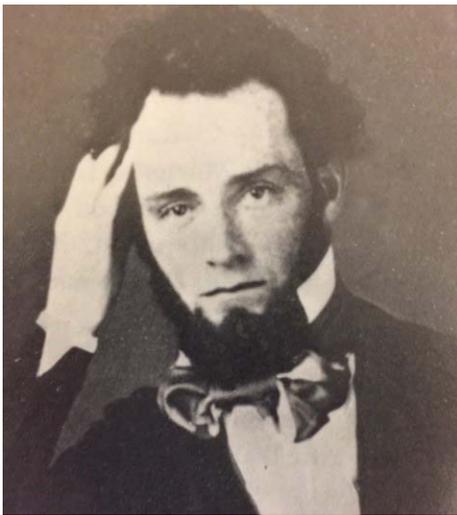


Cyrus K. Holliday, pp. 1-3 & 5

*Historical  
Highlights*  
vol. 8, no. 4  
*Nov., 2019*

## Holliday Letters

**C**yrus K. Holliday, the writer of the letters here reproduced, is nationally known as the original promoter and first president of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, but he played a considerable part, as well, in the territorial history of Kansas, particularly in the founding of the city of Topeka. While the railroad, following generally the route of the old Santa Fe trail into New Mexico, was built upon his conception and as



a result of his persistent efforts, he threw himself with equal determination into the territorial struggle for a free state. He was one of the organizers of the Topeka town company, assisting in laying out the town; and at the sacrifice of his personal political

ambitions was largely instrumental in having it made the state capital.

Holliday came to the territory in the autumn of 1854, at the age of twenty-eight, leaving behind him his young wife, to whom these letters were addressed. He had some capital, realized from work in the organization of a railroad in Pennsylvania, and a determination to build a business career on the frontier. Within four weeks after his arrival he was engaged in founding the town up the river, looking with clear vision beyond the immediate time, and planning with the acumen that marked his entire business life.

This selection of letters to Holliday's wife Mary in Meadville, PA reflect his first impressions of Kansas Territory and the founding of Topeka. These and a number of other letters were published in the August 1937 issue of the Kansas Historical Quarterly. The transcriptions and the introduction were prepared by Lela Barnes for that publication.

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### City of Lawrence K. T. Nov. 18, '54

My Dear Mary-

Through the politeness of the City Magistrate I am favored with materials to pen you a single line just

previous to Mr. Ingram's departure. Had it not been for his kindness you could not have heard from me except by word of mouth. Mr. Ingram will fully explain all the inconveniences of our situation and the trials through which we have passed. I design remaining here for some time-how long I don't know in order to effect some business arrangements. I would not have gone here for anything just now but at the same time will expect to have you come with me here hereafter. I am perfectly delighted with the Country. You may tell those who inquire that my idea of the country is simply this-that God might have made a better country than Kansas but so far as my knowledge extends he certainly never did. I am bound to make it my home if I can at all succeed in making suitable business arrangements. The site of this new city I think is most beautiful-and I know you would be delighted with it. But of all those matters Mr. Ingram will fully tell you. It may be that I will be home in a week or ten days after Ingram's arrival but you must not look for me at that time as I may not come until near spring. ...If I conclude to stay here for a while I will make arrangements for putting up a building early in the spring-and [if] I —cont., p. 2→

—cont. from p. 1 → succeed in making suitable arrangements we will try and come out in the spring. ...

A letter from you will do me much good—

Yours affectionately, HOLLIDAY



### City of Lawrence Kansas Territory

Dec. 3, '54

My Dear Mary- This Sunday evening I avail myself of the generous offer of a friend to pen you again a very few lines. You will see by this that I have got no place to call my home. But I hope ere long to have you with me and then I feel that I will truly have a home.

I should not have written this evening were it not for the consideration that tomorrow I again start for the up country to be gone I know not how long-perhaps 3 or 4 days-perhaps a couple of weeks. Hence I thought I had better write to you this evening as I might not get a chance to write to you again for some time to come. I am going about 40 miles

up the Kansas River to assist in laying out a new town. I do wish you were here, Mary, I should never go back again to Meadville-except merely to visit and scarcely that. I have found the very best of people in Kansas. I am becoming more and more pleased with them every day, and I now you would like them and the place were you here. Last Thursday I was invited and attended a "thanksgiving dinner." Several gentlemen and ladies were present and we had a good time generally. The gentleman who favors me with the privilege of writing this note says if you will come out he will immediately surrender all right and title to his mansion. It is one of the best in the place. I will describe it. In shape it is exactly like the roof of an ordinary house-about 14 ft. long. The floor is earth-such as the Creator made. Next the framework of the building-which are rough poles stuck together-is a layer of brush-next a layer of sod or turf and next a covering of prairie grass. If you would like the accommodations let me know-and yet I have seen beautiful and refined and educated women occupy just such mansions . . . None in the city have any better. Even Mrs. Nichols the great lecturer on women's rights and editor of a newspaper has been living here a long time in just such a house. [6]

I don't know yet when I shall be home-perhaps soon. Maybe not till spring. I can tell you more in my next letter-I hope. ...

HOLLIDAY

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### "Up the River" K. T. Dec. 10, 1854

My Dear Mary- ...I believe I addressed you last from Lawrence.

I am now thirty miles above Lawrence on the Kansas River assisting in starting a new town. We are just about in the central portion of the settled territory and with perhaps the best landing and the most eligible site for a city in the entire country. Governor Reeder [7] passed through our place day before yesterday and spoke very encouragingly of our enterprise. We hope all will go well.

You can't tell, Mary, how glad I am that you are not with me. What we have to endure is almost beyond belief and you never could have gone through it. It is a long time since I have seen anything in the shape of a bed. I have a Buffalo Robe and two blankets in which I roll myself and lay down to rest upon the bare ground with boots, hat, overcoat and all on. Our food is mush, molasses and bacon, mixed plentifully with dirt three times each day. Thus we live in Kansas. Yet notwithstanding all this I have never had better health in my life-growing fatter and heartier each day.

A more lovely country I certainly never saw-and yet it looks worse now than at any other season. I am told by those who know that in the spring and early summer when the grass and shrubbery and flowers appear it is beautiful beyond conception. So I think it must be. And in a few years when civilization by its magic influence shall have transformed this glorious country from what it now is to the brilliant destiny awaiting it, the sun in all his course will visit no land more truly lovely and desirable than this. Here, Mary, with God's kind permission, we will make our home. ...

C. K. HOLLIDAY

Direct as usual to "Lawrence K. T."

4/35  
 "Up the River" K. T.  
 Dec 10, 1854

My Dear Mary - I have thought that I could not spend this Sabbath morning in a more appropriate manner than in addressing another letter to you - consequently I am find myself at 11 o'clock A.M. seated on the end of a trunk and writing upon the end of a half bound keg - a little better fixture than when I wrote to you some few times I had nothing better than the bottom of a painted platter upon which I had just eaten my breakfast. This will give you some idea of life in a new Territory -

I believe I addressed you last from Lawrence - I am now thirty miles above Lawrence on the Kansas River assisting in starting a new town - It is just about in the central portion of the settled territory

have ever seen and the right kind of men have taken hold of it. I want to, if I possibly can, put up a building for us this winter in order that we may have some place to move into in the spring.

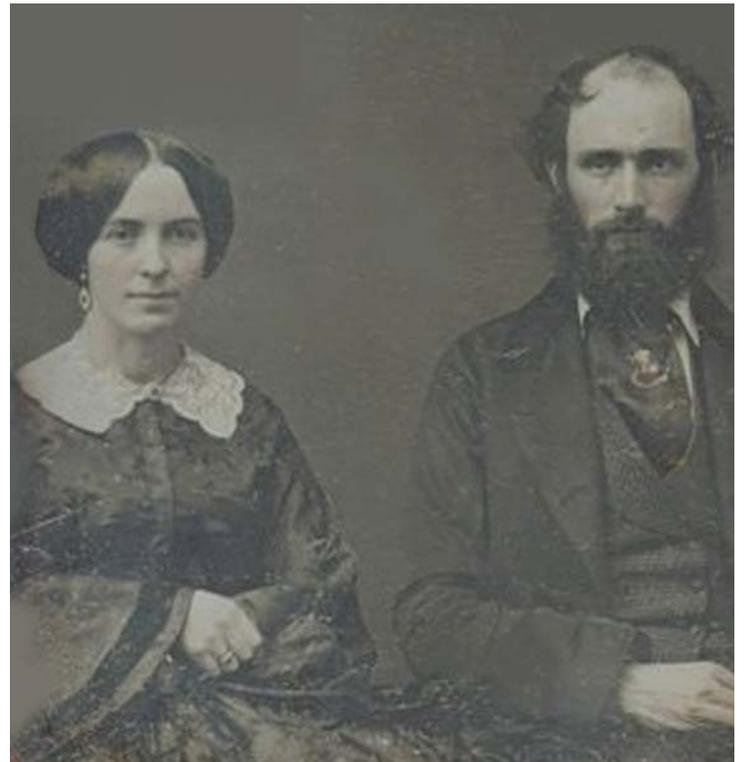
Yet I cannot say definitely whether that home will be at this place Lawrence-or at Topeka our new town. At Topeka I have a city interest and have taken a farm claim-both of which I hope to hold. But if I succeed in holding the claim it will be necessary for me to live upon it-hence I think I will put a house upon it-and we will live there when you come on to the Territory.

I am much gratified by the favorable reception I am meeting with in the Territory-it proves what I have often said to you-that I could do nothing at Meadville but let me get off and try my hand among a new people and under different influences and I could pursue a different course of action. This has proven true. For instance in our own town I have acted as their President from our earliest commencement to the present time and last Monday I was unanimously, by ballot, elected as their first constitutional President to serve until the first Monday of July 1855. I have also received the appointment of temporary agent for the Emigrant Aid Co. of New England. I merely mention these facts to show you that I hold a respectable position before the people among whom I live. ...

HOLLIDAY

## Dec. 24, 1854 My Dear Mary-

As you will perceive by my heading I am again in Lawrence-having returned here on last Wednesday for the purpose of attending to some business for the Association in our new City and also for personal business. Notwithstanding we have a very beautiful site for a town above where I have been operating for the past three weeks yet I must confess I was much pleased to get back again to Lawrence. Here I can find a chair to sit upon, a table to eat from and a bed to lie upon. At our town above I can obtain neither, it having neither chair, table nor bed in the entire limits. Something of a city that. Yet we hope for something better-and we think we have good reason for our hope. Our city site is without doubt the prettiest in the Territory the country round is more extensive and better for agricultural purposes than any other I



# Digitizing Shawnee County Historical Bulletins

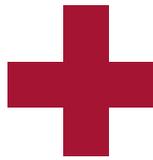
The Society and the Shawnee County Public Library are about to give the world a tremendous gift! Digital copies of the Society's history publications will soon be available to readers all over the world.

Since 1946, the Society has published a yearly (or more often) bulletin of interesting historical items. The Library's Backstage Library Works has chosen to digitize these bulletins into electronic form. Librarian Donna Rae Pearson is heading up the effort on behalf of the Backstage Library Works and has determined that almost all of the bulletins can be digitized. This effort will help future historians find and read information about Topeka and its history.

While this is a joint effort of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library's Backstage Library Works

and the Shawnee County Historical Society we greatly appreciate that the library is doing the lion's share of the work and absorbing all the costs. We want to extend our thanks to the Library organization for agreeing so quickly and its commitment to get this done. The project should be completed by summer of 2020.

More information about when and where the bulletins will be found on-line will be publicized when it develops.



## Students Visit SCHS

Fall days like we had earlier this month was a great time to visit the the Ritchie House, the oldest house in Topeka. Seventh graders from **Robinson Middle School** came in early November and **Jardine Middle School** kids arrived mid-month to see the Ritchie House located at 1116 SE Madison. **Most Pure Heart of Mary** 4th graders came to see the Ritchie House on a beautiful Fall Friday. **Over two thousand children and adults have visited the Ritchie House this year...** and we expect more throughout the rest of this year.

If you are interested in a tour, come **Tuesday thru Thursday 9 AM to 1 PM** to check out the Ritchie house; a stop on the Underground Railroad.



## Note from our SCHS President

**Step up to the plate, take a swing at it, go for the fences, start the ball rolling, etc.** The point of all of these clichés is to invite you to become more involved with the Shawnee County Historical Society.

The SCHS needs you to get involved to help us accomplish our mission to promote greater awareness of the history of Shawnee County, Kansas, and its place in the national struggle for freedom through preservation, interpretation, education and citizen engagement. We can use volunteers to assist with tours (script provided), develop additional educational programming, help with special events planning such as the historical homes tour, serve on the program committee to develop adult programming such as the Shawnee County History Geeks speaker series, help develop membership promotion activities, help redesign the web site, and—well the sky is the limit. We are open to all ideas that will help us share the history of Shawnee County



with an expanded audience. So—step to the plate and share any ideas you have with board members.

I have enjoyed serving as president of the Society for 2019. We have had a successful historic homes tour, preservation awards, and spring and fall speaker series. Visits to the site continue to be popular with school groups and other visitors. Bob Totten, our part-time employee, continues to go above and beyond in conducting tours, promoting activities, and handling day to day management. The board of directors has been active in supporting all these activities. I am excited about the future for the Shawnee County Historical Society and I hope you will become involved in helping us swing for the fences.



— *Pat Michaelis*

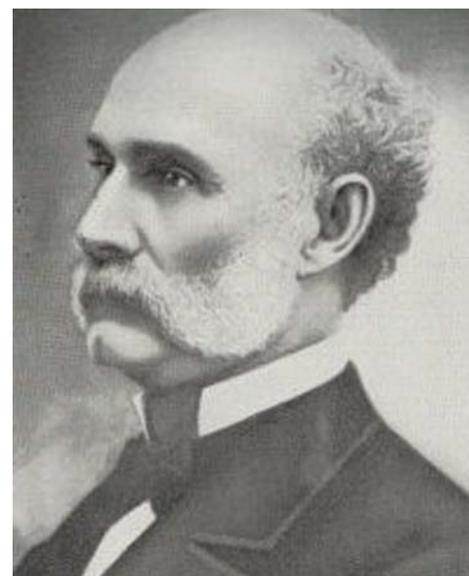
## Plan to attend SCHS Annual Meeting & Dinner —R.S.V.P. needed by 12/4

**Cyrus Holliday** will be the center of attention at the upcoming **Annual Meeting of the Shawnee County Historical Society at Noon, Sunday, December 8**, at the **Topeka Country Club**, 2700 Buchanan Street, in Topeka. **Tom Coleman** is the featured speaker and will explore the life and hardships of Kansas Territory immigrants in 1854-1860 as viewed through the personal diary and letters of Cyrus K. Holliday to his wife Mary, who remained in Meadville, PA. Holliday was one of the founders of Topeka, and first president of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa

Fe Railway (AT&SF). Coleman will also look at the historical events occurring in the eastern Kansas territory, with a principal focus on the free-state communities of Topeka and Lawrence.

**Please join us at Noon for the dinner and program.** The annual meeting and meal is **\$35 per person**, payable by check, or make arrangements to pay by contacting the Shawnee County Historical Society at PO Box 2201, Topeka, Kansas 66601 or call at 785 234 6097. We will need to know in advance how much food to prepare so **please get your RSVP to the pro-**

**gram by December 4.**



## Patton Makes Appearance at Cox Communications Center

**General George Patton** made a return appearance to Topeka on October 20, 2019. It was all part of the speaker's series at the Cox Communications Center as **Roger Aeschliman** portrayed General Patton. Known as "Old Blood and Guts," General George S. Patton Jr. became legendary for his success in World War II. Yet he was haunted by mistakes, most notably when he slapped two soldiers in Sicily for what he believed was cowardice, and was nearly sent home in disgrace. CoreFirst Bank and Trust Vice

President Roger Aeschliman provided a true-to-life reenactment as Patton apologizing to the troops for his behavior with some soldiers in Italy. This was the second of four programs offered as part of the historical society's "Shawnee County History Geeks" fall series. The re-enactment was an emotionally powerful presentation of war at its worst and best.



## Would you like to support the Shawnee County Historical Society?

Here is your opportunity. Just fill out the following information below and send it to:

Shawnee County Historical Society  
PO Box 2201  
Topeka, Kansas 66601



### Option B:

You can also join the society on-line:  
<https://222.shawneecountyhistory.org/become-a-member>

### I want to support:

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage Education for kids   | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shawnee County Preservation   | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Programs/Lectures  | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bus Rental Grants for School Field Trip (to help make field trips possible) | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ritchie House restoration and maintenance                                   | \$ _____ |

### I also want to renew my annual membership:

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Membership \$35            | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron Level Membership \$50       | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renovator Level Membership \$100   | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Level Membership \$150+ | \$ _____ |
| <b>Total</b>  | \$ _____ |

Visa  Mastercard  Discover Credit

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

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## Membership Renewal Notices Are Forthcoming

Soon, you will be receiving a notice to renew your membership to the Shawnee County Historical Society. Please return your renewal as soon as possible as it is the primary form of revenue we rely on to further our efforts to promote and preserve the history of Shawnee county. For \$35 you can be a Regular member, the Patron level is \$50, the Renovator level is \$100 and a Sustainer membership is \$150+. If you are so inclined, please fill out information on being a member, above on this page, and return it with your check or credit card number to PO Box 2201, Topeka, Kansas 66601.

You can also renew on-line at: <https://www.shawneecountyhistory.org/become-a-member>

— Thank you!



P.O. Box 2201, TOPEKA KS 66601-2201

*Lighting Freedom's Pathway;  
Building Heritage Culture*

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## *Mark Your Calendars* **Society Events: Dec. 2019:**

**Shawnee County Historical Society is closed in December**

**December 8 Annual Membership Meeting —Noon**  
Topeka Country Club, 2700 SW Buchanan St.  
Holiday Lunch Provided, \$35 per person in advance  
Featured Speaker: Tom Coleman, on the Life of Cyrus K. Holliday

# *Historical Highlights*

*Nov.  
2019*

