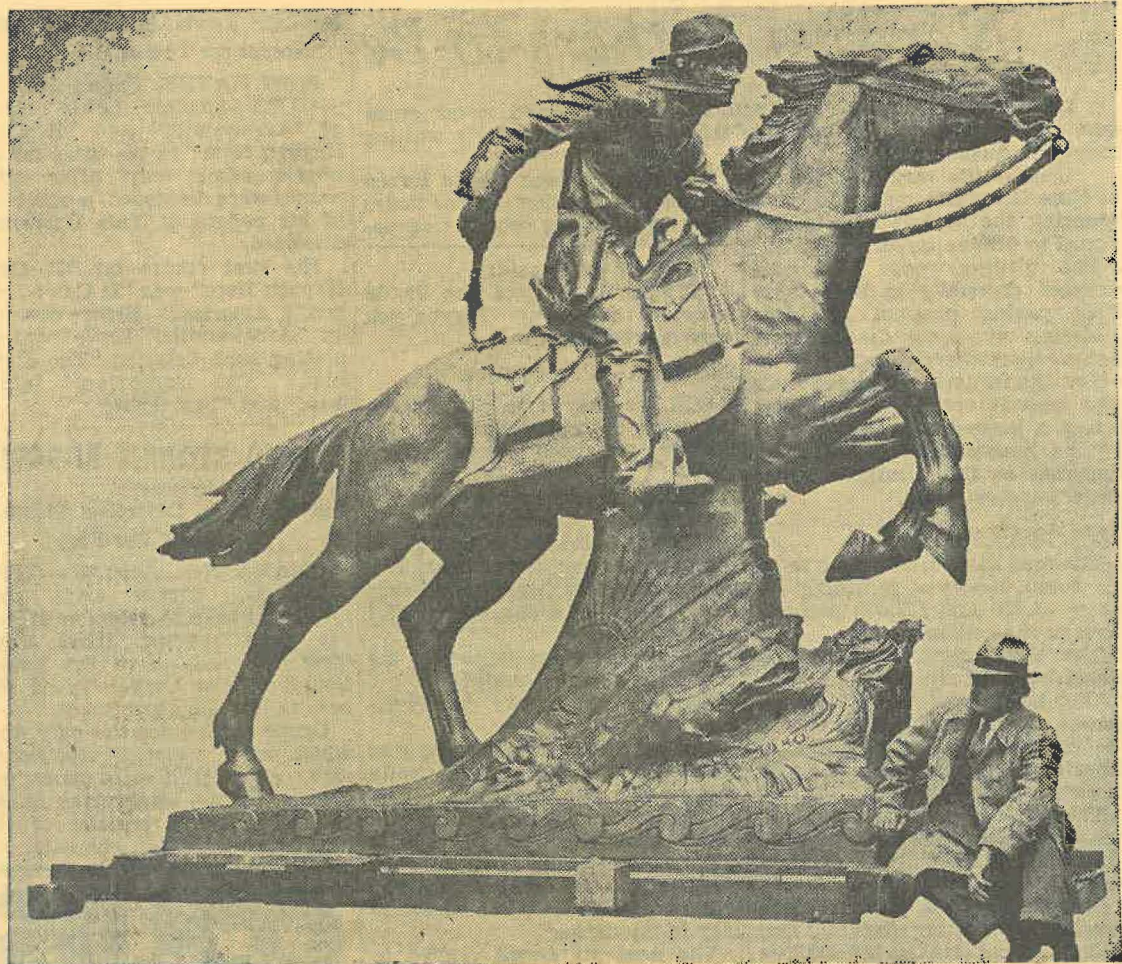


May - 10 - 12 - 74 Staff photograph by Bill Bennett

### Another rider statue planned

The Pony Express will be commemorated again with a statue of a Pony Express rider—this time at the west end of the 1860 mail route. The city of Sacramento, western terminus of the Pony Express, plans to have a statue like the one held here by Tom Olmstead, curator of exhibits at the St. Joseph Museum. He holds one of a limited number of casts of a replica of the full-sized statue to be sculptured by Thomas Holland. In the background is St. Joseph's Pony Express statue in Civic Center. It was sculptured by Herman A. MacNeil and unveiled at Civic Center park April 20, 1940. The Sacramento replica can be seen at the Pony Express Stables Museum, 1914 Penn street.

### The Sculptor and His Heroic Statue



Hermon A. MacNeil is leaning on the base of the great statue he designed, that of the Pony Express horse and rider, unveiled yesterday afternoon in the triangle of the Civic Center. The picture was taken at the foundry, where the bronze memorial was cast from Mr. MacNeil's plaster model. It shows the careful detail of the statue,

the result of long study. The scarf over the rider's horse served to keep the dust from his nostrils in his gallop across the plains, and the mail was attached to a mochila, a leather square thrown from one horse to another in the relay race with time. The bronze weight is taken care of by a support that suggests the mountains to be crossed, the

sage brush and alkali desert. On one side is the sun and on the other the moon, symbolizing the ride that continued day and night. The photograph shows, by contrast with its author, the great size of the 7,200-pound statue. Speed is the motif. The horse looks excited as the rider starts on the run for the first lap of the St. Joseph to Sacramento journey.

# Pony Express Statue project nears end of trail

N.P. 5-22-86

By VINCE HAMON  
Staff Writer

After decades of merciless attack from the elements the St. Joseph Pony Express statue has been given a new lease in life as it gallops toward the completion of refurbishing to erase the signs of corrosion.

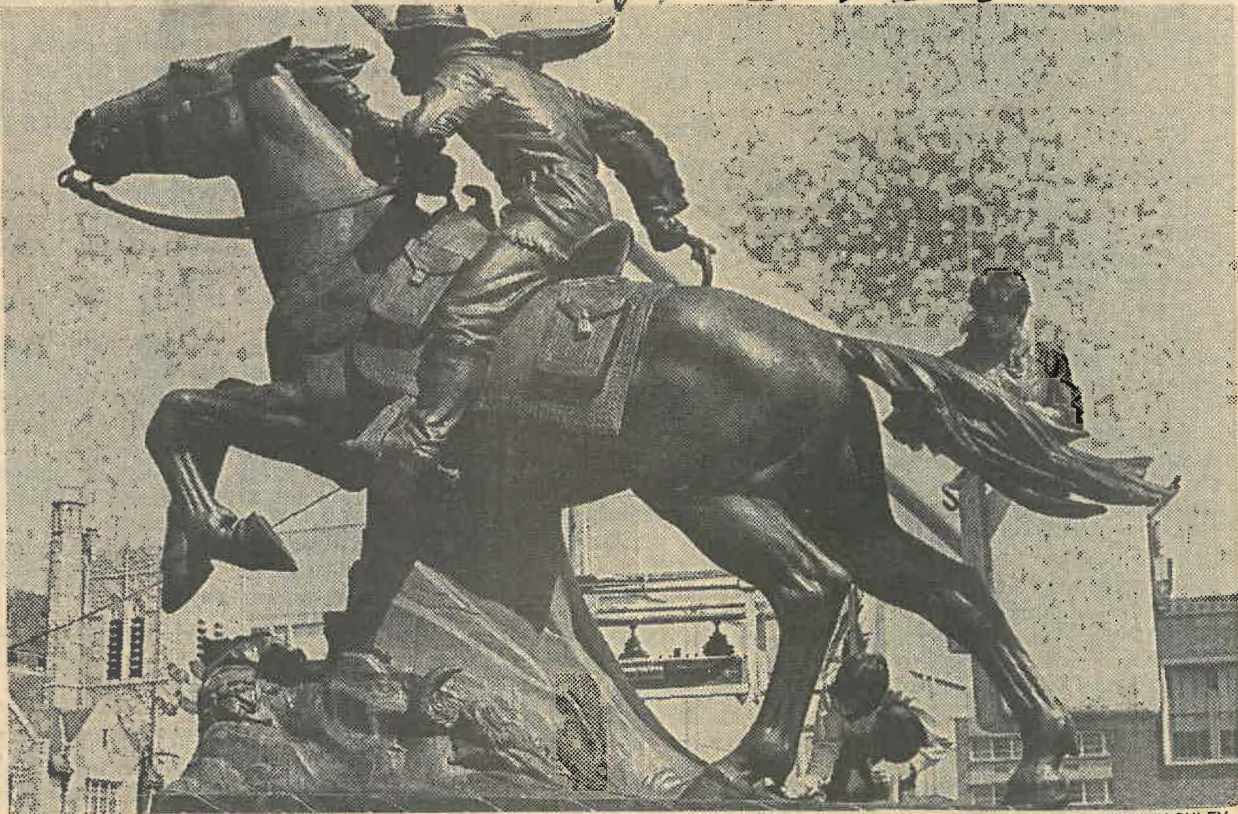
Jim DiGiovanni, parks and recreation department director, was jubilant Thursday morning as he watched two workers apply pigmented wax to the statue's right hind leg and its base. "This is one monkey I wanted off my back," he said.

The work will be finished Friday when workers wax the side of the statue facing north and then apply a final coat of clear wax, said DiGiovanni.

He said the contract for the project cost \$10,600, of which \$7,000 was donated by the public and the rest obtained from unencumbered balances from the parks department.

The project is on its seventh and last week, noted DiGiovanni, noting that nine work days were lost due to bad weather.

The statue's greenish coloration was due to natural oxidation of the statue, said DiGiovanni. "We saved the patina as best as we could . . . that's why we chose this (restoration) process."



Staff photo by COLIN HACKLEY

Bonnie Watkins, left, and Mayda Goodberry apply final coat of pigmented wax to the statue.

The process used is more expensive and takes longer than others, he explained. But it pre-

serves the original texture of the statue and its coloring. "The (horse's) underbelly still

has the original color and that's what we wanted to match," he said.

## Pony Express sculptor's 2 grandsons plan to visit

News-Press Staff Report 6-10-95

In 1940, sculptor Hermon MacNeil unveiled his famous bronze statue of the Pony Express in the Civic Center of St. Joseph. It was the first of five Pony Express statues, each different, to spring up along the trail.

Now, 45 years later, MacNeil's grandsons, Bob and Doug MacNeil, from Fresno, Calif., are returning to St. Joseph to follow the route of the famous mail service back to their home state.

The MacNeils and their wives will be special guests Saturday night when the Missouri Chapter of the National Pony Express Association hosts the 135th Anniversary Western Barbecue at Patee House Museum.

The dinner will be on the eve of the 135th anniversary rerun of the Pony Express.

Also on hand will be Wendall Overfield from Gillette, Wyo., national president of the association.

Overfield will follow the mail to California, covering the 200 miles a day by highway, while riders on horseback stay on the original trail as much as possible.

Also taking part in the Saturday evening event will be U.S. Rep. Pat Danner, D-Smithville. The dinner sponsors are Bank Midwest, Commerce Bank and Jerre Anne Cafeteria.

On their return trip to California, the MacNeils won't be roughing it the way Pony riders did. They will make the 2,000-mile trip by motor home, taking time to stop at historic sites along the route.

Pony riders, who leave St. Joseph at 1 p.m. Sunday, will take 10 days to cover the original trail by horseback, just as the riders of 1860 did. More than 500 riders of the National Pony Express Association will take part this year, each covering from two to five miles in their own states.

## Pony Express statue a source of pride!

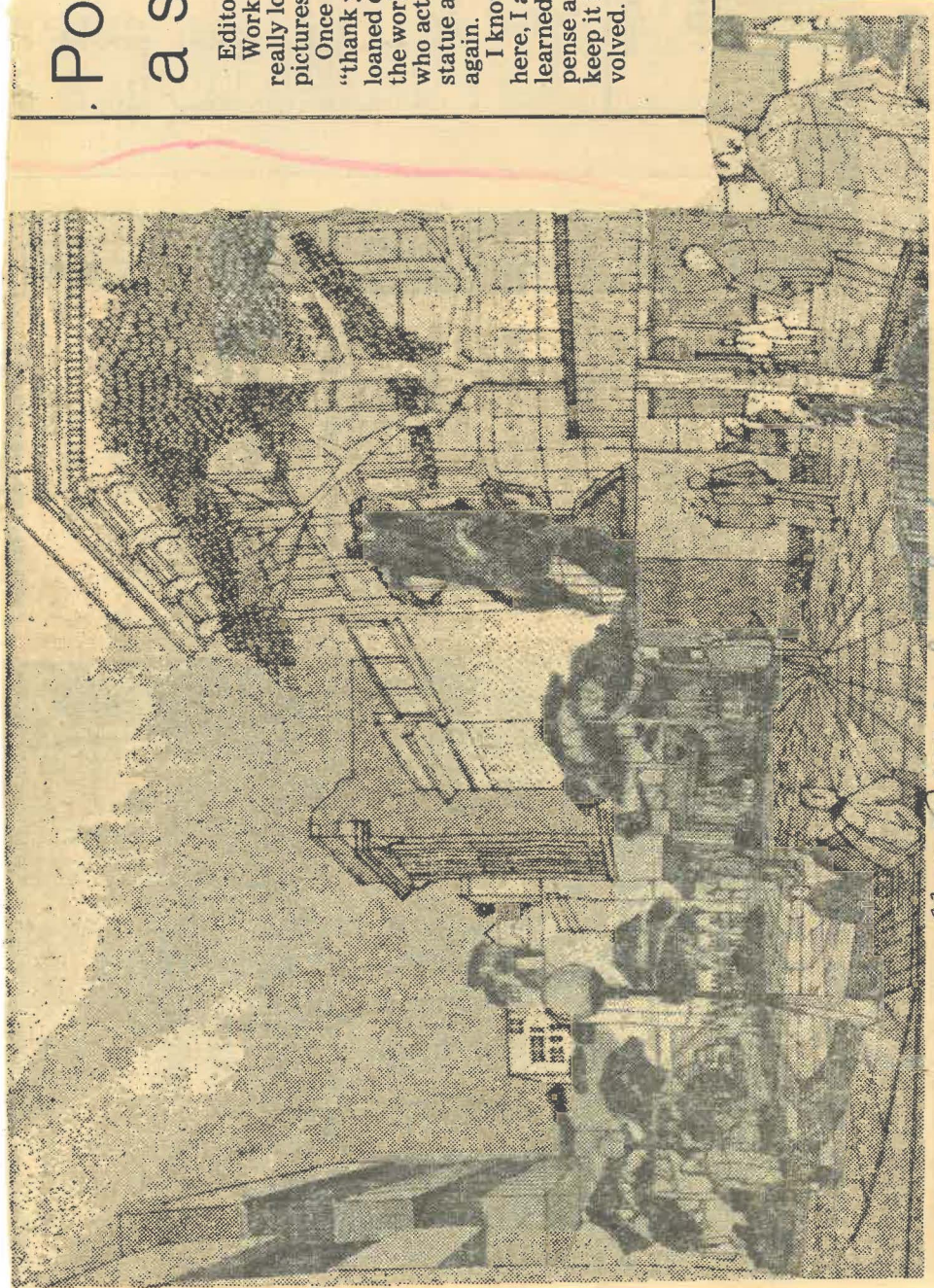
GAZ. 6-10-86

Editor, The Gazette:  
Work on restoring the Pony Express Statue is finished and it really looks good! It's finished just in time for tourists to take pictures with it in the background.

Once again, the citizens of St. Joseph can be proud of it. A big "thank you" is due a lot of people who not only gave money but loaned equipment, along with the Sheraton Inn which provided the workers rooms to stay. But the biggest thanks goes to people who actually did the hard work — cleaning and waxing the statue and whatever else had to be done to make it presentable again.

I know it cost a lot of money, but as a person who grew up here, I am proud of the way it looks. Hopefully the town has learned to keep it up in shape and there won't be such an expense again. Those who cleaned it said material applied would keep it in good shape for a long time. Thanks to everyone involved. It was a big job well done.

Dorothy Ramsey, St. Joseph.



## Pony Express Statue to Stay Put

Pony Express statue to be moved from 10th and Fredrick to the intersection of Felix and 7th streets in the downtown urban renewal mall?

"Taint so, says Thomas W. Paul, executive director of the city's urban renewal agency.

The question rose after the

and we won't ask the city for the statue. We do plan some kind of a centerpiece for the intersection though," the urban renewal director said.

The sketch is from the northwest and shows the south side of Felix street where the 7th street and Felix street sections of the mall will cross.

above sketch was given to the city to be framed and hung in the city finance department.

Mr. Paul said the sketch merely represents a preliminary suggestion and that the statue was placed in the picture to show the size of the adjacent buildings.

"Moving of the statue hasn't even been discussed