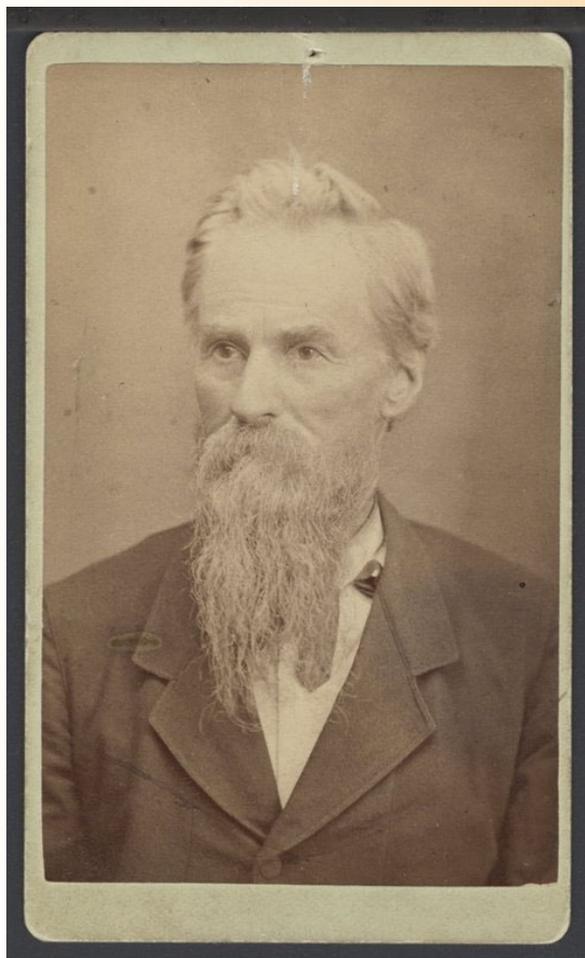


Historical Highlights

07/17/2017
v.6, n.3



John Ritchie
"Radical of Radicals"
1817-1887

SPECIAL 200th BIRTHDAY EDITION

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Special points of interest

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- Renew your 2017 membership today!

“Six Feet of Earth or a Free State” The Legacy of John Ritchie

Thom Rosenblum

The latter half of the 1850s in Kansas had the vibrations of a prairie twister about them. They were pivotal and often messy years and the Territory and the nation shuddered over the question whether the new state would be admitted to the union free of slavery. Some had come to Kansas spoiling for a fight. Many more came seeking only a better life and wanting nothing more than to live their lives. But by mid-decade, the air of public life seemed to be on fire and that public fire singed the private self.

John Ritchie stood in the middle of it of it all. In September 1855, the year Ritchie arrived in Topeka, big city papers smudged southern hopes that Kansas would enter the Union a slave state, their headlines blaring **Triumph of Freedom** as a Free-State Constitutional Convention assembled in Topeka leaving some to prematurely announce the end of the issue. They could not be more wrong.

Up from the south and out of Missouri they came, the Border Ruffians carrying banners screaming “Death to the damned Abolitionists” and “No quarter for Free-State-men.” At Lecompton, the pro-slavery men forged a legislature which brought its wrath down on any who preached the Free-State cause and threatened to lead Kansas into the Union as a slave state.

The air was thick with intimations of last days. “Six feet of earth or a Free State,” declared one of the most notorious Free State men of them all, Jim Lane. Earthen walls went up around settlements and log cabins transformed into fortresses. Free Staters, hearing the cry “you shall have Slavery” or “every drop of blood must be spilt” formed militias to meet the pro-slavery forces they knew would soon be

marching down alternately dusty and muddy Kansas roads. Even those not caring about ending slavery outside of Kansas, knew that losing meant their property would be sacrificed and their “wives and children ruthlessly violated and they murdered.”

The pro-slavery men stockpiled arms and feather mattresses to throw up against windows of homes in case of attack. “I wish you could take a peep inside our cabin,” Mary Titus, wife of Henry Titus, who had arrived in Kansas in April 1856 with a force of 1,000 men intent on driving every Free State man from the territory, wrote from her family from her cabin a few miles south of Lecompton, “you would find 15 U.S. muskets in one corner, half dozen guns and Sharpe’s rifles in another, and any quantity of *revolvers* lying about here, there, and everywhere.”

Pro-slavery men blockaded the Missouri River and hid in the thickets along the Westport Road connecting Missouri and Kansas, plundering every wagon and traveler not “sound on the goose” as the saying went. “There is not a single sack of flour or a bushel of meal for sale in this vicinity and we have at least 2000 men, women and children to be fed,” newspaper correspondent John Kagi wrote from Lawrence in August 1856. The Free-State men, their bellies grumbling from a diet of often no more than baked squash, pumpkin, and green corn ground up in coffee mills, retaliated by raiding pro-slavery towns. Makeshift armies took the field at places like Osawatomie, Franklin, Hickory Point, and Pottawatomie Creek.

Uttering nothing but contempt for the Fugitive Slave Act and Lecompton’s “Bogus” Legislature, a handful of Free-State families turned their homes into refuges for escaping slaves tracked by their owners, sheriffs, U.S. deputy Marshals, and the slave catchers prowling river banks and towns hoping to catch the fugitives and drag them south for cash. In homes scattered around Topeka, lookouts nervously scanned roads while others prepared wagons to secret fugitives to freedom. Slave owners found them-

selves frustrated in their attempts to bring in the fugitives and more often as not left Topeka, as one observer crowed, “sadder” but “wiser” men.

As lawmen kept a wary eye on the comings and goings in Topeka and other towns which served as stops for slaves on their trek to freedom, those moving the fugitives devised new tactics such as dressing up in slickers and plug hats and carrying canes to look the part of a slave holder to ward off the suspicion. The aggrieved slave owners countered. One enterprising planter, upon learning five of his missing slaves were at or near Topeka, hired a free black out of Jackson County, MO to pose as a fugitive hoping to learn the whereabouts of his missing human chattel. Known to be a “shrewd fellow” and possessing “some knowledge of the character of an abolitionist,” the spy soon learned what route the fugitives had taken. The planter lit out to re-claim his chattel, overtaking not only his five but another six just as they crossed from Nebraska into Iowa.

John Ritchie rode with a Free-State militia and turned his property into a sanctuary for fleeing slaves. In a battle in which those who opposed slavery in the territory were far from like-minded on the extent of freedom blacks should enjoy, the editor of the *Leavenworth Times* singled Ritchie out as a “Radical’s Radical,” gifted with a “pluck which enables a man to take ground alone and on a fixed principle.” In the eyes of a correspondent with the *New York Times*, Ritchie “has always been a *Radical* – Buchanan would say an Abolitionist, and is supposed to have a *life-interest* in the Underground Railroad.”

Kansas gave rise to men like Ritchie because slavery, the nation’s fatal flaw, was awful enough to breed opponents of equal fury. The 1850s had proceeded chaotically. When the decade closed, if it was the end of some things, it prepared the way for other beginnings. In the years following the Civil War, Kansas continued to be a laboratory of social experimentation and political insurgency leading the *New York Times* in 1889 to declare the state “the great experimental garden of the nation.”

Possessing a reformists’ vision regarding what an ideal society should look like, John Ritchie, as many abolitionists, sought to purge Kansas and the nation not only of slavery but of other evils as equally great. Ritchie embraced the struggle to expand the American promise of equality to women. In 1867, State lawmakers submitted two suffrage amendments to the state constitution, one removing the word “negro” the other removing the word “male.” When Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton began stumping the state on behalf of woman’s suffrage, John Ritchie introduced them on a Topeka platform. The tone of the occasion was quickly set when a local daily reported while Ritchie’s message “thundered out,” it was met by “very audible snickers.” The voters turned both amendments back.

The suffragists, however, refused to remain silent. The following year, Mary Jane Ritchie called a meeting to organize the Topeka chapter of the Woman’s Suffrage Association at her home. The nascent association attracted little interest

Topeka Walking Tours

Did you know that the SCHS’s website has a walking tour resource guide? It is located under the Archives tab on our main page at www.shawneecountyhistory.org. We currently have historic tour information for:

- Historic North Topeka
- Downtown Topeka
- Holliday Park
- Topeka Cemetery
- St. Joseph’s Parish
- Urban Living in Topeka
- Home Styles in Topeka

These guides contain pictures, information, and are all printable for your convenience. You can even visit our website on your phone and bring up these guides while you are on the go.

SCHS Events

Aug 21 Board of Trustees Meeting-Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - meeting begins at 5:30 PM

Sep 18 Board of Trustees Meeting-Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - meeting begins at 5:30 PM

Oct 16 Board of Trustees Meeting-Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - meeting begins at 5:30 PM

Nov 20 Board of Trustees Meeting-Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - meeting begins at 5:30 PM

Nov 25 Christmas at the Ritchie's - Details to come!

Dec 3 SCHS Annual Membership Meeting - Cox Communications Heritage Education Center - Meeting begins at 2:00 PM - Light refreshments

For an updated list of upcoming SCHS Events visit our website at:

www.shawneecountyhistory.org
click the **Events** tab

with only six or seven persons attending yet it survived.

Change, however, was again about to be unleashed. In the half century which elapsed between the first state suffrage referendum in 1867 and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, a growing band of women began to apply their sense of duty of to society and in the name of social justice transformed women's clubs from their earlier devotion to charity, religion and domestic arts to focus on a broad-based political and economic equality and social reform. They disclaimed the old notion that women were the weaker sex crying out "when we get our rights we won't care whether the men are pleased or not."

In 1884, Kansans formed the State Equal Suffrage Association and in 1887 the ladies of Kansas won the right to vote and run for office in all city elections. They quickly made their presence at the polls felt when in 1889 Susannah Medora Salter won election as mayor of Argonia, Kansas. Within two years, five more Kansas cities elected female mayors and city councils.

Not being content with winning the municipal vote, Kansans concentrated on their final objective of unlimited suffrage. By 1905, The State Equal Suffrage Association boasted 894 members. Susan B. Anthony proclaimed Mrs. Lucia O. Case, Dr. Eva Harding, and Mrs. N. W. Lyon of Topeka her "Kansas Trinity." On November 5, 1912, Kansas voters approved the Equal Suffrage Amendment to the state constitution. Again, women quickly made their presence felt when in the election of 1916, some 250,000 women out of a total Kansas vote of 625,000 cast their ballots for the President of the United States, the majority of the female vote, including some 70,000 Republican women, going to Woodrow Wilson who had run for re-election on the promise to keep the nation out of the war in Europe. No amount of argument, the *New York Times* wrote, could shake Kansas women from their support of the peace candidate. Still, the fight for national women's suffrage went on. In August 1918, Topeka suffragette Effie Boutwell-Main became the only Kansas woman to earn the "Jailhouse Door Pin" after she and forty-six others were arrested and sentenced in Washington, D.C. for picketing in front of the U.S. Capital. In June 1920, less than two weeks after Congress proposed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote, Kansas lawmakers voted in favor of ratification. Two months later the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted.

As many abolitionists fighting to rid the nation of slavery, Ritchie came to see drink as an evil needing to be eradicated if America were to be fully cleansed of sin. In 1857, Ritchie lead a party of one hundred "prominent and respectable citizens on a raid on several Topeka establishments known for selling liquor, smashing kegs and bottles worth at least \$1,500. In an age when political campaigns depended on the art of the stump speech, Americans by the thousands turned out in city green spaces, auditoriums, and tents pitched in fields to hear loyalists ask

for their support. In 1879 Ritchie arrived at Bismark Grove in Lawrence to address the National Temperance Camp meeting in support of a proposed amendment to banish liquor from the state. Over the course of twelve days, some 100,000 turned out to hear the prohibition message, causing Kansas Governor John P. St. John to cry out “the eyes of the whole people are turned to Kansas.”

In 1880, Kansas lawmakers placed a prohibition amendment on the books, declaring in politics the issue to now be as “as dead as slavery.” Yet, while laws are passed at specific moments, their enforcement is rarely clean and precise. It was still said you could light in Topeka or virtually any other city in the state and in five minutes be sipping from a bottle of “White Mule” or “Exhaustion Cure” procured from a local druggist. The “joint business” in Topeka, as one newspaper proclaimed, like Alfred Lord Tennyson’s brook in the poem of the same name, “goes on forever.”

In winter of 1900-1901, convinced God was on her side, Carrie Nation led the Topeka Home Defenders through city streets in her crusade to rid the state of the evils of alcohol. On one such raid, Mrs. Nation egged on a mob of 500 with the cry “Come on, children; we must be doing God’s work.” Taking the lead was a contingent Washburn College football players, a school John Ritchie helped found, armed with a battering ram. Behind them marched the crowd wielding hatchets, clubs, brooms, and stones. They destroyed one joint, smashed six bar fixtures stored in a livery stable, and ransacked a cold storage house. On the heels of the raid, Topekans gathered in a mass meeting in which a crowd reported to be 3,000 issued the call that “the jointists must go – by peaceful means if possible; by force if necessary.” Within week, a reporter with the *Topeka Daily Capital*, making rounds of the joints, could find not one saloon open and liquor being sold nowhere with even the barroom fixtures removed to a place of safety. By spring, however, the bars were back in business operating with seeming impunity. It did little good to convict a joint keeper in the police court, the newly elected Topeka City Attorney lamented, “because the case always was appealed to the district court where it was generally dismissed.” Although Kansas lawmakers continued to stiffen the prohibition laws, it was not until 1917 that the legislature passed and Governor Arthur Capper signed into law the so-called “bone dry” law which criminalized not only the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors but its possession and use with the exception of communion wine.

. Where John Ritchie had raged against a reading of the Constitution which gave white men the right to hold blacks as chattel, a new breed of radical arose raging against the system of wage slavery in which what they viewed as a man’s most precious possession, his labor, was being exploited by those who saw the working class as fodder for their factors and ripe for the plunder. As the 1890s proceeded, Kansans such as Mary Lease and Dr. Eva Harding predicted the inevitable coming of a “great struggle between labor and capital in which blood will flow all over the country.”

In the town of Girard in southeastern Kansas, beginning in 1897 presses turned out the Socialist Party’s *Appeal to Reason* which at its peak had a circulation of some 760,000 readers and counted among its regular contributors Eugene Debs and Upton Sinclair. The following year the Socialist ticket first appeared on a Kansas gubernatorial ballot with the cry that “labor should own the tools which produce the wealth of the country”.

Topeka’s socialists railed against a system which saddled laboring men and women with long hours, dismal pay and exploitative working conditions. Where a Leavenworth newspaper once lauded John Ritchie as one “who dares to take the somewhat unpopular ground of an Extreme Radical,” during the early decades of the twentieth century, Ike Gilberg, a Jewish Tailor who had fled Russia in 1889 arriving in Topeka by 1907, now earned the label “the leader of Topeka radicalism.”

In the years following the Civil War, the trickle of freedmen seeking a refuge in Kansas, turned into a flood with

those fleeing an increasingly hostile south with Reconstruction's end and the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877. This was Kansas which had been freed through "suffering and blood." The land where John Brown had taken a dreadful revenge on those who would keep a man shackled in irons because of his race. For a people who had their fill of living in fear of night riders, a popular song of the day promised in Kansas, "De Shot Gun Rules No Mo'E." This land, the prophets and speculators told them, was theirs.

And in many ways Topeka kept that promise of a better life. A solid, generally conservative black middle class quickly emerged. In "the Bottoms," the city's oldest black neighborhood just northeast of the Topeka's business district along Kansas Avenue, black-owned businesses sprang up while African Ameri-

"This is Kansas" where "the liberty loving spirit of John Brown still lives" a Topeka newspaper cried out, where "no person will ever be returned to plantation owners and blood hounds . . . to pay debts and remain in bondage."

can doctors hung shingles outside their office doors. A black-owned newspaper kept track of it all. Rather than find themselves bottled up in one neighborhood, blacks scattered across the city's landscape, the majority settling in enclaves dotting the landscape with colorful place names like Tennessee Town and Mud Town. Just south of Topeka proper, migrating blacks found a home on John Ritchie's land. Frye Giles, one of Topeka's founders, recalled in his history of the city, so many of the settlers on Ritchie's land "were of the colored race," that "it militated against the sale of lots to white people."

Watching over their community was a cadre of African American lawyers who knew only too well that freedom depended on law. Some came to Topeka with degrees earned from far away institutions. Others were homegrown, receiving their legal training at Topeka's Washburn College, built in 1865 on land donated by John Ritchie and with stone taken from his quarry.

These attorneys believed that the law was not set in stone but could and should be used for social justice when others avenues were blocked. They fought to keep the city's green spaces open to all and shot down attempts at restrictive housing covenants designed to keep blacks from moving wherever they wanted. They took up the cause of African American mothers who, at a time when more Americans swam than regularly attended picture shows, could not really explain to their children why they could not use the municipal swimming pool on a sweltering hot Kansas day.

Where John Ritchie had used his wiles and property to ferret fugitive slaves to freedom, Topeka black attorneys, made the city a safe haven for those fleeing the Jim Crow laws in the states of the old Confederacy. In 1919, they fought to keep the hands of Arkansas' Attorney General off of black union leader Robert Hill. It was Hill who authorities blamed when violence broke out after sharecroppers, having had a bellyful of receiving five cents on a dollar for their crops, banded together to lay out a plan to either use the law to force the landowners to pay a fair rate or that failing, call a boycott. Nobody knows who fired the first shot but outside a small church just north of the city of Elaine where the union members had gathered to meet, a Phillips County sheriff lay dead, White residents snatched up weapons, the wild armed pursuits through the fields and woods around Elaine leaving five whites and twenty-five blacks dead although several of the vengeful whites claimed the total number of lives they took numbered in the hundreds.

Hill was nowhere near Elaine during the fighting. As lawmen and others attempted to hunt him down though, he fled to Kansas. With Arkansas juries often deliberating no more than eight minutes before handing down sentences of death to those they had rounded up, Topeka's black attorneys rallied, announcing they were "fully prepared to resist" any attempt by Arkansas to remove Hill from Kansas soil. They made their plea to Kansas Governor Henry J. Allen arguing that Hill would never receive a fair trial, if he, in fact, lived long enough to even see the inside of a courtroom. It did not take long for Allen, confronted with a "flood of anonymous filthy letters" coming out of Arkansas saying the hangman should not be cheated, to agree and announce he would not turn Hill over to the state authorities.

Then there was the time a Deputy Sheriff from Louisiana, wearing a "large umbrella sombrero with two large navies buckled on him," arrived in Topeka to claim a local man on a charge of kidnapping. The accused, in fact, stood guilty of nothing more than bringing home his two half-brothers who were indebted to a plantation owner one hundred and forty dollars. The local attorneys "fired their trench guns into the case" and went to Governor Ben Paulen who they convinced to stand firm. "This is Kansas" where "the liberty loving spirit of John Brown still lives" a Topeka newspaper cried out, where "no person will ever be returned to plantation owners and blood hounds . . . to pay debts and remain in bondage."

A little more than ninety years after Kansas entered the Union as a free state, nine judges sitting in the nation's highest court, handed down a ruling in another hard fought battle in Kansas over the right to enjoy a full and free life. Just as the Underground Railroad existed as an act of defiance against the law of the land which doomed one man to be held as slave by another, the U. S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education, City of Topeka* dashed against the rocks a reading of the U.S. Constitution that assigned generations of African Americans to an inferior class of citizenship. That decision severed the past from the future like a knife and history cracked open again. On May 17, when Chief Justice Earl Warren read the opinion of a unanimous court, uttering the words "we conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. With those words, the promise offered up by John Ritchie to a people seeking a better life took yet another step closer to a vision of the state and the nation as a fairer and just place.

News to Use

If you're not receiving our bi-monthly email news-letter **SCHS News to Use**, please send your name, address, and email to tosch-supdate@gmail.com. It's our primary method of keeping you up to date on coming events and activities. If you're not sure that we have your current email, send the requested information and we'll check.

200TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FOR JOHN RITCHIE

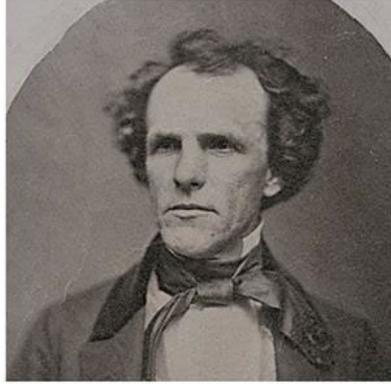
Monday, July 17th was the 200th Birthday of John Ritchie. He has been a beacon of freedom in Topeka and throughout the country. In honor of John Ritchie, the SCHS hosted a birthday party for Ritchie on the site of the Historic Ritchie House on Sunday, July 16. The Westar Bluegrass Players performed on a bandstand, provided by event co-sponsors Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Department, and Topeka Mayor Larry Wolgast honored the day with a reading of his proclamation making July 16, 2017 John Ritchie Day. The proclamation can be viewed on our website at www.shawneecountyhistory.org/copy-2-of-additional. Later in the day the Santa Fe Band provided patriotic themed music event goers.

There were also area crafters demonstrating candle making, woodworking, ceramics, and more. Attendees were able to get a first-hand look at how to work with and make things from simple everyday items.

Five lucky attendees received a complimentary membership to the SCHS. And of course, no birthday party would be complete without a cake and ice-cream. G's Ice-cream shop in Topeka provided the delicious treat.

Everyone also got a chance to meet John Ritchie himself, as interpreted by our own SCHS President, George Bernheimer. He was joined by John Brown (Kerry Altenbernd) and Jim Lane (Tim Rues). The three gentlemen interacted with visitors and gave their views about the struggle to make Kansas a Free State.

Site visitors were invited into the Ritchie home where they



Historical Interpreters George Bernheimer, Tim Rues, and Kerry Altenbernd portraying John Ritchie, James Lane, and John Brown at the Shawnee County Historical Society John Ritchie 200th Birthday Anniversary celebration.

SCHS Memberships make great gifts for friends or family!



Our thanks to those of you that came out to Topeka Gives 2017 and supported your Shawnee County Historical Society and other community non-profits. The SCHS received \$2054 in contributions and match funds.



SCHS made \$55.08 between April and June 2017. One of the best ways you can help support the SCHS is to sign up for community rewards. It does not cost you anything and Kroger (Dillons) will donate a percentage of your spending to the groups and organizations you choose. You can learn more at:

[www.kroger.com/
account/
enrollCommunityRewardsNow](http://www.kroger.com/account/enrollCommunityRewardsNow)

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership is from January-December, annually

MEMBERSHIP FORM (Please print)

Yes! I wish to join the Society that preserves the past and celebrates our heritage.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____ Email _____
 Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____
 Check type of membership: _____ Regular (\$35.00) _____ Patron (\$50.00)
 _____ Renovator (\$100.00) _____
 Heritage Education Sustainer (\$150.00 +)

GIFT MEMBERSHIP (Please print)

_____ \$ Gift Membership for someone I know who will benefit from membership.

(Photocopy this form for more than one. Use rates listed above.)

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____ Email _____

VOLUNTEER for a COMMITTEE

Nominations Membership Publications
 Annual Meeting/Socials Preservation Public Relations
 Landmark Preservation Committee Education/Communications
 Name _____

(Make checks to "Shawnee County Historical Society")

Please send form(s) with your check to:

Shawnee County Historical Society, P.O. Box 2201, Topeka, KS 66601-2201

SCHS Membership Renewals for 2017

Current members thru 7/15/ 2017

Sustainer:

Donald A. Chubb
 Jerry Estes
 Mildred Francis
 Carolyn Huebner
 David Laird
 Douglas J. Mauck
 Tom McClure
 Walter Menninger
 Jerry Powers
 Olive Stanford
 Charles T. Crawford
 John H. Gilbert MD

David J. Heinemann
 Patricia Michaelis
 Ann C. Strecker
 Glenn and Claire Swogger
 Warren E. Taylor
 Mary B. Voigt
 William O. Wagnon
 Cynthia Wahle
 Martin E. Wanamaker
 June Windscheffel
 Sustainer:
 Hon. Robert J. Dole

Tom Ellis

Renovator:

Tuck Duncan
 Stu and Elinor Entz
 Dick and Dottie Hanger
 C. Heeb, MD
 Margie Hogue
 Jim and Kathy Maag
 Parrish Management Corp.
 John Pinegar
 Jim and Linda Slattery
 John Stauffer

Elizabeth Taylor
Nancy Kassebaum Baker
George and Diane Bernheimer
Jon Boursaw
Rachel and Duane Goossen
Doug and Dorothy Iliff
Martin Jones
Ross Jory
Charles (Mike) Lenen
Patricia Michaelis
Ramon and Eva Powers
Donald C. Rutherford
Bryan Taggart
Ann Strecker

Patron:

Charles and Linda Bowers
Jeff Carson
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Lona Morse
Ramon and Eva Powers
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Chris Schultz
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Laura P. Bettis
Betty Bomar
Tim and Margaret Carkhuff
Jeffrey S. Carson
Civil War Roundtable of Eastern Kansas
Sheldon Cohen
Virginia M. Correa
Bill Cutler
Richard Friedstrom
Patricia E. Decker
L. A. and Lois Dimmitt
Clark Duffy
Hon. Karen Hiller
Walter Hillmer
Paul and Jeanne Hoferer
Timothy Hrenchir
Jim Lagerberg
Jan W. Leuenberger

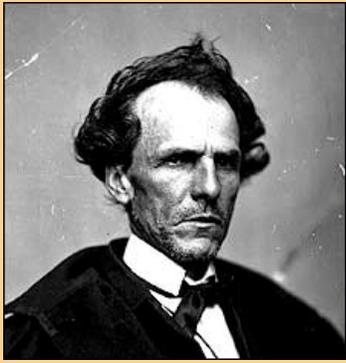
Melissa Masoner
James A. McHenry, Jr.
Richard Meidinger
Tom Muth
Austin and Marianna Nothern
Alicia and John Salisbury
Ralph E. Skoog
Dale and Judyanne Somers
Renee Stevens
Herschel and Jacque Stroud
Lawrence Tenopir
Hon. Larry and Anita Wolgast
Doug Wright

Regular:

Patricia Bonine
Chris Bowers
Dan and Helen Crow
Douglas Dunton
Julie Emerson
Kathryn Fernkopf
Eadie Flickinger
Virginia Kay Foster
Dr. Marilyn Fritzier
Brian Hall
Mike Hall
Richard Jones
Patricia Kane
Susan Kendall
Robert Lehnart
Bill McFarland
Terry Kieth Manies
Andrew McHenry
Eric McHenry
Mark McHenry
Bryce McHenry
Barbara Patterson
Luci Reamer
Robert W. Richmond
Grant and Jennifer Sourk
Sheldon Wheaton
Melinda I. Abitz
Betty Alderson
Gregory Allen
Grace Hiebert Beam
Terry E. Beck

Bryce Benedict
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Karen Martin Craig
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Doug and Carol Cook
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Kurt Daniels
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Robert L. Derstein
Downtown Topeka, Inc.
Shirley Driscoll
Ethel Edwards
Jerry and Barbara Estes
Betty Frantz
Tom and Linda Garrett
Edna Greene
Leon Graves
Anne Greitl
Mary A. Hall
Johnathan Hart
Anne and Ted Heim
Thomas and Cinda Henderson
Regular Cont.

Terry Hobbs
Linda Jeffrey
Sandra Kassebaum
Sally Kahle
Robert E. Keeshan
Ken Kerle
Bob and Margaret Knecht
Alice K. Landers
Carolyn Litwin
Patrick Macfee
Roy and Judy Marks
Linda McHenry
Jacque McKibbin
Jeanne Christie Mithen
Ritchie A. Patterson
Jim and Nancy Parrish
Norma Pettijohn
Duane and Deborah Pomeroy
Paul Post
Elliott Potter



James (Jim) Henry Lane

James H. Lane "The Grim Chieftain," who finished out his Kansas political career as a U. S. senator, was born in Indiana in 1814. After studying law in his father's office, Lane was admitted to the bar in 1840, practiced law, and served with the Indiana Volunteers during the Mexican War.

Lane joined free-state forces and quickly became one of the most recognized Free State Party leaders. He was often crude and could be ruthless, but Lane believed in the idea of a free Kansas.

Lane served as president of the Topeka and Leavenworth constitutional conventions and was elected as one of the first Kansas senators. He also raised the "Frontier Guard," recruited and commanded "Lane's Brigade" (actually, the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Kansas Volunteers). Lane was responsible for forming the First Kansas Colored Volunteers, the first regiment of African American troops to see action on the side of the Union during the Civil War.

Lane shot and killed a neighbor in 1858 over a boundary dispute.

Robert H. Reeder
Frank and Judith Sabatini
Georgia Sandlin
Joe and Nancy Sargent
Marsha Sheahan
Robert Rusty Steinmeyer

Wanda Stevens
Michael Stubbs
Richard Taylor
Topeka Genealogical Society
Joan Wagnon
Douglas Wallace

Watson Library, University
of Kansas
Rosemary Williamson
Jack Wisman
Carol Yoho

Lane's Trail and the Underground Railway

By Morris W. Werner

In the wintry twilight of a January day in 1859, a small caravan of wagons occupied by 30 or 40 escaped slaves approached the log cabin dwelling of Charles Smith in the southwest corner of Brown County. Several outriders escorted the party, whose leader was the notorious abolitionist, John Brown. This was Brown's last adventure in "Bleeding Kansas." A few months later he was captured and executed in an ill-conceived slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry, Virginia: martyred in the cause of emancipation. Sear fields and bare tree branches bracketed the lonely cabin in stark relief, but hot food and shelter from the elements was a welcome prospect for the exhausted little band on their long journey to freedom in Canada on the Underground Railway.

The Underground was necessarily clandestine and occult in Kansas Territory. Slaves were chattels, and those aiding in their escape could be prosecuted for receiving and concealing stolen property. Earlier on this particular day, an armed posse barred their passage at Dr. Albert Fuller's cabin at the crossing of Straight Creek two miles south of present Neta-waka, where they had spent the previous night. When no move was made to arrest them, Brown loaded the slaves into wagons and boldly splashed through the ford and up the north bank to find that the posse had fled without firing a shot. By one account, Brown had stolen the slaves, wagons, and draft animals, and it was their owners who barred the road. Retreat was the better part of valor, however. No one doubted Mad John Brown's resolve to shoot it out if challenged. This incident has since been derisively dubbed "The Battle of the Spurs."

Smiths and Fullers were two of the armed stations established in 1856 by James H. Lane. His purpose was to provide protection for free-state settlers when Missouri River ports of entry into Kansas were blockaded by pro-slavery mobs. Lane called for a free state army to assemble in Iowa, cross the Missouri River into Nebraska, and enter Kansas near the mouth of Pony Creek in Brown County. Three hundred armed men under James Redpath and an additional thirty men led by Preston B. Plumb responded to the challenge. They met and established a settlement which they named Plymouth in the southeast corner of S15 T1S R15E. Plymouth became a post office in 1858 with Morgan Willett as postmaster. Another station named Lexington was planted two or three miles southeast of Sabetha. E. P. Harris is identified as the proprietor. He abandoned his claim in 1863 at the time of the Quantrill raid on Lawrence. At this point, the trail passed due south, paralleling the west boundary of Brown County to Smith's Station and thence to Fullers. A settlement was made in Calhoun County at present Holton, later to become the county seat of Jackson County. The southern terminus of the trail was Rochester, a hamlet on the Ft. Leavenworth and Ft. Riley Military Road north of Topeka.

Lane's Trail saw little or no immigrant traffic after 1856. Lane erected stone cairns on hilltops to serve as guideposts, but it was not sufficiently marked to be recorded by the

Territorial Surveys of 1857-60. This isolation made it an ideal route for the Underground, and the existence of free-state settlers along the trail guaranteed their safety.

In 1857 a colony of a dozen or more families, related by blood and affinity, from Painted Post and Castle Creek, New York, settled at the head of Pony Creek, naming their town Albany in honor of the capital of their native state. Albany was two miles north of present Sabetha on the east edge of Nemaha County. Among these pioneers were the families of William and Samuel Slosson, John and William Graham, Noble H. Rising, John Tyler, George Lyons, Edwin Miller and Elihu Whittenhall. These men were destined to exert considerable influence on the civil, military, and economic affairs of the two counties in the next quarter century. Educated, cultured, and possessed of sound business acumen, they were whole-hearted supporters of Free State principles.

The Slossons and Grahams quickly realized the potential of the Lane Trail, and were instrumental in organizing a branch of the Underground Railway known as League No. 40. Many slaves escaped to freedom in the next five years, but no written records exist of names or numbers. Some slaves reaching Albany in 1862 were provided homes and employment in the area. Among these were five Holden siblings, their mother, and two Russell siblings: Daniel and Lena. Fanny Whittenhall, wife of W. G. Sargent, taught Jane Holden to read and write and maintained an extended correspondence with her friend long after Jane married a man named Scott and moved away from Albany. Charles Holden married Lena Russell; Cora Holden married Thomas Frame, and another sister married ex-slave John Master-son. One of the Holden brothers served in the Union Army and was killed in action. His mother eventually received \$1800 in back pay and pension. Although most of the freedmen moved elsewhere after the War, E. J. Holden owned a 10 acre tract on the east edge of Albany some 50 years later according to the 1912 Atlas of Nemaha County. John Brown spent his last night in Kansas in the Elihu Whittenhall cabin, which he shared with family members and the only cabinet grand piano in Kansas Territory. The following day William Graham escorted Brown's party to the Missouri River in Nebraska Territory.

Also in 1857, a post office named Powhattan was established on the stage coach route from St. Joseph to Salt Lake City, which has been identified with the Underground Railway. This village was located in the extreme southwest corner of Brown County in the NW1/4 S32 T4S R15E. It should not be confused with the town of the same name south of Hiawatha. Modern Powhattan did not exist until the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railroad built through Brown County in the 1880s. Only a pioneer cemetery marks the site of Old Powhattan on the Wetmore quadrangle of the U. S. Geological Survey. Escaped slaves sheltered at Old Powhattan perhaps reached Albany on a trail west of Gregg Creek through Pleasant Spring (Granada) and Capioma. This was a well traveled road as far as Capioma, but after Kansas was admitted as a free state in 1861, the need for secrecy diminished.

By the time the St. Joseph and Grand Island Railroad by-passed Albany in favor of Sabetha in 1870, Albany had faded away. Today only a two story frame house built of native black walnut, and a pioneer cemetery remain from the original settlement. Edwin Miller physically removed his hotel to Sabetha. John Tyler settled on Cedar Creek two miles southwest of Fairview at a crossing which may have been used by emigrant parties as early as 1844. It is logical to assume that it was used by Gen. Lane in 1856, since it aligns north and south with Lexington and Smith's Station at the Gregg Creek crossing. The Tyler family cemetery is a mute testament to the contributions of this pioneer family. Noble H. Rising built the Granada Hotel at Pleasant Spring in 1858, and was a partner with George Lyons in a store at Sabetha in 1859. The following year he built Log Chain Station for the Pony Express on a branch of Muddy (Locknane) Creek.

John Graham, William Miller, and Robert Hale of Albany were killed at the Battle of Chickamagua in 1863 while serving in the 8th KS Vol. Inf. The 8th sustained more than 50% casualties in the fighting. Arthur W. Williams, who founded Sabetha on his farm in 1859, was captain of Company D. He moved to Seneca after the War, where he died in 1886. Graham County, Kansas, is named for John Graham.

After the War some effort was directed to resettle freed slaves in Kansas. The Freedman's Bureau was instrumental in this activity, but "Exodusters" made little impact on the state as a whole. Understandably, many ex-slaves were reluctant to leave their Southern roots for the gift of 40 acres of unimproved land in a harsh climate and little access to capital. Nicodemus in Graham County, Kansas, is a notable exception. This colony achieved a measure of success through hard work and cooperative effort. In many respects, Nicodemus represents the culmination of what the Free State movement in Kansas was all about.

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The SCHS would like to thank all of our volunteers and staff that help us maintain our commitment and involvement in Shawnee County and other local communities. We could not make this happen without you!

There are many ways in which you can help the Shawnee County Historical Society preserve the past for the future. Become a member! Volunteer some time! Or make a donation. Also remember the SCHS in your estate planning.

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