

Why no 'U' on KS Hill?

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Q: I was wondering why the person(s) didn't put the "U" on the KS hill, and why they chose to leave it off? I may be one of the many (or few) but to me it symbolizes "Kansas." If the "U" were to be added, then I would connect Kansas State University to the hillside and Manhattan.

A: This is a matter of history, topography and money.

We're talking about the hill south of town, just on the other side of the Kansas River. It's the one you see as you're heading over the bridge to K-177 to get out to I-70.

Originally, says Cheryl Collins of the Riley County Historical Museum, the letter "K" was put up there in 1921 by civil engineering students at what was then known as the Kansas State Agricultural College. That's the predecessor of today's Kansas State University.

The "S" went up in 1930, Collins said. That addition cost \$500; the original "K" cost about \$350.

Of course, at the time, it wouldn't have been relevant to add a "U," since the institution was known as KSAC. In 1931, the name changed to Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science. It became Kansas State University in 1959.

Each time the name changed, there was thought given to adding the new letters. But even if somebody had really wanted to do so, it wouldn't have been an easy job.

The ground where the "U" would go is unstable — that is, there's no really solid accessible rock underneath to anchor the letter to — and it drops off there in a way that would make the placement of the letter very difficult, according to Dick Hayter, advisor to the K-State student group that keeps care of the letters. That group is called Tau Beta Pi; it's an engineering honorary society.

A 1984 study estimated the cost of adding a "U" at \$20,000, Collins said. Hayter said some more recent estimates from structural engineers have pegged it in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range.

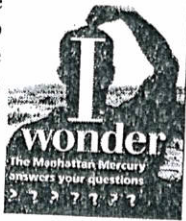
Given that sort of price tag, "we just haven't pursued it," Hayter said.

The letters were intended to represent K-State. Although the access area and the top of the hill is owned by local businessman Burke Bayer, the hillside with the letters is owned by K-State. The group that maintains the letters is with K-State. So it is all very much associated with the university.

If you and other people see it as symbolizing Kansas — rather than K-State — well, I guess that's your perspective, and there's not necessarily anything wrong with that.

Anyway, until some group decides they want to conquer the topography and raise the money, it's probably going to stay the way it is.

You can submit a question to this column by e-mail to questions@themercury.com, or by regular mail to Questions, P.O. Box 787, Manhattan, KS 66505



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