NICODEMUS ON THE GREAT PLAINS: ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF NICODEMUS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE KANSAS

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NICODEMUS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
KANSAS
Administrative History

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2023

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Introduction

Nicodemus is a community that invites loyalty and devotion. It is embedded in the memories of those whose roots are there, drawing back to it those who migrated away. Located in a remote part of the high plains of west central Kansas, the town was created just a dozen years after the Civil War by African Americans born into slavery in Kentucky. Now the oldest and only surviving post-Civil War Black settlement west of the Mississippi River, it is the remnant of a community that enjoyed a brief period of optimism and relative prosperity in the 1880s before being bypassed by the railroads, those lifelines of trade, capital, and new populations that could make or break communities in nineteenth-century America. By the 1890s, Nicodemus had entered a long twilight period that lasted throughout much of the twentieth century. Those who remained were buoyed by the memories of hope that brought their parents and grandparents to that place on the prairie while seeing their children and grandchildren leave for new and better opportunities elsewhere. Migration has been a defining fact of this part of the Great Plains, stretching back millennia, with nomadic tribes passing through and creating only temporary settlements in a changeless pattern over countless generations, homesteaders and town builders coming and going as hope waxed and waned, and the descendants of the town's original settlers leaving and returning in an annual cycle over the past century. The harsh and unforgiving landscape may push people away, but memories of optimism and the opportunity to start life anew, free of fear of violence and oppression, and a deep awareness of the suffering and struggle involved in keeping that hope alive, draws them back.

A tiny spot on the map in a vast agricultural land where stoplights are few, Nicodemus could well have become yet another Western ghost town like several other communities settled by African Americans in the late nineteenth century. Nicodemus was one of the first in what would become a significant migration of formerly enslaved persons from states in the former Confederacy and from border states where slavery was legal, including Kentucky, who escaped the increasing scale of racist tyranny in search of land and opportunity in Kansas and elsewhere on the Great Plains. Only Nicodemus has survived, partly due to the attachment to the land of those who remain and the annual pilgrimage for the summertime Homecoming festival, a commemoration of, and a thanksgiving for, emancipation from slavery. This combination of an annual homecoming and relatives to come home to helped to keep the memory of Nicodemus alive in those who had left throughout the years of decline, as stories of the struggles of their ancestors who journeyed to this new land in the 1870s and 1880s gave the place an importance that went beyond the few buildings that remain.

Sadly, few people stayed in Nicodemus as outmigration for greater economic opportunities took its toll, leaving the town with a small and, primarily, elderly population in the decades after World War II. Despite this decline in fortunes, when the few families still living in Nicodemus only rarely had the funds to maintain the town's remaining buildings, devotion to the idea of Nicodemus sustained it, keeping it alive as an idea and as a place to which descendants could return. The town gained new attention in the 1960s and 1970s when growing awareness of the importance of overlooked peoples and processes in American history emerged among

historians and others interested in America's past. Along with histories of women, immigrants, and the dispossessed, historians began looking with fresh eyes at the rich history of African

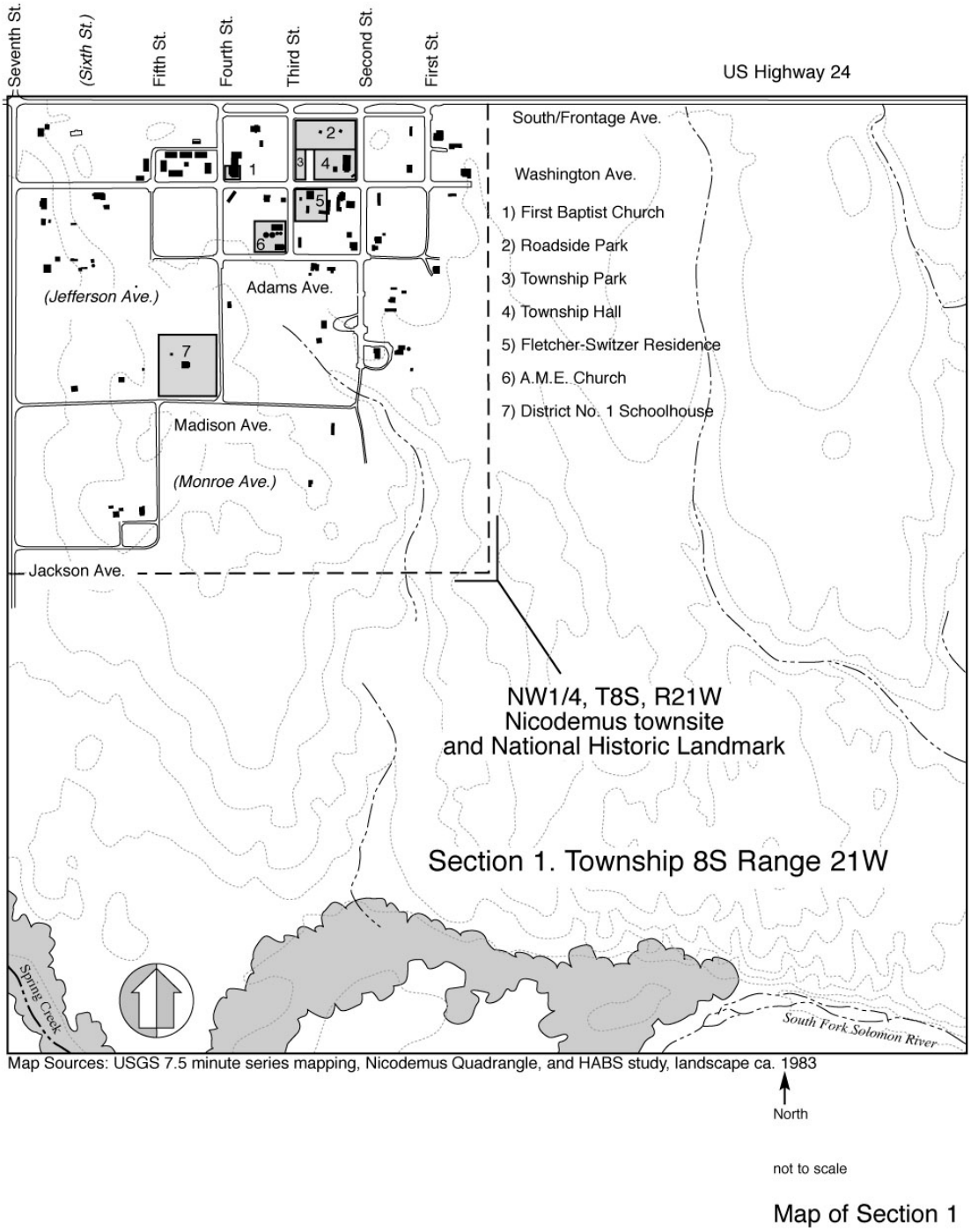

Figure 1. Map showing the 161-acre Nicodemus Township.

American experiences in a variety of settings other than as slaves in the antebellum South. Amid a general interest in and enthusiasm for American history leading up to the 1976 Bicentennial celebration, Nicodemus began drawing the attention of those interested in the history of African

American migrations out of the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation was organized in the early 1970s to promote an understanding of the significance of sites associated with the history of African Americans and initiated a three-year study of this topic in close coordination with the National Park Service. One result of this study was the preparation of a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Nicodemus Historic District in late 1974. The National Park Service (NPS) approved its listing in the National Register in 1975, and, in 1976, the township of Nicodemus, consisting of 161.6 acres, was further designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) (Figure 1).[1]

Once Nicodemus was designated a National Historic Landmark, NPS was able to take a more active role in the town's preservation. Alarmed by the continuing loss of historic buildings in Nicodemus, the NPS Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Denver, Colorado, organized a documentation program in the early 1980s through the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), which issued a book on the history of Nicodemus in 1986. At the same time, current and former residents of Nicodemus began planning for the collection and preservation of historic documents and artifacts related to town history. In 1989, Angela Bates, a descendant of Nicodemus' early settlers whose parents and grandparents had migrated to California, returned to Nicodemus and incorporated the Nicodemus Historical Society. In the early 1990s, Bates led efforts to have the town authorized as a unit of the National Park System, which was accomplished in November 1996, when President William J. Clinton signed Public Law 104-333, creating the Nicodemus National Historic Site (NHS).

The legislation defined the new park as consisting of five buildings: First Baptist Church, St. Francis Hotel, Nicodemus School District No. 1, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and Township Hall (Figure 2). When the park was established, none of these buildings were owned by the federal government, though the legislation allowed NPS to acquire them by donation or purchase from willing sellers only. The National Park Service has subsequently acquired one building, the former African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The Town of Nicodemus owns one of the five, Township Hall, built in 1939 with funds from the Works Progress Administration, which it leases to NPS for use as a temporary visitor center. The other three buildings—the First Baptist Church, the St. Francis Hotel, and School District No. 1—remain in private hands. Despite the vital involvement of the federal government to assist in protecting and preserving the town, the town's remaining residents who, with their direct ancestors, had sustained the community for generations, have remained cautious. Delays in organizing and staffing the site, the park's administrative arrangement involving reporting to a succession of other park superintendents, difficulties in retaining staff due to the park's remote location, and a recurring reduction of involvement by the National Park Service Regional Office over the years exacerbated suspicion of federal involvement on the part of a substantial portion of the town's few remaining residents. As a result, NPS has had difficulty securing the permissions or legal interests in the three privately-owned properties that are necessary to assist in maintaining them. At the same time, limited staff over the years has led NPS to rely on local

[1] In keeping with the distinction that informed the park's Historic Resources Study in 2011, the use of "Nicodemus" without any other specification refers to the small village center where the five buildings that constitute the park are located. References to the larger township, consisting of 161 acres, will use either Nicodemus Township or township. Don Burden et al., *Historic Resources Study: Nicodemus National Historic Site* (prepared for Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior), approved July 14, 2011, page xi.

residents, through the aegis of the Nicodemus Historical Society, to assist in providing interpretive services. By legislative intent, as established as policy by approval of the General

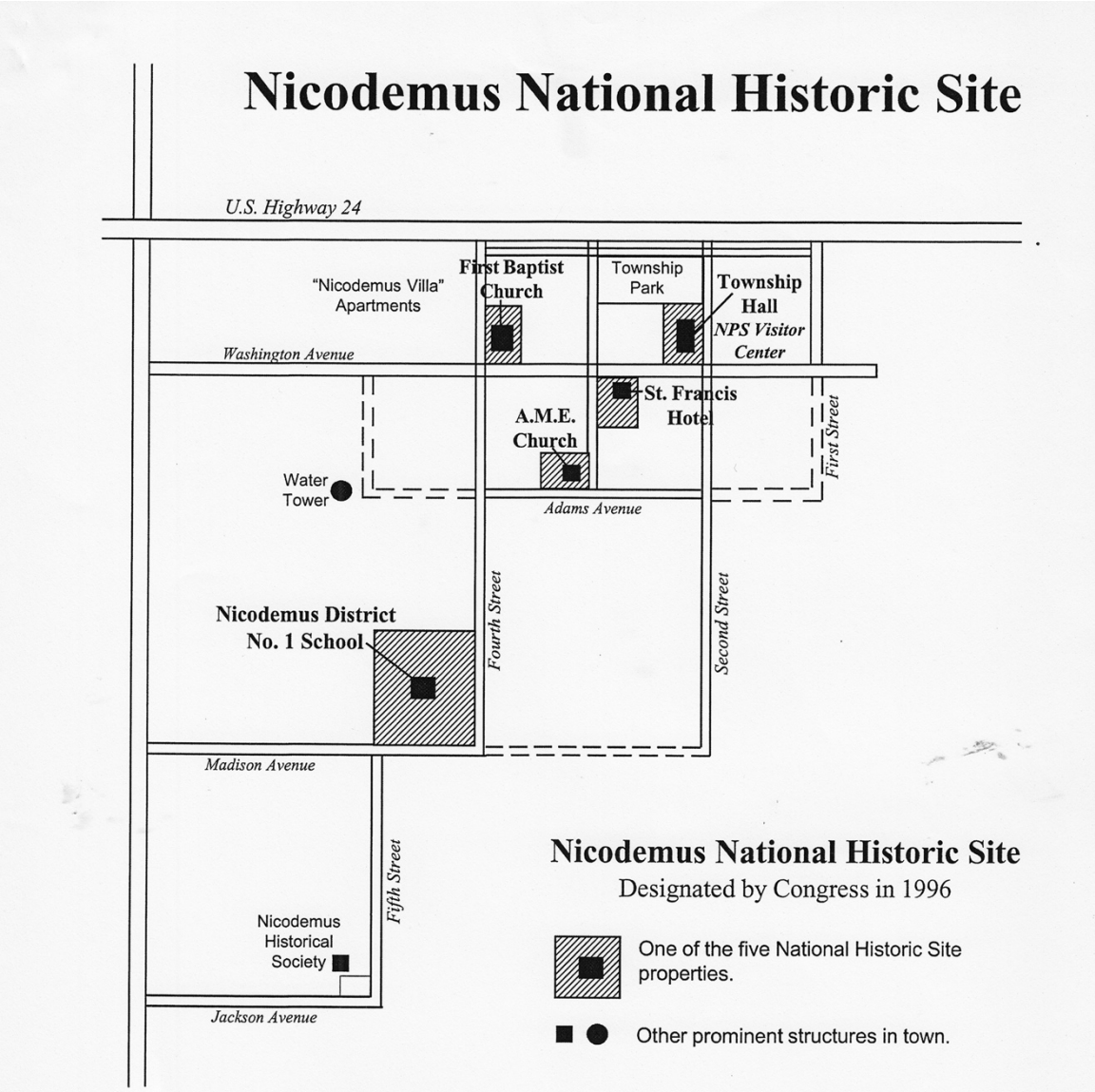

Figure 2. Map of Nicodemus showing the five buildings that constitute the park.

Management Plan and as put into practice through force of circumstance, the NPS in Nicodemus must work in close relations with the surrounding community.

This complicated relationship between NPS and the Nicodemus residents, most of whom are descendants of the original settlers, is distinctive, if not unique, within the National Park System and is one of the vital components in understanding the development of Nicodemus National Historic Site during its first quarter century of operation. Another important factor in the site's development has been its status as a mentored park. When it was established in late 1996, Nicodemus National Historic Site (NHS) was administered by Fort Larned NHS, Kansas, which is located approximately two hours' driving time from Nicodemus. The first two Nicodemus NHS superintendents, from 2001 to 2008, reported to the superintendent at Fort

Larned. The succeeding superintendent, from 2008 to 2012, was supported administratively from Homestead National Monument of America (now Homestead National Historical Park) while reporting directly to the Midwest Regional Director. However, in 2013, responsibility for the park's administration was delegated to the superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education NHS, Kansas, approximately four hours' driving time from Nicodemus. The Chief of Interpretation of Brown v. Board of Education then served a dual role as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS from 2017 to 2020, while the park's interpretive program was handled by the Nicodemus Historical Society under a cooperative agreement. In the fall of 2020, a new superintendent was appointed for Nicodemus, initially reporting to the Brown v. Board of Education Superintendent. In late 2021, however, with the retirement of the Brown v. Board of Education Superintendent and other personnel shifts in the Midwest Region, responsibility for the Nicodemus Superintendent was transferred back to Fort Larned. In addition to making administrative continuity more difficult, these administrative migrations have done little to allay concerns among Nicodemus residents regarding the role of the federal government, its relationship to the community, and its commitment to the Nicodemus National Historic Site.

The legislation that authorized Nicodemus National Historic Site identified two purposes: to preserve, protect, and interpret the remaining buildings and landscape that represent the history of Nicodemus, and to interpret the role of Nicodemus and its settlers in the context of African Americans' westward migration in the decades following the end of Reconstruction. To meet the first of these, NPS has acquired the former AME Church, completing a comprehensive restoration in 2021, has collaborated with the Town of Nicodemus through a lease to stabilize and maintain the Township Hall, and has attempted to coordinate with the private owners of the other three buildings to provide basic stabilization assistance. These attempts to coordinate with private owners have met with varying and limited success over the years, with the result that these three buildings face substantial physical challenges. To meet the second of these purposes, NPS operates a temporary visitor center in Township Hall, with interpretive exhibits, an introductory video, and a small staff of interpreters, and has erected wayside exhibits at the five buildings that constitute the park.

The purpose of this Administrative History of the Nicodemus National Historic Site is to explore how the National Park Service has developed and interpreted what remains of Nicodemus. The challenges involved in carrying out this mission comprise a substantial portion of this story, as park staff have encountered numerous difficulties in their relations with the surrounding community and with regional and national NPS staff and as a result of the park's remote location on the high plains of western Kansas. Despite these challenges, park staff, both those based at Nicodemus and those at the various other parks to which the staff have reported, have, during the past quarter century, established a vital presence to tell the nationally significant story of the westward migration of African Americans from the South in the late nineteenth century. This study, using a combination of archival research and oral history interviews, explores the origin, establishment, and development of this unit of the National Park System. The principal sources for this study are the park's administrative files which are now located primarily at the Independence Multi-Park Facility, Missouri, with additional files at Nicodemus NHS. An important component of the present study are oral history interviews with individuals who are knowledgeable about the park's history and operations, including previous and current park and regional office staff, volunteers, members of the community, and professionals who

have collaborated with the park in various ways. These oral history interviews, which were transcribed and transferred to the park, provide information that may not be recorded in the park's documents as well as invaluable insights into the basis for many decisions and actions. In addition, local and regional newspapers proved useful to help fill gaps in the documentary record.

This study was produced by Outside The Box, LLC (OTB) under contract with the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service. Bruce G. Harvey, Ph.D. served as the Principal Investigator and primary author of the study. Deborah Harvey, MHP served as the Project Historian, conducting the oral history interviews and editing the entire document. The contract for this project was awarded in May 2020 for an intended two-year period. Unfortunately, restrictions put in place to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a delay in the process, because Brown v. Board of Education NHS, the original location of the park's administrative files, was unavailable for research access until the spring of 2021. In addition, OTB was obliged to conduct nearly half of the oral history interviews remotely, either by telephone or video conferencing, with the approval of the Midwest Regional Office. Research resumed in June 2021 with the support of park staff, requiring that the contract be extended by one year.

Regional Historian Ron Cockrell guided this project, as he has so many other administrative histories produced by OTB and others, with consummate skill, sharing specific knowledge and insights about the park and regional office history and his experience in the preparation of these types of documents. In addition, Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams, who also served as the first permanent Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS, supported the project with her typical enthusiasm, kindness, and generosity. We are grateful to her, and to all who shared their time and recollections with us. This project would not have been possible without them.

Chapter 1: Historic Background

From prehistoric times until the present, two factors have been ever present for the area surrounding Nicodemus: isolation and migration. Unlike the eastern parts of the state, where more dense vegetation and readily available water spurred the emergence of settlements between three and four thousand years ago, the high plains, for thousands of years after humans first arrived, attracted only visiting nomadic bands that created temporary camps before moving to other areas. Within the past two thousand years, the Missouri River valley to the north and east saw the growth of bustling American Indian villages that attracted traders from across the continent, both American Indians and, later, Euro Americans. Western Kansas, however, remained sparsely populated, in more recent centuries serving as remote hunting grounds for Missouri River tribes as well as home territory to nomadic groups of Apache and other Plains Indians. Beginning with the brief expedition led by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado in 1541, Europeans, primarily French and Spanish, began passing through what is now Kansas in search of riches. Finding little beyond rapidly disappearing jackrabbit furs, few Euro Americans through the eighteenth century stayed, leaving Kansas in the hands of its original inhabitants. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the new American government instituted a policy of forced migration, requiring American Indians in the eastern states to relocate to Kansas to make way for increased settlement by newcomers from more crowded areas. When Congress created the Territory of Kansas in 1854, many of these American Indian groups were forced to relocate again to what is now Oklahoma. None of these new groups established long-term settlements in the high plains of western Kansas.

Following the creation of the Kansas and Nebraska Territories in 1854, thousands more Americans migrated to Kansas, first to ensure, through any means necessary, that Kansas became a state without slavery, then as a haven for those fleeing slavery and its aftermath in the South. The decades after the Civil War through the early twentieth century saw a new influx of migrants to Kansas, both white and African American, drawn by the promise of free land in the Homestead Act of 1862 and its successors or by the sales pitches of town builders. Particularly in western Kansas, such as in the Town of Nicodemus, some settlers stayed, but others, put off by the hardships of trying to create a farm in the isolation of the prairie, returned east. For Nicodemus through much of the twentieth century, migration has been primarily outward, as opportunities for earning a living or experiencing the wider world were limited. Even for those who went elsewhere, however, and for their children and grandchildren, Nicodemus continued to be a draw, at least on an annual basis, to attend the Homecoming celebration every summer as families returned to the homes that their ancestors settled to join in an act of communal memory.

Prehistoric Overview and Early European Exploration

Nicodemus is located in the high plains of western Kansas, almost exactly halfway between Denver, Colorado, and Kansas City, Missouri, in the midst of the Great Plains near the center of the continental United States (Figure 3). In casual conversation, it is easy to make a direct association between the Great Plains, grassland, and the prairie as a single,

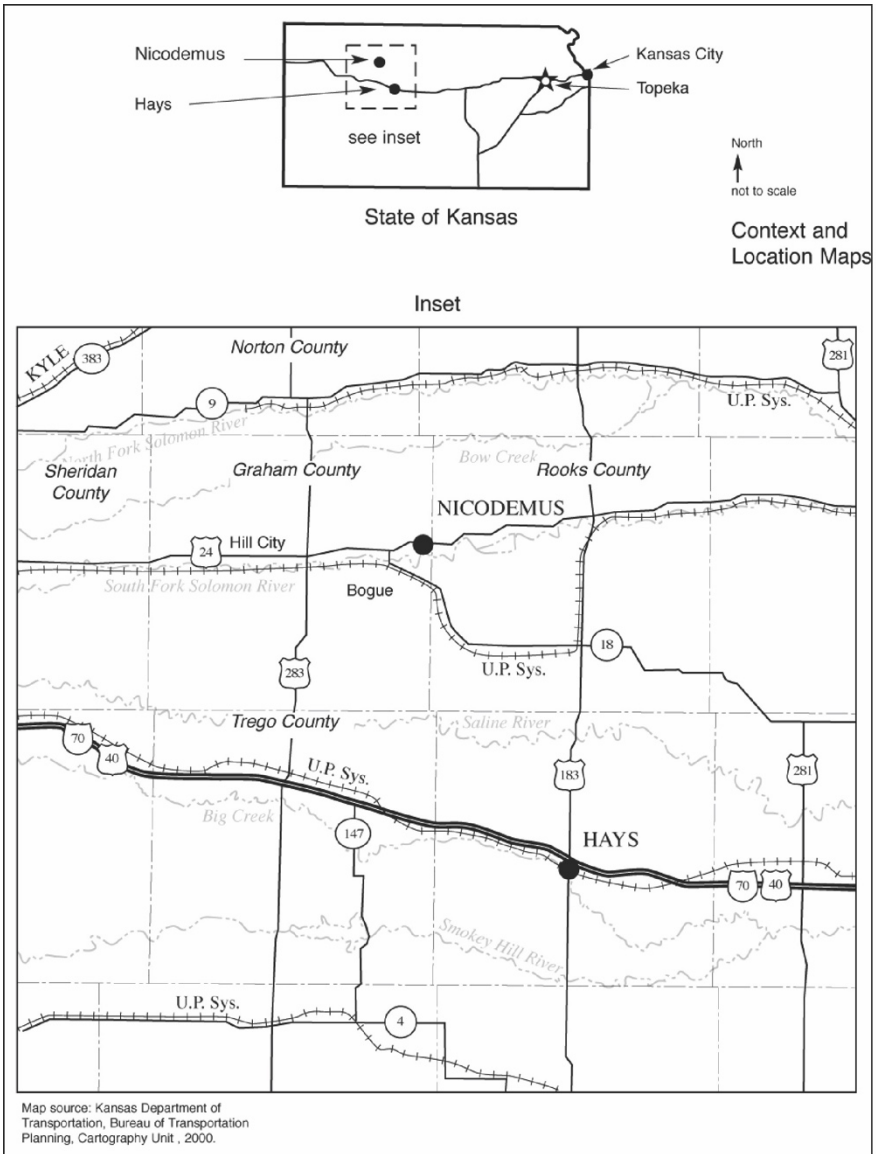

Figure 3. Context and location map for Nicodemus. Burden et al., *Historic Resources Study*, xii.

undifferentiated area. In the powerful short documentary film *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, produced in 1936 by the federal Resettlement Administration and directed by Pere Lorentz, the Great Plains region was singular, defined as "the 400,000,000 acres of wind-swept grass lands that spread up from the Texas panhandle to Canada. . .A high, treeless continent, without rivers, without streams. . .A country of high winds, and sun. . .and of little rain."[2] Environmental historians and archeologists are quick to point out, however, the important, if occasionally subtle, differences in the prairie within Kansas as one moves from east to west, differences that have had a substantial impact on how people survived and the types of communities that emerged from ten or more centuries before the present to the past century. As Waldo Wedel, one of the twentieth century's preeminent scholars of Great Plains archeology, stated, "These variations, for

[2] *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, directed by Pere Lorentz, produced by Resettlement Administration, 1936; available at https://archive.org/details/plow_that_broke_the_plains.

hundreds of years past as today, had and have a direct bearing on man's utilization of the region."[3]

The high plains region, where Nicodemus is located, forms the western edge of the Great Plains, extending westward from the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers toward the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. The portions of the high plains in Kansas, in particular, lie within a rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains, the prevailing winds from the west having been drained of their moisture while passing over the mountains. It is a dry land dominated by a short-grass prairie in contrast to the tallgrass prairie further to the east and is "essentially a plateau characterized by broad reaches of flat uplands with poorly developed surface drainage."[4] Although the area sees only limited rainfall, much of the high plains in western Kansas sits on an important aquifer producing small springs in minor valleys. This is in strong contrast to eastern portions of Kansas, where major rivers, including the Arkansas River and its tributaries, and the Kansas River, which, itself, is a tributary to the mighty Missouri River that forms the state's northeastern border, drain a more varied and heavily vegetated terrain.

American Indians first entered the Missouri River valley and the Great Plains in the wake of the last glacial period approximately 11,000 years ago. Most archeological evidence for these Paleo-Indian peoples has been found in the plains lying to the west of the Missouri River, with examples of stone tools indicating reliance on mammoth, now-extinct forms of bison, and other large animals for sustenance. The archeological evidence suggests that these Paleo-Indian peoples were organized socially as small, mobile groups that came together occasionally for larger hunting expeditions and ranged widely across vast areas of the Great Plains. As the climate changed in the millennia following the last glacial era, becoming warmer and drier during what is known as the Holocene Altithermal and stimulating the development of the prairie ecosystems, megafauna became extinct, leading to a broadening pattern of subsistence, including hunting a variety of smaller mammals, fish, and shellfish, together with gathering wild plants. In the eastern portions of Kansas, this era is frequently referred to as the Archaic Period, extending from approximately 9,000 years ago to some 1,500 years ago, a period of wide swings in climate that affected the economy, agriculture, and social organization of those living in the Missouri River valley and the surrounding plains.

As traditionally defined by archeologists, the Late Archaic Period extended from approximately 2,500 years to approximately 1,500 years before the present. David Mark Spence, in his extensive summary of American Indians in the Great Plains and the Black Hills, described the Late Archaic most elegantly and effectively "as an endpoint for the vast and undifferentiated expanse of time that Native peoples often refer to in a phrase like 'since time out of memory' or 'time immemorial.'"[5] Beginning nearly 2,000 years ago, what has been identified by archeologists as the Woodland Period, is, Spence notes, within the time of stories and traditions passed down for generations and that continue to inform American Indian culture today. This era

[3] Waldo R. Wedel, "Prehistory and Environment in the Great Plains," in *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, Vol. 50, no. 1 (June 1947), 2.
[4] Rolfe D. Mandel, "Late Quaternary and Modern Environments in Kansas," in Robert T. Hoard and William E. Banks, eds., *Kansas Archaeology* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, in association with the Kansas State Historical Society), 2006, 17.
[5] Mark David Spence, *Passages Through Many Worlds: Historic Resource Study of Wind Cave National Park* (prepared under contract to Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, Omaha Nebraska), 2001, page 38.

is characterized by increasingly complex cultural and technological systems. A key technological innovation that helped to shape the era was development of the bow and arrow, in use by approximately 250 AD. This technology seems to have arrived with the Avonlea groups, who migrated from the Northern Rockies toward the Great Plains at that time and spread among the many diverse Woodland-era groups and cultures already living in the region. The impact on the productivity of traditional communal bison hunts was profound.[6]

In the high plains of western Kansas, however, the chronology is different. Rather than an increased reliance on horticulture and a trend toward sedentism that stimulated the formation of villages, a process that typified the transition from the Archaic to the Woodland periods in the eastern part of Kansas, people in the high plans "possessed a lifestyle much more similar to that of the preceding nomadic or semi-sedentary Archaic hunter-gatherers." In the millennia or two that preceded the Common Era, as the new technology of ceramics came to support increasingly horticultural and village-based cultures in the Missouri River valley, those living in the western plains maintained their traditional, nomadic way of life. According to John Bozell, "These peoples' economy, material culture, mortuary customs, and settlement patterns persisted until as late as A.D. 1100 in much the same form as they emerged between 500 and 1,100 years earlier."[7] In his 1947 article on the relationship between Plains Indians and the environment, Wedel described the western Plains as dominated by bison-hunting tribes traveling on foot for millennia before the arrival of horses following the Spanish presence in the sixteenth century.

After a long and undifferentiated period that continued Paleo-Indian and Archaic patterns of nomadism and semi-sedentism in the western plains, archeologists have identified a long period during the first thousand years of the Common Era as the Keith Phase, marked by occasional small villages on the low alluvial terraces of small creeks and rivers that served as temporary gathering places for mobile hunting and gathering groups. The use of ceramic vessels for cooking spread to these groups during the early centuries of the Common Era, though archeologists in Kansas have found little evidence overall for cultural interaction or conflict between east and west. Instead, people in the high plains of western Kansas typically "lived as isolated nuclear or extended families or in small hamlets," while "[s]cattered habitation sites may reflect loosely affiliated bands or lineage groups." As Bozell summarized, "They persisted as a relatively autonomous, static, and homogenous tradition of scattered groups for perhaps a thousand years."[8]

Arrival of Euro-Americans

Change gradually came to this area, a product of the arrival of Europeans to the Great Plains and a westward migration of eastern American Indian groups. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the high plains were occupied primarily by the Apache, and the Comanche and Cheyenne migrated to the area during the eighteenth century. In addition, the plains served as seasonal hunting grounds for the Kansa, Osage, and Pawnee, who resided further east in the

[6] Ibid., see also Ludwickson et al.
[7] John R. Bozell, "Plains Woodland Complexes of Western Kansas and Adjacent Portions of Nebraska and Colorado," in Hoard and Banks, 93-95. See also Wedel, "Prehistory and Environment," 6.
[8] Ibid., 102.

Missouri River valley.[9] Europeans first arrived in Kansas in 1541 when a Spanish expedition led by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, the Governor of New Galicia in Mexico, traveled north in search of a reported source of treasure, the Seven Cities. This initial quest failed when the fabled city was found to be a small Zuni settlement, but Coronado continued to the north and east, reaching the village of Quivira, most likely occupied by the Wichita Indians, along the Arkansas River.[10] Coronado's visit was brief, and he soon returned to Mexico. Although the Spanish rarely ventured as far north as the plains and the Missouri River valley in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, two other European arrivals during that time had profound impacts on American Indians living in the Great Plains and the Missouri River valley: horses and diseases. The Spanish brought horses with them through Mexico and into what is now the American southwest in the early sixteenth century. While a limited number of Indians in the southwest were using horses by the middle of the seventeenth century, a revolt against the Spanish in 1680 led by Pueblo Indians resulted in a widespread release of horses from control of the Spanish, which then came to be used by the American Indians.[11] The use of horses spread quickly among the peoples of the Great Plains. As Spence has noted, horses made "seasonal and year-round nomadism more productive, both in terms of the number of places and resources that could be utilized by a highly mobile group as well as in the amount of trade products that could be carried to and from the Middle Missouri villages."[12]

Horses clearly increased the possibility for conflict between groups, and the new European guns made those conflicts more deadly, but European diseases were far more devastating to the region's American Indians. With no natural resistance to these diseases, given the regular movement and interaction of people and goods throughout the Great Plains and Missouri River valley, the risk of infection was great. Frequent epidemics during the eighteenth century destroyed villages throughout the regions, often changing the balance of power among the different groups; a 1781 smallpox epidemic, in particular, was devastating across the upper Great Plains, forcing the Mandan, who controlled the area, to retreat to smaller villages in what is now North Dakota.[13]

European settlement tended to follow the Missouri River, particularly as French traders in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries made their way south from the Great Lakes from trading posts and fortifications in Canada. Few natural watercourses, however, provided access to the western plains of Kansas, and, with no American Indian villages of size that could serve as trading bases, Europeans had little inclination to venture into the plains. The region remained nominally under French control until 1763 when it transferred to the Spanish in the wake of the Seven Years War. In the 1790s, France, under the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, regained ownership of the region from Spain as part of his imperial vision and with a view toward thwarting British global mercantile interests. When Napoleon's planned military invasion through New Orleans, designed to seize control of the interior trade with American Indians in North America, collapsed in the Caribbean, he turned his attention to attacking Britain directly

[9] Wedel, "Prehistory and Environment," 8-9.
[10] Wedel, "Coronado, Quivira, and Kansas: An Archeologist's View," *Great Plains Quarterly*, Vol. 10, no. 3 (Summer 1990), 139-140.
[11] Fenn, 132-134.
[12] Spence, 57.
[13] Fenn, 156-171.

instead of through its former colonies. In 1803, he agreed to sell, not just New Orleans but the entire Louisiana Territory, to the United States to keep it out of British hands.

When the Louisiana Territory came into the possession of the United States, President Thomas Jefferson put into action a plan that he had already developed. As early as 1801, Jefferson appointed Captain Meriwether Lewis, an Army officer with knowledge of the frontier West, to serve as his private secretary. A year later, he asked Lewis to command an expedition to explore the Missouri River. Together, they agreed that Lewis's former Army colleague, William Clark, who also had extensive experience in the West, would serve as his second-in-command. In commissioning the expedition, Jefferson's interest was partly scientific inquiry into the geography and natural resources of the American West. The more important part, though, was to establish influence within that portion of the North American continent belonging to the United States by extending U.S. commerce into it. This meant forging commercial relations with the many American Indian tribes in the Missouri River valley, drawing as much of the American Indian trade network toward the new United States of America and away from the European traders, particularly British and Spanish, who had already developed strong relationships in the region. The two Army officers, Lewis and Clark, led the Corps of Discovery Expedition, now known simply as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, from 1804 through 1806. The expedition used the Missouri River to gain access to the West in the hope that it would lead ultimately to the Pacific Ocean and to greater trade for the new nation. Lewis and Clark's expedition, followed quickly by the establishment of private trading posts, opened the door for Euro American settlers to make initial attempts to establish farms, ranches, and settlements on American Indian lands. Conflicts between the new U.S. traders and American Indian tribes, especially the Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa, soon emerged, leading to an official U.S. military foray into the region in 1825. The U.S. Army accompanied a commercial expedition with soldiers and weapons and intended to compel the different indigenous groups to work out treaties that would result in peace. The U.S. officials who took part in this expedition claimed sovereignty over the area and imposed U.S. federal law to resolve all disputes. This 1825 expedition resulted in treaties with nations all along the Missouri, including the Ponca, Arikara, Hidatsa, Mandan, Crow, Oto, Missouri, Pawnee, Omaha, Lakota, and Dakota. By the end of the 1820s, commerce with the United States was well established and enforced, particularly with construction of Fort Union in 1828 at the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, now the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site, North Dakota.[14]

Further to the west of the Missouri River valley, however, the authority of the United States was not as firmly in place. Various American Indian tribes of the Missouri River valley, including the Kansa, Osage, and Pawnee, used the western plains as traditional hunting grounds, while other Plains Indians continued to live there permanently. By the early eighteenth century, these were primarily Apache Indians, though Comanche and Cheyenne had both migrated to the region by the end of the eighteenth century. They were semi-nomadic peoples, following bison herds through the summer and fall and establishing temporary settlements during the winter months. By the mid-eighteenth century, they had adopted horses. As Wedel observed, "These were the so-called 'typical' Plains Indians; and it was they primarily who, from Texas to Canada, disputed the westward expansion of the Americans in post-Civil War days."[15]

[14] Ibid., 284-286.
[15] Wedel, "Prehistory and Environment," 6.

In spite of the more difficult travel conditions, Euro American explorers began pushing further into west Kansas, at first on a limited basis. In 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike crossed what is now Kansas on the orders of General James Wilkinson, Governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory. Pike had already completed an expedition to the headwaters of the Mississippi River on Wilkinson's orders and, in 1806, traveled from southeastern Kansas to the Nebraska border, then south to the Arkansas River before turning west into Colorado. Pike's journey was designed, in part, to convince American Indian groups to support the United States in their claim to the Louisiana Purchase in spite of Spanish forces in Mexico, which denied the legitimacy of the United States' claim to the region. By 1821, however, Mexico had gained its independence from Spain, opening new trading opportunities for the United States. The first trader to take advantage of these opportunities was William Becknell from Franklin, Missouri. Becknell generally followed American Indian trails across Kansas from Independence, Missouri, angling to the southwest through what is now the panhandle of Oklahoma to reach Santa Fe, then part of Mexico. Becknell was soon followed by many other traders along what became known as the Santa Fe Trail. Though it passed well to the south of what is now Nicodemus, the Santa Fe Trail was vital to bringing to the attention of land dealers and potential settlers the almost unimaginable amount of land available for farming and settlement in western Kansas.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the principal immigrants to Kansas, both in the eastern areas and in the high plains in the west, were not Euro American explorers but other American Indian groups forced out of their ancestral lands in the eastern United States. As the populations in the seaboard states grew exponentially from the late eighteenth century, and with the creation of the Erie Canal in the 1820s that made travel from the East Coast to Ohio, Michigan, and the upper Midwest faster and less expensive, Americans pushed west into traditional American Indian lands. By then, in the wake of the Lewis and Clark Expedition which noted the favorable conditions for agriculture in and near the Missouri River valley, this was seen as a good opportunity by many leaders, both white and Indian. Clark, who, in the late 1820s, was the superintendent of Indian affairs stationed in St. Louis, negotiated with members of the traditional occupants of Kansas including the Kansa and Osage, to share the land with tribes from the east. Under growing political pressure based in both greed for land and sincere concern for the welfare of the tribes, Congress came to support Indian removal from the East. Andrew Jackson, who strongly supported the relocation of American Indians through force, was elected President in 1828 over the more cautious John Quincy Adams and, in 1830, oversaw passage of the Indian Removal Act. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed into law by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830, authorized the President to grant to American Indians lands west of the Mississippi River in exchange for lands in the east. This capped a period of experimentation that began in the early nineteenth century as American political and social leaders hoped to "civilize" members of the many American Indian tribes throughout the east. In the southeast, for example, many members of the Cherokee and Creek tribes took on American ways including establishing farms and sending their children to white schools. Even this effort to move toward Euro American civilization was insufficient to land-hungry whites who demanded removal of the American Indian populations to facilitate their own aims for the lands claimed by the United States. Though initially planned to operate by treaty and agreement, the Indian Removal Act soon became a coercive program in which tribes or individuals were pressured to relocate from Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and other states, with Kansas the

principal focus of relocation. More than twenty-five eastern tribes, including the Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Sac and Fox, and Delaware, relocated to Kansas, originally in the eastern half of the state.[16] As Americans expanded westward from Missouri through the 1830s and 1840s, however, these American Indian groups were pushed further west and south where the United States government designated land in what is now Oklahoma as Indian Territory.

The tide of migration made a dramatic shift in 1854 when Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, creating two territories open to settlement. Adding new territories in the decades before the Civil War involved extraordinary political challenges. Many southern legislators were concerned that new states populated by small free-holders would come into the Union as free states in which ownership of enslaved people would not be allowed, thus upsetting the balance of power in Congress between slave-holding states and free states. They worried that this imbalance would result in passage by Congress of laws restricting or even eliminating ownership of enslaved people in any of the states. In 1820, Congress agreed to a compromise over the proposed admission of Missouri as a state. The "Missouri Compromise" defined the southern border of the new state, latitude line 36'30", as the border between free and slave states in all lands gained through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Those states organized north of the Missouri Compromise line would be free states, and those south of the line could allow ownership of enslaved people. By the 1840s, however, the growing importance of railroads led many to envision a railroad line that would span the entire continent. This proposed transcontinental railroad would have to pass through areas in the Great Plains and the West that had not yet been organized into territories. Senator Stephen A. Douglas (D-IL) hoped to secure for Chicago status as the eastern terminus of the transcontinental railway line and, through the late 1840s, proposed several bills to organize several territories, particularly what is now Nebraska, so that the rail line could be built. His proposals were all rebuffed by powerful southern senators because part of the Nebraska Territory was north of the Missouri Compromise line. In response, in 1853, Douglas proposed to extend to the Nebraska Territory, which included what is now Nebraska and Kansas, the concept of popular sovereignty, first developed in the "Compromise of 1850" by which New Mexico and Utah were admitted to the Union. This concept would allow eligible voters in the territories themselves to vote on whether to allow or disallow ownership of enslaved people within the state. Since Nebraska was north of the Missouri Compromise line, northern anti-slavery politicians objected because this meant repeal of the Missouri Compromise line. With northern Whigs and some northern Democrats splitting off to join the new anti-slavery Republican Party, the bill passed Congress in 1854; President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law on May 30.

With the question of ownership of enslaved people now up to a public vote, settlers, both pro- and anti-slavery, swarmed into the new Kansas Territory in the mid-1850s in hopes of creating a majority. Historian Rachel Franklin Weekley stated, "Like air rushing into a vacuum, supporters and detractors of slavery charged into the breach to win control of the territory."[17] The

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[16] Joseph B. Herring, *The Enduring Indians of Kansas: A Century and a Half of Acculturation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2021), 13-22. Chapter 2 provides a fascinating discussion of the negotiations not just between federal and state governments and the various tribal governments, but also between the various tribes as well. The book is available for free download at https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1p2gm9m.

[17] Rachel Franklin Weekley, *"A Strong Pull, A Long Pull, and a Pull Altogether:" Topeka's Contribution to the Campaign for School Desegregation, Historic Resource Study, Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Topeka, Kansas* (Omaha, Nebraska: Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, December 1999), 9.

Nebraska Territory was reliably against ownership of enslaved people, but Kansas, bordering the state of Missouri on the east, which allowed such ownership, was violently contended. During the mid- and late 1850s, both sides established territorial legislatures and draft constitutions. Topeka served as home to the free-state forces, while Shawnee Mission, at the eastern edge of Kansas near Kansas City, Missouri, was the base of the pro-slavery legislature. After a constitutional convention in Topeka in late 1855 outlawed ownership of enslaved people in the Kansas Territory, President Franklin Pierce denounced the results and supported the pro-slavery legislature in Shawnee Mission, which soon relocated further west to Lecompton, Kansas, and was headed by Democrats. Violence between the two factions reached a peak in 1856, and Congress refused to support either faction's constitution. Pro-slavery forces gained an edge in November 1856 when pro-slavery James Buchanan was elected President of the United States. They submitted the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution to Congress and won a territorial vote in 1857. Territorial Governor Robert Walker, despite holding a pro-slavery position, refused to certify the election on the grounds that that it was fraudulent. By the late 1850s, the popular sentiment had swung to the anti-slavery position, and Congress was deeply divided over the issue of whether to approve the Lecompton Constitution. Finally, in August 1858, Kansas voters rejected the Lecompton Constitution and, in October 1859, voted overwhelmingly to ratify a constitution outlawing ownership of enslaved people. In January 1861, after seven Southern states announced their secession from the United States, Congress formally admitted Kansas as the thirty-fourth state of the United States.[18]

The new state of Kansas saw only limited action during the Civil War in comparison to many of the states further east but was an important part of Union efforts, nonetheless. Established less than three months before the start of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, in April 1861, Kansas was the last state admitted to the nation before the hostilities began. Having passed through monumental struggles to become a free state, Kansas, under new Governor Charles Robinson, quickly raised troops to fight on the side of the Union. By the end of the Civil War, the new state had raised nineteen regiments, over 20,000 troops, over 3,000 more than the federal government requested and the highest percentage of volunteer troops relative to population of any state. The state also organized two regiments of African Americans, the 1st and 2nd Colored Infantry Regiments, which were the first African American units to see combat in the Civil War. In addition, Kansas also established three regiments of Native Americans, known as the Indian Home Guards, from among members of several tribes who had been forced to refugee camps in eastern Kansas by Confederate soldiers in 1861. The state suffered 8,500 casualties in the Civil War, including approximately 3,000 deaths.

The state also saw several engagements, frequently in the form of small groups or individual Union and Confederate partisans on either side of the Missouri/Kansas border launching attacks against one another. The most important of these was in August 1863 when a group of pro-Confederate guerilla fighters led by William Clarke Quantrill attacked Lawrence, Kansas, which remained strongly pro-Union and anti-slavery. The raiders burned many of the town's buildings and executed more than 150 men and boys in what came to be known as the Lawrence Massacre, one of the most egregious acts of violence against civilians during the war. Later in 1863, Quantrill led another raid against Fort Blair in Baxter Springs, in southeastern Kansas. In this case, however, the Union troops, African American and white fighting together,

[18] Ibid., 10-13.

successfully repulsed the rebel fighters. A more significant battle took place a year later, in October 1864, the Battle of Mine Creek. In August of that year Confederate Major General Sterling Price led troops into Missouri, bypassing the heavily fortified St. Louis and Jefferson City to concentrate on Kansas City and its environs. Union troops engaged the Confederates in several battles south of Kansas City in October as Price marched toward Fort Scott, Kansas. On October 25, the two Confederate cavalry divisions came under attack from two brigades of Union cavalry near Mine Creek. The Confederate troops were forced into retreat by Union forces with superior weapons, halting Price's advance and resulting in one of the largest calvary battles of the Civil War.

In the aftermath of the war, as Rachel Franklin Weekely observed, "the interstate squabbles fell away and were replaced by a unified focus on Indian removal."[19] The United States Army, following on its experience in the Civil War, soon launched an unstated war on American Indians in Kansas, setting up a series of forts. Tribes that had come to Kansas, either voluntarily or involuntarily, following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and those for whom the plains of Kansas were ancestral lands, were soon either forced to relocate to what is now Oklahoma or established on their own tribal reservations.[20] This process of forcing so many of the state's American Indians to relocate elsewhere was largely complete by the late 1870s, making available vast lands for new immigrants from the East.

African American Migration to Kansas in the Late Nineteenth Century

In the decades after the Civil War, circumstances both pulled and pushed African Americans toward Kansas. Through the arduous and often violent process of becoming a state in the late 1850s, Kansas gained a reputation for liberality in race relations. Anti-slavery forces from New England and elsewhere had won a difficult victory against pro-slavery forces based in nearby Missouri and other states in securing Kansas's admission to the Union as a free state. At the same time, anti-slavery individuals had taken part in the Underground Railroad, guiding formerly enslaved persons northward through Kansas to Nebraska. Leaders in the new city of Topeka worked to reduce racial prejudice, including establishing a new institution of higher education, now Washburn College, in 1865, that admitted students without regard to race. The city's African American population boomed through the 1860s.[21]

In addition to the reputation of Topeka itself, the idea of nearly endless amounts of open, unclaimed land (once cleared of American Indians) was a powerful draw to Americans of all races. The majority of the American population remained agricultural through the late nineteenth century, and the prospect of a farm of one's own represented the dream of many and was a sign of a final break from enslavement for African Americans in the former Confederate South. Under the pressure of restless Americans of all stripes, the federal government explored various approaches to conveying the enormous amount of land that was acquired in the Louisiana Purchase to the nation's citizens. The Republican Party, created in the 1850s, advocated

[19] Ibid., 14.
[20] Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 147-166, details the various strategies adopted by those Indian tribes that remained in Kansas to survive through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
[21] Franklin Weekely, 17-19.

transferring lands in the public domain to settlers without charge. Lacking sufficient political clout through the late 1850s, Republicans were unable to secure passage of a bill that promoted free homesteading on public domain lands. Their closest attempt was made in 1860 when Congress passed a homestead act that required a payment of twenty-five cents per acre; President James Buchanan, however, vetoed the bill. With the election of the Republican candidate for President, Abraham Lincoln, in 1860, and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the party of free land gained ascendancy. Southerners no longer had a presence in Congress, having formed the Confederate States of America, and Republicans successfully brought forward the Homestead Bill, which President Lincoln signed into law as the Homestead Act on May 20, 1862 (12 Stat. 392). The law would take effect on January 1, 1863. The Homestead Act made available "unappropriated public lands," those lands in the public domain that had not already been set aside for other purposes. Rather than conducting auctions of public lands or requiring settlers to purchase the land, the Homestead Act allowed individual settlers 160 acres simply by filing a claim with a small processing fee. To file a claim, the settler had to: be a citizen or intend to become one, never have taken up arms against the United States, and be the head of a household, a single person over the age of twenty-one, or a war veteran of any age. Each settler was then required to live on the property for five years (later reduced to three years). Once the local Land Office staff accepted testimony as to the veracity of the claimant, the homestead was "proved" and the Land Office compiled the land-entry case file and forwarded it to the General Land Office (GLO) headquarters in Washington, D.C. with a certification of eligibility. Once determined valid, the GLO sent a deed of title for the land back to the local Land Office for delivery to the homesteader, certifying that the homesteader held the land in fee.[22]

Supporting these appealing factors that drew Americans, white and black, to Kansas—a liberal cultural environment and promises of free land—was the expansion of railroads. While most settlers continued to enter and cross Kansas on foot, on horseback, or in wagons, covered or otherwise, into the late nineteenth century, railroads began to expand across the state through the 1860s and 1870s, making travel across the plains faster, easier, and safer. The first railroad began laying track in eastern Kansas in the mid-1850s, shortly after Congress opened the Territory to settlement. The Union Pacific Railroad began operating in eastern Kansas by 1866 and reached the Solomon River by 1867. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, established in 1863, spanned the state from east to west by 1872, giving faster access to the plains of western Kansas than had ever been possible before, and allowing expansion of trade from St. Louis, Missouri, to Santa Fe in the Territory of New Mexico.

In addition to factors that attracted African Americans to Kansas, however, other, more sinister forces were pushing them out of the East, particularly from the former Confederacy in the aftermath of the Civil War. With the end of the bloody war, hope spread throughout the northern states, where abolitionists celebrated the conclusion of a decades-long quest to remove enslavement from America, and most potently among former enslaved persons in the states of

[22] A brief description of the process and a detailed explanation of how to use land-entry case files for research can be found in Kenneth Hawkins, comp., *Research in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office, Record Group 49*, Reference Information Paper 114 (National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., , rev. 2009); available online: https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf. These land-entry case files have been the subject of an enormous collaborative research project spearheaded by Homestead National Historical Park.

the Confederacy. The Emancipation Proclamation, which was announced September 22, 1862, and took effect on January 1, 1863, despite its limited scope, applying only to those states of the Confederacy that remained outside of federal control at the time, was, nonetheless, a beacon of hope and an indication of the intent of the federal government that slavery would have no place in the Union.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Congress, private entities, and individuals took immediate action to support approximately 4,000,000 African Americans in the former Confederacy who had been released from enslavement. Much of this humanitarian effort took place through the U.S. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, created by Congress in 1865 and more popularly known as the Freedmen's Bureau. Working throughout the South, the Freedmen's Bureau provided direct food assistance, created hospitals to begin providing medical care, and established a network of schools, several of which continue to exist as historically black colleges and universities, including Clark University in Georgia, Fisk University in Tennessee, and Howard University in the District of Columbia. In the face of a *de facto* return of slavery throughout the southern states immediately after the Civil War through the development of farm tenancy and sharecropping, Congressional leaders also sought to increase protections for the formerly enslaved beyond amending the Constitution by creating positive laws to support those amendments. Their efforts culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1875. This law banned discrimination based on race in public accommodations, public transportation, and in selection for juries.

Sadly, these initial efforts to make possible the full integration of African Americans into the nation's political life and provide for due process under the law, during what came to be called the Era of Reconstruction, required a level of military and political support that could not be sustained. In the hands of the Republican Party for nearly a decade after the war's end, Congress directed the U.S. Army to enforce the nation's laws and ensure equal protection for whites and for African Americans. In those areas of the South where it had an active presence, the Army had a profound impact on gains made by African Americans in civic and political life. The Army was not omnipresent, however. It had a presence in only limited locations and, often, was sporadic in its efforts. By the early 1870s, the combination of an economic downturn and news of political corruption caused the defeat of many Republican members of Congress, culminating in the loss of a Congressional majority in 1875. The loss of Republican's power meant they were unable to support the policies of Reconstruction, an inability symbolized by the complicated political deal known as the Compromise of 1877 by which Rutherford B. Hayes, a Republican, became President of the United States, and Republican leaders agreed to support the withdrawal of federal troops from Louisiana and South Carolina in return for Democratic support for Hayes. The presence of federal troops, as much as political support, was vital to the enforcement of federal civil rights laws, and their removal was uneven throughout the former Confederate states, in some places lingering into the 1880s and delaying the end of Reconstruction. As southern states regained political representation and power, the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 were rarely enforced, and, in 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that it was unconstitutional on the grounds that Congress did not have the authority to regulate private interactions.

In addition to military support to maintain order and provision of medical care and educational facilities, the establishment of a truly free population of former enslaved persons required a type of political investment by Congress that went beyond what any American political leader could countenance: some form of land confiscation and redistribution to afford the newly-freed African Americans a basis of subsistence, an economic base that would facilitate a more complete political participation. Otherwise, as events soon proved, the vast majority of African Americans would remain dependent on their former owners, who retained ownership of the agricultural lands that were the foundation of the region's economy. President Andrew Johnson, who, as Vice President, succeeded to the office after President Lincoln's assassination, quickly issued pardons to many of the military and political leaders of the Confederacy, allowing them to retain their lands. Johnson was impeached in March 1868 for, among other things, his repeated attempts to dismiss Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, but the Senate failed to convict and remove him by the required majority, and he served out the rest of Lincoln's term of office. Former Union General Ulysses S. Grant, a Republican, was elected President in 1868. Though repudiating Johnson for many of his actions as President, Republican leaders were similarly disinclined to confiscate the agricultural property of the owners and distribute it to their former enslaved persons. As Historian Nell Irvine Painter has observed in a new Introduction to her classic work on the migration of African Americans to Kansas in the decades after the Civil War, the reluctance to support the confiscation of land from former plantation owners "narrowed the extent to which Republicans would be willing to support the Republican regimes in the South."[23]

As political support waned through the late 1860s and early 1870s, the level of violence and terrorism by whites directed at African Americans increased rapidly. Throughout the South, African Americans began forming self-help organization and cooperative stores, among other efforts to provide stability and prosperity while making modest but real political gains. Southern whites, however, were threatened by these gains, seeing them as insurrectionary and a challenge to the customary order of their civilization. To quash this perceived threat, white organizers took to "nightriding," burning African American properties and maiming and killing African American political participants to warn other African Americans away from organizing for their own benefit. As Painter explained, the end of Reconstruction for many African Americans in the South was already evident by the early 1870s:

> Black solidarity and a real, if guarded, optimism (bolstered by relative prosperity) marked the period preceding 1871, but nightriding and a corresponding loss of hope among rural Blacks prevailed in the later years. By the late 1870s the South began to take on the feudal usages which shaped race relations economically and politically throughout the rest of the century.[24]

Together with the several factors that served to draw African Americans toward Kansas, this omnipresent violence and loss of hope were factors that pushed them from their homes in the former Confederacy. In her groundbreaking book, Painter explored the migration of tens of thousands of African Americans from the lower South, primarily Louisiana and Mississippi, beginning in 1879. It was a semi-organized exodus that drew on African Americans' desire for autonomy, in the form of land ownership that was not possible in the post-Civil War South, and

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[23] Nell Irvine Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977; 2nd Edition with new Introduction, 1986), xi.
[24] Ibid., 16.

freedom from the terrorism that they faced at the hands of their white neighbors. As Painter discusses, African Americans throughout the nation began meeting in conventions in the mid-1870s to discuss options for relocation, focusing their efforts initially on Kansas and on Liberia on the west coast of Africa. Due to the costs and logistical difficulties involved with transportation to Africa, attention quickly shifted to Kansas. Those taking part in this massive migration beginning in 1879 were quickly referred to as Exodusters. The Exoduster movement, however, despite its national significance as a sign of African Americans' striving for self-determination, followed the earlier example of the original settlers from the upper South. This earlier migration, beginning in the early 1870s, was smaller, though still substantial, and has received far less attention than the later Exoduster movement. The oldest surviving example of the earlier migration of African Americans from the Upper South is Nicodemus, in the high plains of Graham County, Kansas.

Between 1870 and 1879, approximately 10,000 African Americans migrated to Kansas from the Upper South states of Kentucky and Tennessee, and from Missouri.[25] The majority of these people, most of whom had to overcome enormous obstacles to complete the journey, settled in Topeka, where a vibrant community of African Americans began to form in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Others, however, sought out opportunities to own land and establish a farm for themselves. As Painter argued repeatedly in her work on the Exoduster movement, African Americans, the vast majority of whom had experience with little but agriculture in addition to related crafts such as blacksmithing and carpentry, clearly recognized that owning land was the most important component in the path to freedom and independence.[26] Nicodemus was one of more than two dozen towns settled in Kansas and neighboring states by African Americans, which, in turn, were among the many hundreds of towns throughout the Great Plains settled by those who sought to acquire lands from the federal government. Recognizing that formerly enslaved African Americans had a particular interest in landownership and the opportunities posed by the abundance of open land in the Great Plains, a number of African American leaders and entrepreneurs began organizing companies or associations that acquired land or options on land. These entrepreneurs then promoted migration among African Americans, either those who were still in the South or those who had already settled in Kansas. The best-known of these African American land entrepreneurs was Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, who was born enslaved in Tennessee but escaped in 1846, eventually settling in Detroit, Michigan, where he assisted others who were escaping enslavement. He returned to Tennessee after the Civil War and, by the late 1860s, became convinced that Kansas was the best place for African Americans. He created the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Company in 1869 and tirelessly promoted migration to Kansas through the 1870s.

Although Singleton himself established few communities in Kansas, his promotion efforts generated increased interest in the South and in Kansas. On April 18, 1877, seven men in Topeka, six of whom were African Americans, joined to form the Nicodemus Town Company. These men formed their company to take advantage of the Townsite Preemption Act of 1844, as amended in 1867, that allowed organized groups of settlers to purchase federal land for town sites at minimum prices. As Historian Kenneth Hamilton observed, the six African American

[25] Gregory D. Kendrick, "Introduction," in *Promised Land on the Solomon: Black Settlement at Nicodemus, Kansas* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 1986), iii.
[26] Painter, *Exodusters*, 7-8.

members of the company had migrated from Tennessee and Kentucky after the Civil War "searching for an open society where they could live without fear of hostile whites." W.H. Smith, a native of Tennessee, was chosen as President, and W. R. Hill, the company's only white member, served as Treasurer.[27] Hill was a native of Covington, Indiana, who came to Hutchinson, Kansas, as a young man, quickly turned to real estate, and worked as a townsite promoter and developer. He had come to the Solomon River in west central Kansas to identify potential homestead and town sites and met Smith in late 1876 or early 1877. The two men joined forces to create two townsite companies: in addition to the Nicodemus company, they also partnered on the Hill City Town Company, formed in September 1877.[28]

W.R. Hill selected the site for the new Town of Nicodemus, located on a slight elevation approximately one mile north of the South Solomon River. The town encompassed 160 acres, one quarter of a one-mile square section (640 acres) in what is now Graham County. Hill filed the claim on June 8, 1877, with the General Land Office in Kirwin, Kansas, giving the Nicodemus Town Company the first option to purchase the tract. Even before having the land in hand, however, the company began the recruiting process to find new settlers to purchase land and provide the company with a profit. The company had a two-pronged approach to recruiting settlers. The first target was the African American community in Topeka, where many had settled upon first coming to Kansas in the early and mid-1870s. The second target was in Kentucky, where most of the company had lived. In both places, members of the company first circulated advertisements inviting settlers with the promise of a favorable environment for farming—good water and soil, and timber for building. The company members also conducted speaking tours, boosting the new town. By the summer of 1877, thirty people from Topeka became the town's first settlers. At the same time, Hill spoke to groups of African Americans in Georgetown, near Lexington, Kentucky, who were interested in forming a colony. In September 1877, more than 300 people from Kentucky arrived in Nicodemus.[29]

These first settlers faced enormous, nearly insurmountable difficulties. The conditions were considerably different than they had been promised, with dry, windy weather conditions, no trees from which to make houses, and no wild game for hunting. Of the three hundred settlers from Kentucky, sixty left for eastern Kansas the day after arriving in Nicodemus. Of those who stayed, the group from Kentucky, in particular, arrived too late in the season to start any crops before the cold weather set in, making them dependent on either the generosity and surplus of others or on getting paying jobs. As Marvin Hamilton observed, many men and women from Nicodemus in the earliest years were forced to take work, often on the railroads, further east in Kansas or in eastern Colorado. These residents, he reported, "would repeatedly work a few days and then return to Nicodemus to take care of their families."[30] A group of Osage Indians shared some meat with the settlers that first winter, but, still, it was a lean time. In the spring of 1878, the town began sending agents to Topeka for supplies and began organizing more recruits. Nearly 200 more settlers from Kentucky arrived in the spring of 1878, many of them bringing

[27] Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, "The Settlement of Nicodemus: Its Origins and Early Promotion," in *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 2.
[28] Ibid., 3. See also Claire O'Brien, "'With One Mighty Pull': Interracial Town Boosting in Nicodemus, Kansas," *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 16 no. 2 (Spring 1996), 119.
[29] Ibid., 5-7.
[30] Ibid., 8.

much-needed cash and supplies. By 1879, a combination of income from outside jobs and the ability to plant crops and raise livestock provided a degree of stability to the town's settlers.[31]

Despite this gradually rising prosperity, most of the early settlers still lived in houses that were a combination of dugouts and "soddies," houses built with blocks of sod for walls. These houses were dug into the ground or, preferably, into a slope, with a roof frame made of wooden posts that carried a layer of sod. The walls were then built up of sod blocks approximately two feet long, one foot wide, and four inches thick. The high-density grass roots of the prairie sod provided the blocks with internal stability and strength. The interiors and exteriors of the walls were covered with a thin layer of limestone wash. An archeological survey in 2009 identified the remains of one of these hybrid houses, built by homesteader Thomas Johnson in the late 1870s, whose family continued to live in the original house until building a new, wood-frame, farmhouse in 1921.[32]

The Town of Nicodemus

Nicodemus was settled by African Americans, who remained a majority throughout the town's history. In the early decades, however, the town also had a significant white minority, creating a rare example of an interracial town in which businessmen of both races worked collaboratively for the town's benefit. None of the early African American settlers arrived with sufficient capital or access to credit to maintain a general store; instead, the town's early white settlers owned the few retail stores in the early years. The town's political life, however, remained in the hands of African Americans who, by 1880, were having success in county politics as well. According to historian Kenneth Hamilton, this degree of political success at the town and county levels indicated "the lack of intensive white racial hostility present in the county and the higher degree of political sophistication possessed by area blacks."[33]

This degree of collaboration across racial lines in Nicodemus persisted throughout the 1880s as whites and African Americans worked together to promote their town and advance its fortunes. The 484 African Americans who lived in Graham County represented approximately 12 percent of the county's population in 1880, with 452 of them living in Nicodemus. The town also had fifty-eight white residents in 1880, less than 2 percent of the county's white population. Despite the small population, barely 500 people, Nicodemus was growing quickly and, by 1881, had three general stores, three hotels, three churches, two livery stables, a drug store, a meat market, a lumber yard, and a school. Most of these were sod buildings, though the town had a growing number of buildings built of limestone block.[34] The buildings, though modest, signified a boost in the town's economic base just four years after the first settlers arrived, a result of good rains and harvests, and both resulted from, and gave a foundation to, optimism for the town's prospects. Half of the businesses were owned by whites, who had more substantial original

[31] Ibid., 11-13.
[32] DeAnn R. Presley and Flordeliz T. Bugarin, "Morphology, Provenance, and Decomposition of a 19th Century Hybrid Dugout and Sod House in Nicodemus, Kansas," in *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, vol. 119, no. 3-4 (2016), 381-393.
[33] Hamilton, "Settlement of Nicodemus," 14.
[34] O'Brien, "'With One Mighty Pull,'" 119-121.

investment capital. The town's African American population, however, according to historian Claire O'Brien, was "much more tied to the town than the whites" and were more invested in ensuring the town's long-term survival.[35] Both groups worked together, however, in social and communal organizations, to build up the town and support each other. Community groups such as the Nicodemus Cornet Band, Nicodemus Literary Society, Nicodemus Land Company, Grant Benevolent Society of Nicodemus, and Daughters of Zion had nearly equal numbers of white and African American members. In March 1887, a group of African American and white businessmen who, together, owned fifty lots in the town offered these lots free to anyone who would build on them. As O'Brien observed:

> Here we are presented with a rather remarkable picture of a completely biracial business elite offering free land to anyone of any race with the resources to erect a building of some kind on it. . .although naturally the hope was to draw more businessmen, what was wanted in Nicodemus was *people* to help build up the town, and apparently neither the whites nor the blacks cared a great deal what color they were.[36]

At the same time, Nicodemus' leaders of both races were focused jointly on a crucial project. Throughout the 1880s, both whites and African Americans in Nicodemus worked closely together to attract any one of the several railroads that were being built across the Great Plains. During the past three decades, railroads had become vital to the nation, quickly replacing canals and rivers as the only means to span the county's vast distances and transport goods and people inexpensively and efficiently. As a result, railroads were able to either make or break new or established communities, bringing people, trade, and credit to those communities with a railroad depot and leaving those without to struggle. The business leaders in Nicodemus, African American and white, knew that they were in a fight to save the town by bringing a railroad to Nicodemus instead of to a neighboring community.

In December 1886, representatives of the Missouri Pacific Railroad asked the town of Nicodemus to fund four miles of track, a common request by the railroads at the time. For Nicodemus, the cost of funding four miles of track came to approximately $16,000; the company had asked for a total of $132,000 from eight towns in the area. In a pattern typical of cities and towns throughout the nation in the late nineteenth century, Nicodemus' business leaders quickly got to work boosting their town and encouraging all residents to work together to support the town's growth. The question of whether to commit such a large sum from the town's funds for the railroad was actively debated into the winter of 1887; as O'Brien stated, this process "marked the real beginning of the genuine interracial cooperation that was soon to flourish within the community's leadership." The town created a seven-person committee to negotiate with the railroad company, two of whom were African Americans: the two Fletcher brothers who had several businesses including a hotel and livery stable and who operated the post office. On March 22, 1887, the town voted overwhelmingly to give $16,000 to the Missouri Pacific Railroad so that it would start building a rail line. News of the donation spread through the region, and the town began gaining more new settlers in the spring of 1887, with new buildings being built, including what is now the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and new limestone commercial buildings.

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[35] Ibid., 121.
[36] Ibid., 122.

This period of collaboration and optimism also saw the emergence of the town's most important tradition. In 1887, the town first hosted its commemoration of the emancipation by Great Britain of all slaves in its territories in the Caribbean in 1834. Held annually on or about August 1, by the early twentieth century it had evolved into a homecoming celebration when those who had left the town seeking more opportunities returned to be reunited with family members and to celebrate their heritage. It has traditionally been a three-day event held for most of the town's history at Scruggs Grove, but more recently relocated to the town center.[37]

The optimism of the mid-1880s was short-lived, however, as both the Missouri Pacific Railroad and the Santa Fe Railroad, which had also expressed interest in Nicodemus earlier in the year, fell silent by the summer. No signs of the railroads appeared through 1887, and, in 1888, the Central Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad began laying track toward Bogue. Located six miles south of Nicodemus, Bogue was originally the location of a camp for Union Pacific construction crews. It was established as a town by a subsidiary of the Union Pacific in September 1888 to serve as the Union Pacific depot. This was an agonizing blow, and all of Nicodemus' white businessmen, and many of the African American business owners, relocated to Bogue, Hill City, or other communities on the railroad line.[38] In a sense, as Hamilton argues, the story of Nicodemus is identical to that of the great number of towns throughout the Great Plains: settled by optimistic migrants from the East and left to wither when bypassed by the railroads. Nicodemus, however, despite the loss of the railroad and, with it, much of the town's business capital and experience, survived when many did not. Those who remained held to the memories of the original settlers: African Americans who risked so much to own their own land.

Nicodemus never recovered from the loss of the railroads in the late 1880s, and the town "continued its slow downward population spiral" through the twentieth century.[39] Memories of the town's origins remained strong, however, among those who remained and those who left, witnessed by the large crowds who have attended Homecoming celebrations every summer since 1887. During the rest of the year, despite the dwindling population, Nicodemus retained a clear sense of community, serving as a cultural center for the surrounding region well into the mid-twentieth century with literary and arts clubs, plays, recitations, and a baseball team. It was, as LaBarbara W. Fly observed, "the social-cultural center of black life in the county."[40] This level of connection was made possible only gradually during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by improvements of the town's roads within Nicodemus and in the township. In Nicodemus, the township board began a process of grading the roads and adding ditches that facilitated better drainage, making travel to school, stores, and churches more convenient. Farm families in the township, however, still relied on paths through the prairie for travel to Nicodemus or other nearby towns for supplies, and these "direct paths through deep grasses resulted in 'roads all over the prairies' until county roads or 'section roads' delineated each square mile."[41]

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[37] LaBarbara W. Fly, "Into the Twentieth Century," in *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 66.
[38] Clayton Fraser, "Nicodemus: The Architectural Development and Decline of an American Town," in *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 51-52.
[39] Ibid., 66.
[40] LaBarbara W. Fly, "Into the Twentieth Century," in *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 66.
[41] Ibid., including a quote from Fly's interview with James Bates, July 13, 1983. In her footnote, Fly notes that the original Stockton Trail, a stage route, lay three miles north of Nicodemus and was paved in 1937 when it became

Despite the strength of the memories of Nicodemus, and the importance of its history to the families of the descendants, it was a difficult place to live, and many were forced to seek better opportunities elsewhere. The 1930s, a period of economic depression, drought, and dust storms, was a hard decade for Nicodemus, as for others on the Great Plains. Many of Nicodemus' farmers were forced into foreclosure when they were unable to produce enough crops to sell, often relocating to California or the Pacific Northwest. Near the end of the decade, however, the federal Works Progress Administration, one of the New Deal programs created by the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, organized a two-year project that hired twelve men to build a new Township Hall, using limestone blocks quarried in Rooks County. The building was completed in 1939 and remains the town's principal social gathering place as well as serving as the temporary visitor center for the National Historic Site.

The town saw a brief resurgence during the 1940s, even though many of the young men and women who went off to serve in World War II did not return to Nicodemus. In the wake of the economic struggles of the 1930s, Nicodemus resident Blanche White started a 4H club in 1940 to help the town's children learn about good agricultural practices including raising crops, tending animals, and preparing meals. The club also helped spur a new town beautification project when Mrs. White acquired trees from the county that the children planted and tended. The 4H Club was an important social feature of the town in the 1940s, as children looked forward to joining and being with their friends. The town also hosted several restaurants, which helped to bring the community together, and the local American Legion Post, after purchasing the former Fairview School, helped to continue the Homecoming tradition, long held on a farm near Nicodemus, by bringing it to the downtown area in 1953. This brief period of enthusiasm for Nicodemus also resulted in a burst of interest in protecting the town's buildings, and, in 1949, the First Baptist Church and the St. Francis Hotel, both built of limestone blocks, were stuccoed in an attempt to prevent the blocks from further deteriorating.

This resurgence did not last for long, though. The town's population began declining again during the 1950s as younger families left for better opportunities, leaving only the elderly to live in the town. As the population declined, many of the buildings were abandoned; by the 1970s and 1980s, a number of these buildings, including the Masonic Hall and Sayers Store, had deteriorated significantly and were demolished. In the face of this decline, a town meeting was convened in the fall of 1970 to identify ways to ensure the town's survival. One of the key recommendations from this meeting was to build low-cost housing to attract more residents. Town officials Ora Switzer, Guy Redd, and Lois Alexander contacted representatives of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The HUD staff liked the plan, but pointed out that Nicodemus, an unincorporated town, was not normally eligible for HUD funds without special authorization from the state legislature. The Kansas legislature quickly passed a bill written by the offices of State Representative E.F. Steichen and State Senator J.C. Tillotson that made Nicodemus eligible to accept federal housing funds.[42] At the same time,

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Highway 24. Highway 24 was then relocated to its present alignment on the north edge of Nicodemus in approximately 1964. Fly also discusses what is now Highway 18, approximately ten miles south of Nicodemus, based on interviews with Bernice and Alvin Bates in June and July 1983.

[42] "Former Sons and Daughters Feel that Peaceful Pull," *Salina Journal*, July 11, 1971, pages 1-2. See also "Aid Okayed for Graham County Township," *Salina Journal*, March 29, 1971, page 2.

many in the town were becoming aware that some of the town's residents who had left for careers elsewhere in the 1940s and 1950s now wanted to return to Nicodemus for retirement. In a newspaper interview in June 1971, lifelong resident and descendant of original settlers, Alvin Bates, observed, "You'd be surprised at the number of people who used to live here that would like to move back." As he continued,

> There are a lot of older folks living in cities on Social Security who keep bouncing around from place to place because they have to live where it's cheap and their homes keep getting condemned. Nicodemus could be a place where people on low incomes could come—especially colored people—they just can't make it anywhere else. People would rather live here than in the slums.[43]

In June 1972, HUD announced that it had awarded a grant of $240,000 to build ten housing units for the elderly, duplexes with either one or two bedrooms, in Nicodemus. The town created the Nicodemus Housing Authority to take possession of and operate the units, initially headed by Lois Alexander.[44] Neighboring Hill City received a similar grant at the same time to build two projects, and the two communities were combined for contracting purposes. Unfortunately, neither town was able to find a contractor who could build the projects for the funds that were available. Both Nicodemus and Hill City applied for a supplemental grant to cover the cost of construction; Hill City was awarded the grant in the spring of 1974, but Nicodemus' application was denied. After receiving support from Senator Robert Dole (R-KS), HUD explained that the supplemental funds were denied because the local office had doubts about the project's financial feasibility. This delay meant that Nicodemus' project was approved after HUD had instituted a moratorium on supplemental funding. In response to complaints by Senator Dole on behalf of Nicodemus, HUD agreed to go ahead with financing the construction in Nicodemus, but without a community building or landscaping. According to Lois Alexander, the town was "hopping mad. . .We won't even have a flagpole now, and down at Hill City they're going to have all those nice things. But at this point I guess not too many of us feel like being patriotic."[45] With the approvals in place, the new housing development was under construction until the summer of 1976 when the initial housing units were completed. At the same time, the town was awarded a second grant for $65,000, which funded a community building and landscaping for the housing development and paving of some of the streets in Nicodemus.[46] Two years later, in the fall of 1978, HUD provided additional funds for the town: $308,000 for several projects including rehabilitating housing, paving streets, demolishing buildings, and building a water system.[47] This was part of a rising tide of interest in Nicodemus in the mid-1970s. Pastor L.C. Alexander of the First Baptist Church led a volunteer effort, drawing in part on labor and funds from former Nicodemus residents who had left for better economic conditions, to build a new annex to the church. In 1977, some of these same former residents formed Nicodemus West, Inc., with the

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[43] "Town Seeks Urban Renewal?" *The Hays Daily News*, June 27, 1971, page 1.
[44] "Grant Could Mean the Rebirth of Nicodemus," *Salina Journal*, June 28, 1972.
[45] "Nicodemus Irked at HUD," *The Hays Daily News*, June 19, 1974.
[46] Nicodemus Gets Grant from HUD," *The Hays Daily News*, July 28, 1976, page 2; "A Housing Project Was Her Challenge," *Salina Journal*, August 6, 1976, page 11.
[47] "Nicodemus Gets HUD Block Grant," *Salina Journal*, October 10, 1978, page 7.

intent of providing educational opportunities and scholarships. With the United States' Bicentennial year of 1976, and the town's centennial anniversary in 1977 the town was poised to stake a public claim for historical landmark designation.

Chapter 2: Origins and Legislative History

Chapter 1 identified the historical significance of Nicodemus, the oldest and only surviving town created by African Americans west of the Mississippi River. The town was created in 1877 as part of the exodus of African Americans from the South in the decades after the Civil War, when tens of thousands sought opportunities for economic and political independence in the face of mounting tyranny and terrorism in the former Confederacy. This was an extremely important development in American history, as the nation sought to understand how it would move forward in the wake of the Civil War and the formal end of slavery, a process that lasted beyond what has traditionally been seen as the end of the period of Reconstruction in 1877. As part of this process, African Americans throughout the nation had to fight against apparently insurmountable odds to gain the full measure of American citizenship in the face of intense violence, intimidation, and loss of property in the South and entrenched racial prejudice throughout America. The town of Nicodemus, surviving against the odds after being bypassed by the railroads in such a remote and unforgiving location as the high plains of western Kansas, clearly represents the significance of this agonizing struggle.

In addition to its historical significance, Nicodemus and its commemoration as a National Historic Site is emblematic of a thoroughgoing revision in the historiography of the American West. This revision, beginning in the late 1960s but drawing on decades of pioneering and largely unheralded scholarship by African American historians, created a more comprehensive story of America's westward expansion throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The growth in this field of history included a growing awareness of the role of African Americans on the western frontier, both those who emigrated to the Great Plains in the two decades after the Civil War and those who settled throughout the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Given its importance as the only surviving African American town west of the Mississippi River, Nicodemus quickly became prominent among those engaged in the new field of African American studies.

In his 1982 article on the "Coming of Age" of African American history, historian Robert L. Harris Jr. argued convincingly for an approach based less on the contributions of African Americans to the overall course of American history and more on an understanding of a distinct African American culture within America. African American historians throughout the early twentieth century, Harris contended, produced scholarship that sought to counteract the flawed interpretations of white historians who either disregarded, diminished, or distorted the role or presence of African Americans in American history. Three interrelated events of the 1960s—the civil rights struggles, urban uprisings, and the Black Consciousness movement—suddenly brought African American issues to the fore and "forced a reassessment of the Black experience in America" that led to a "groundswell of interest in the Afro-American past [that] permeated practically every sector of American society."[48] The National Endowment for the Humanities, for example, in 1968 sponsored a series of workshops at college

[48] Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Coming of Age: The Transformation of Afro-American Historiography," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 67, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 107, 108.

campuses around the country to provide course materials on teaching African American history, television networks began airing programs on African American life and history, more states began requiring African American history curricula in public schools, and publishers began issuing new, or reissuing older, books on African American history.

While applauding this rapid growth in interest, Harris drew upon insights from Malcom X and others in the 1970s to caution against continuing in the tradition of correcting the dominant themes in American history by pointing out the role of African Americans. Instead, he applauded and encouraged historians who were looking at African American culture as a distinct entity in which roots in the African diaspora were equally as important as relations with white Americans. While this history "has taken place within the context of American history," he argued, "it should not be overwhelmed by that fact. It is much broader than the activities of the American nation."[49] As an example, Harris pointed out that, for African Americans in the nineteenth century, the revolutionary end of slavery in the Caribbean "touched Afro-Americans more substantially than Jacksonian Democracy." As a result, "early Afro-Americans observed August 1st, the date of the West Indian emancipation, as a special day. July 4th held little significance for them."[50] This certainly was the case in the small community of Nicodemus, where Emancipation Day, now combined with a homecoming celebration, has been celebrated at the beginning of August annually since 1887.

The quickly-growing interest in African American history spread throughout both the academic world and that of proponents of historic preservation. Few sites associated with the history of African Americans were identified or protected prior to the 1960s. The first historical park that began to address issues of African American history was George Washington Carver National Monument, Missouri, established by Congress in July 1943, seven months after Carver's death. Planning efforts for the monument began in 1950, and, in 1952, NPS appointed Arthur Jacobson, a ranger from Yellowstone National Park, Montana, as the monument's first superintendent. At the same time, NPS hired Robert Fuller as the monument's historian, the first African American hired for a professional position in the National Park Service; the next year, NPS held a racially-integrated public dedication ceremony at which Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay referenced "the Department of the Interior's commitment to making progress on civil rights."[51] According to the 2014 administrative history of George Washington Carver National Monument, the new park was "the first paying tribute to an African American, the first honoring an educator, the first recognizing achievement in agriculture, and, most importantly, the first promoting interracial peace."[52] Three years later, in 1956, Congress established Booker T. Washington National Monument, Virginia, and, in 1962, the Frederick Douglass Home, District of Columbia, now the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, was added to the National Park System. In 1974, the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, Alabama, was established, and, four years later, Maggie L. Walker

[49] Ibid., 116.
[50] Ibid, 116-117.
[51] Diane L. Krahe and Theodore Catton, *Walking in Credence: An Administrative History of George Washington Carver National Monument* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014), iv.
[52] Ibid., 32.

National Historic Site in Richmond, Virginia, became the first unit to commemorate the life and work of an African American woman.

Much of the impetus for the expansion of historic sites associated with the history of African Americans in the 1970s, particularly within the National Park System, was due to the work of the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation. Two brothers, Vincent DeForest and Robert DeForrest (they spelled their last names differently), founded the Institute in 1970 for the purpose of identifying and protecting sites associated with the history of African Americans. The Afro-American Institute quickly became well-connected with the federal government, collaborating extensively with the Department of the Interior and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The brothers' goal expanded in 1972 when they created the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation to incorporate a recognition of the role of African Americans in the celebrations of the nation's Bicentennial in 1976. Throughout the early and mid-1970s, their emphasis was to have sites associated with African American history identified as National Historic Landmarks. By the late 1970s, the Institute had successfully nominated more than sixty sites.[53]

The DeFor[r]ests' attention was drawn to Nicodemus in the early 1970s by the town's most nationally recognized resident, Verle Switzer. Switzer was born in Nicodemus in 1932, the child of descendants of original Nicodemus settlers. He attended high school in Bogue before matriculating at Kansas State University in Manhattan. He was a standout running back and defensive back on the Kansas State University football team, and, upon graduating in 1954, he was drafted by the Green Bay Packers as their top pick. He played two seasons for the Packers before serving for two years in the United States Air Force, after which he played professional football in Canada for three seasons. From 1959 to 1969 he worked for the Chicago Board of Education, then returned to Kansas State University as an administrator. He earned his master's degree in education while working there and retired in 2005. With his background in education and close family ties to Nicodemus, he became deeply involved in trying to protect and preserve the town during its period of decline in the late 1960s.

Switzer was a friend of Ira Hutchinson, a long-time recreation and therapeutic rehabilitation professional from Kansas. In 1972, Hutchinson was hired by the National Park Service as the Chief of Community Programs for the National Capitol Parks in Washington, DC; two years later, in 1974, he was appointed Superintendent of the National Capital Parks-East before being appointed Deputy Director of the National Park Service in 1977, the first African American to serve in that position.[54] Through Hutchinson, Switzer met with the DeFor[r]ests in the early 1970s and spurred in them an interest in the community's history. Marcia Greenlee, Historical Projects Director for the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, prepared the initial National Register of

[53] Fred Brown, Jr., "Preserving America's Black Historic Landmarks," *Washington Post*, February 20, 1989; https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1989/02/20/preserving-americas-black-historic-landmarks/68a2c680-7abd-42a4-85c7-68d87f9a03f9/.

[54] A brief biography of Hutchinson and a list of his many accomplishments can be found at https://aapra.org/Awards/Pugsley-Medal/Recipient-Biography/Id/53.

Historic Places (NRHP) nomination form in late 1974, nominating as a historic district only the village portion of the Town of Nicodemus, lying south of U.S. Route 24 between 1st Street on the east and 7th Street on the west. The NRHP nomination identified seven contributing buildings: Sayer's General Store and Post Office (1880), First Baptist Church (1908), Township Hall (1939), A.M.E. Church (1885), Fletcher Residence (now known as the St. Francis Hotel, 1878), an original town residence (unknown date), and the site of the Masonic Hall. In 1976, the National Park Service declared that the district had outstanding national significance and was a National Historic Landmark, expanding the listing to include the entire 161.6-acre township.

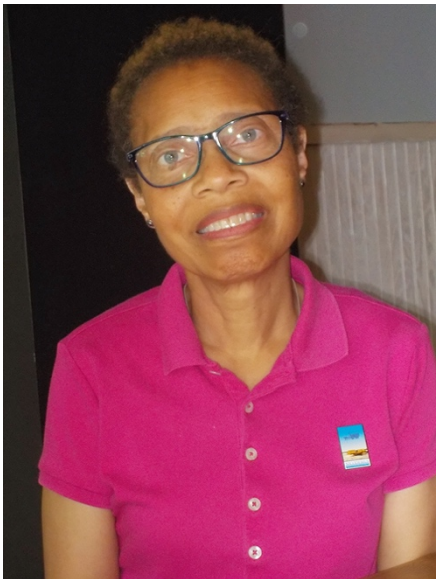

Figure 4. LaBarbara Wigfall, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Interest in the history of Nicodemus, as a component of the development of African American historical studies generally, grew quickly and in several directions from the late 1970s and into the 1980s. LaBarbara Fly (now Wigfall) and her then husband were graduate students at Harvard University engaged in the study of historical African American settlements of various types throughout the nation (Figure 4). With a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1979 and 1980, the couple conducted extensive research into many of the nation's towns established by African Americans, a project that continued into the early 1980s when they formed Entourage, Inc., a non-profit organization focused on research of African American communities. In the course of conducting research and giving presentations about that research at many different universities, they met Verle Switzer, who encouraged them to become more involved with Nicodemus.[55]

Their formal relationship with Nicodemus occurred through the National Park Service, which is required to monitor the condition of National Historic Landmarks and identify potential threats to their protection. Shortly after Nicodemus was designated a

[55] LaBarbara James Wigfall, oral history interview, September 2, 2020.

National Historic Landmark, the National Park Service raised concerns about the "accelerating rate of physical deterioration in the town."[56] In 1981, the Rocky Mountain Regional Office began to develop a project to record the town's cultural landscape using the standards that the National Park Service had developed for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). Although Nicodemus is located within the Midwest Region of the NPS, the Rocky Mountain Regional Office, created in 1973 and based in Denver, Colorado, oversaw National Historic Landmarks in the western portion of the Midwest Region; National Historic Landmarks in the eastern portion of the Midwest Region fell under the purview of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[57] With support from the Kansas State Historical Society and the Kansas State University College of Architecture, the National Park Service solicited a proposal from Entourage, Inc, to manage the project and lead the research efforts.

This extensive documentation project was, according to LaBarbara Wigfall, one of the earliest cultural landscape studies undertaken by the National Park Service. Although NPS has focused on preserving landscapes since its creation in 1916, the landscapes in National Parks such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Glacier were prized for their scenic and natural, not their cultural, value. It was not until the late 1950s that NPS began to pay closer attention to cultural landscapes with the production of the first Historic Grounds Reports. However, these early cultural landscape studies and treatment plans were for parks created for other purposes, primarily their historical associations. The concept of cultural landscapes as a distinct category of historic resources did not emerge until the late 1970s among those in academic and private historic preservation settings, initially with an emphasis on the work of nationally significant landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmsted. The National Park Service first defined cultural landscapes as a cultural resource to be managed in 1981. In 1989, NPS released the first *National Register Bulletin* for evaluating and documenting rural historic landscapes, defined so as to distinguish them from formal, designed landscapes. In 1992, the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation was created at Frederick Law Olmsted NHS in Brookline, Massachusetts, to provide education, planning, and technical assistance for the management of cultural landscapes.[58]

The field of cultural landscape preservation was, therefore, in its infancy in the early 1980s when work began to document Nicodemus. The effort being led by the Rocky Mountain Regional Office included research into the changes in the landscape of the town and the patterns of buildings, roads, and fields from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries. The results of the project consisted of four detailed drawings of

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[56] *Promised Land on the Solomon: Black Settlement at Nicodemus, Kansas* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Region), nd [1986], ii.

[57] Following the 1995 reorganization of the NPS, when the Midwest Region was expanded from ten to thirteen states, each of the seven regions had responsibility for the National Historic Landmarks within its region. Within the Midwest Region, National Historic Landmarks were the responsibility of the Park History Program, which was transformed into the History and National Register Programs. In 2019, the Park History program was separated from the Historic Preservation Partnerships Program, with responsibility, among other historic preservation initiatives, for National Historic Landmarks. Our thanks to Regional Historian Ron Cockrell for the clarification of this institutional genealogy.

[58] A valuable timeline of landscape preservation from the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation is available at https://www.nps.gov/subjects/culturallandscapes/upload/CL_Timeline_PCLP_2016-2.pdf.

the town that showed the presence and locations of buildings and landscape features in 1890, 1920, 1950, and 1983, together with a limited number of large-format photographs showing representative views of the town. The HABS documentation also included the first comprehensive historical study of Nicodemus' development, from its origins in post-Civil War Kentucky and its distinction from the slightly later Exoduster movement to its peak activity in the late 1880s when a railroad connection seemed imminent, through the town's decline in the twentieth century. More than just a story of the decline and fall of a prairie village, however, the book that resulted from the HABS study provided detailed information on everyday life in Nicodemus at various periods of the twentieth century, resulting in a story of resilience and survival in addition to a detailed analysis of architectural and landscape changes over time.[59]

The HABS study also provided invaluable photographic documentation of Nicodemus. Undertaken more than a decade before Nicodemus NHS was authorized, the HABS package includes original large-format photographs by photographer and architectural historian Clayton Fraser, and copies of historic photographs, of many buildings in the town in addition to the five that now constitute the park, together with landscape and general views of the township. The buildings that were included in the 1983 HABS survey range in condition from fully intact and in use to ruins in which only portions of walls remain. Many of the buildings that are part of the HABS photographic package for Nicodemus have since been demolished, their loss in part giving urgency to the creation of the park. In all, twenty-four buildings were photographed individually. In addition to the five buildings that now constitute the park (AME Church, First Baptist Church, Fletcher-Switzer House, School District No. 1, and Township Hall), these include:

- Dr. Stewart/Goins House, Washington Street; then in ruins
- Jerry Scruggs, Jr. House, Adams and Second Streets
- Jerry Scruggs House, Seventh Street; then in ruins
- Carrie Dabney House; then in ruins
- Fairview School, Second and Washington Streets
- Lloyd Wellington House, Adams and Second Streets
- Switzer Bunkhouse, Washington and Third Streets
- Joe Wilson's Post Office, South Avenue and Third Street
- Ace Williams Street, Fourth Street
- Charles Williams House, South Avenue and Fourth Street
- Calvin Sayers House, Madison Street
- Tim Lacey House, Block 35; then in ruins
- Clementine Vaughn House, Block 40
- Alexander G. Vanduvall House, no location given
- Henry Williams House, no location given
- Emma Williams House, no location given
- Mount Olive Church, South Street; then in ruins

[59] *Promised Land on the Solomon*.

- Mount Olive School, South Street; then in ruins
- John Edwards House, no location given[60]

While the National Park Service was documenting the history and landscape of Nicodemus, former Nicodemus residents were initiating an attempt to preserve it. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a group of former Nicodemus residents who had relocated to California and the Pacific Northwest established Nicodemus West, Inc. in 1977 to provide education and scholarships to those associated with the town with the intent of keeping Nicodemus intact.[61] The multi-year effort to secure HUD funding for a housing complex, also discussed in Chapter 1, was another attempt to assure the town's survival. The effort to protect the town's history, however, entered its modern phase in the 1980s with the efforts of Angela Bates and the establishment of the Nicodemus Historical Society (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Angela Bates, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Bates, a fifth-generation descendant of one of the original settlers of Nicodemus, was born in Nicodemus before her parents relocated to California when she was a young child. As a young adult in her 20s, she lived in Washington, D.C. when her cousin, Verle Switzer, was coordinating with the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation regarding the NRHP nomination for Nicodemus. In 1984, she relocated to Denver, Colorado, after her parents retired and moved back to Nicodemus. In the course of her frequent visits to Nicodemus in the mid-1980s, her interest in the town's history grew, and she encouraged her cousins to join her in collecting and preserving historical materials. She began conducting oral history interviews with extended family members

[60] Photographs of all of the buildings that were included in the HABS survey, together with drawings showing the evolution of the landscape from 1877 to 1983, can be found on the HABS/HAER/HALS pages of the Library of Congress website: https://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=Nicodemus&co=hh (accessed May 16, 2023).
[61] Ibid., 77.

and recording genealogical information. By the late 1980s, she was producing a newsletter about the history of Nicodemus, and, in 1988, she founded the Nicodemus Historical Society, incorporated in 1989 when she relocated back to Nicodemus.[62]

Bates worked assiduously from 1989 through the 1990s to generate awareness of Kansas' African American history in general and the history of Nicodemus in particular. In 1990, for example, Bates supported the effort to bring statewide recognition to Edward McCabe, the first African American elected to public office in Kansas when he served as Graham County Clerk in 1880 while living in Nicodemus. McCabe was then elected in 1882 as the Kansas State Auditor. In February 1990, during Black History Month, Kansas Governor Mike Hayden announced that a portrait of McCabe would be hung in the State Capitol, the first African American in Kansas to receive that honor. Bates was then invited to give a talk about McCabe and the history of Nicodemus at the unveiling ceremony at the Kansas State Capitol in October 1990.[63]

In addition to her work with the Nicodemus Historical Society, Bates founded a company, the Nicodemus Group, which contracted to produce historical and educational materials. At the same time, she traveled throughout Kansas and beyond to take part in conferences and give presentations about the history of Nicodemus, soon becoming the subject of newspaper and magazine articles that helped to spread the word of Nicodemus and its history even further.[64] In September 1991, the nationally-prominent *People* magazine published an article on Nicodemus, calling it "The Big Little Town on the Prairie" and praising its survival.[65] Through Bates' unceasing efforts, Nicodemus and its status as a National Historic Landmark gained national prominence through the early 1990s as Bates sought more concrete ways to preserve the community from further deterioration.

The possibility of Nicodemus being authorized as a National Historic Site was first broached in the late 1970s when Veryl Switzer was coordinating with the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation. Bates was then living in Washington, D.C. and met with Switzer and Ira Hutchinson, then serving as NPS Deputy Director. As Bates recalled, "Ira was the one that, pretty much, said that, out of all the National Historic Landmarks – African-American Landmarks – Nicodemus really should be a unit of the National Park Service. He was really the catalyst."[66] This possibility remained dormant throughout much of the 1980s but was reawakened in 1989 and 1990 as Bates worked to create the Nicodemus Historical Society and promote the town's preservation. As an editorial in the *Salina Journal* observed, Bates "has lobbied extensively in the capital,

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[62] Angela Bates, oral history interview, August 31, 2020.
[63] "Woman to Present Research on Black Community," *Salina Journal*, October 9, 1990, p. 3. See also "Good Morning, Kansas!" *Hutchinson News*, February 2, 1990, p. 23; "Edward P. McCabe," *Hutchinson News*, October 1, 1990, p. 4.
[64] See for example "'Home' Continues to Draw Its Children Back," *Salina Journal*, April 21, 1991, p. 1; "Nicodemus, Kan. Struggles to Remain A Citadel of Hope," clipping from *The Wall Street Journal*, June 11, 1991, in collections of Nicodemus National Historic Site; "Woman Devoted to Preserving Community Founded by Slaves," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 15, 1991, p. 12."
[65] Brief mention of the article is made in *Hays Daily News*, September 17, 1991, p. 3.
[66] Bates, oral history interview.

appearing before committees, visiting with lawmakers and making presentations at the Interior Department and the Congressional Black Caucus."[67] U.S. Senator Robert Dole (R-KS) visited Nicodemus several times and dined at the restaurant owned by Bates's aunt, Ernestine Van Duvall. In 1990, Bates, then working hard to increase awareness of Nicodemus' history among those interested in either African American history or Kansas history, contacted Dole, asking if he would be willing to sponsor a bill to create a Nicodemus National Historic Site. As Bates recalled, "he wrote back and said, 'Yes.' I was shocked! And – well, it did! It just happened so fast!"[68]

The first step was not to propose a bill to establish the historic site, however, but to identify funding that would allow NPS to study its feasibility and suitability. True to his word, Senator Dole worked quickly to find the necessary funds. In the late summer of 1991, as the Senate was preparing a spending bill for the Department of the Interior, Dole secured nearly $9 million for Kansas projects, a minor part of which was $15,000 for a Special Resource Study for Nicodemus National Historic Site that would evaluate the town's suitability and feasibility as a unit of the National Park System. Rather than create a separate line item for Nicodemus, however, the Interior Appropriations Bill, which President George H. W. Bush signed in November 1991, drew $15,000 from funds that remained unexpended from an unsuccessful feasibility study for a National Recreation Area at Wilson Lake, Kansas.[69] News of the appropriation spread quicky throughout Kansas, particularly in December 1991, when former Kansas Governor Mike Hayden, by then the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, visited Nicodemus in advance of the NPS study team. Hayden met with Bates and other members of the community and offered his support for the establishment of a national historic site as being good for the community and for the state: "'I hope it will be determined it will be good for the (National) Park Service.'"[70]

Work on the feasibility study began quickly. Staff from the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska, took part in an initial public meeting in Nicodemus in mid-January 1992, and then with members of a Community Task Group composed of a representative from each of the organizations and individuals owning a historic property in Nicodemus and one member each of the Nicodemus Township Board and the Graham County Commission. The Regional Office identified a study team led by Regional Planner Sändra Washington; other members of the study team included Regional Chief of Planning and Environmental Quality Al Hutchings, Homestead National Monument Superintendent Randy Baynes, Fort Scott National Historic Site Superintendent Steve Miller, together with Angela Bates and Kansas State Historical Society Archivist Dan Fitzgerald. As Washington recalled, the public meeting at the Township Hall was very well attended, "and I remember thinking that I have to remember that all of these people were just like my grandparents, so I was going to give them the same kind of respect I

[67] "Saving Nicodemus," *Salina Journal*, September 29, 1991, p. 4. Bates recalled that she attempted to gain support from the Congressional Black Caucus for the establishment of a national historic site at Nicodemus but was unsuccessful.
[68] Bates, oral history interview.
[69] "Nicodemus Clears First Hurdle" *Salina Journal*, November 18, 1991, p. 4. See also Sandra Washington, oral history interview, September 23 and October 21, 2020, who coordinated the feasibility study of Wilson Lake.
[70] "Hayden Sees Historic Significance of Town," *Salina Journal*, December 24, 1991, p. 1.

would give my grandparents. There was some hesitation; certainly, a lot of questions." At that meeting, Washington recalled further, most of the participants were in favor of the creation of a national historic site, thinking primarily of the benefits in terms of funding to help save and preserve the few remaining historic buildings: "I think they thought it was going to do much better things for them than it has, that it would really– that they would notice a change soon, that the Park Service would come in, and they would – and they would do things."[71] As Bates, recalled, "I was telling people why we should, because they didn't know. And the real impetus was the fact that we were losing the architectural fabric."[72]

In the months following the initial meeting in January 1992, Washington and the rest of the study team conducted additional research into Nicodemus and other historical African American communities in the West to better understand the history and significance of Nicodemus. At the same time, the study team examined what buildings would constitute the park and how it would be operated. Initially, six buildings were recommended for inclusion: Township Hall, AME Church, First Baptist Church, School District No. 1, St. Francis Hotel, and a small historic residence built by Jerry Scruggs, one of the original settlers. Early in the planning process, the owner of the Scruggs house, one of Bates' cousins, opted not to participate, leaving five buildings on the list of buildings to be included in the national historic site.[73] Bates convinced other members of her family, who owned the AME Church under an irrevocable trust, to donate the building to the Nicodemus Historical Society which, she argued, would help to spur the town's designation as a national historic site; the family trust completed this donation in 1993.[74]

The study team held a second meeting with the Community Task Group in February 1992, to discuss local issues and concerns and potential interpretive themes and activities. The study team prepared an initial draft of the suitability report in late July 1992, recommending that Nicodemus was appropriate for a national historic site given its national significance and that the buildings proposed for inclusion retained sufficient integrity. The study team then held a public town meeting to discuss management alternatives at the annual Homecoming celebration in early August. This was the first chance for the town's residents and those who lived elsewhere but had roots there to express concerns about the possibility of the town hosting a national historic site. Washington recalled having her own concerns about creating a national historic site in this remote and tiny community, particularly that "we [NPS] could come in and subsume the community" given its small size, "[a]nd that we would put our foot in it. We wouldn't be able to tell stories with any amount of sincerity." The town, she argued, was itself an artifact, a survivor of the nineteenth century that had almost no financial resources and few opportunities for partnerships. Without these opportunities, she recalled, "there isn't an understanding or a full appreciation of the weight of the federal bureaucracy, which is

[71] Sandra Washington, oral history interview, September 23 and October 21, 2020.
[72] Bates, oral history interview.
[73] Ibid. See also "Nicodemus Hopes to Join Tourism Wave," *Salina Journal*, May 10, 1992, p. 63.
[74] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the convoluted process by which the NPS finally secured title to the AME Church.

this agency who is coming in."[75] These concerns were raised again late in the summer of 1992 after the study team submitted its draft report for review by the Midwest Regional Office and the Washington Office. According to a summary of the study team's findings, the initial report found that Nicodemus was nationally significant and suitable, but the "site's feasibility was questioned," and the study team returned to work in the fall of 1992. A revised draft was completed in the spring of 1993 and included a study of the potential sociological impacts of federal involvement on Nicodemus.[76]

The final Special Resource Study report containing the results of the suitability and feasibility study was released for public comment in May 1993. The report included the determination that Nicodemus was a suitable and feasible addition to the National Park System, though with the reservation that a federal presence in the community had the potential to harm the town's social environment. The suitability of the town for designation as a national historic site was clear, as it embodied six significant historic themes identified by NPS: Ethnic Communities, Poverty Relief and Urban Reform, Civil Rights, The Reconstruction Era, The Farmer's Frontier, and Farming Communities. Nicodemus' feasibility as a national historic site was less certain, given the loss of several buildings that contributed to the original National Historic Landmark historic district. The Special Resource Study report put the matter bluntly: "Nicodemus in in jeopardy of being lost entirely," and, although the town's historical significance is beyond doubt, "the deteriorating conditions of some of the remaining historic structures limits the ability of the physical features to convey the story."[77] The study team identified four potential management alternatives: no federal action in Nicodemus; the town becoming an Affiliated Area; Nicodemus as a National Historic Site managed solely by NPS; and Nicodemus as a National Historic Site managed jointly by NPS and an Advisory Commission. The purpose of the Special Resource Study, however, was not to make a recommendation among the management options, but only to present alternatives for future consideration.

The ambivalence of the town's residents was clear throughout the report. The report explained that the town's buildings were deteriorating rapidly "with neither the funding nor the technical expertise available to the local historical society to stabilize and preserve the historic structures and character of the town." The town's residents wanted the buildings preserved and wanted to share the town's story with the public, "but with a large degree of private ownership," and "there are concerns about the effects a Federal presence will have on the community." The Special Resource Study report addressed the community's concerns directly in its "Social Impact Analysis," starting with the recognition that the most significant cultural resources of Nicodemus were not just the buildings but "the community of people that continue to live here, today. This body of people is indeed the 'resource' that makes Nicodemus unique and nationally significant." The stakes, however, were high, including the survival of the town:

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[75] Washington, oral history interview.
[76] Briefing Statement, Nicodemus Suitability/Feasibility Study, March 16, 1993; files of Nicodemus National Historic Site.
[77] *Nicodemus, Kansas Special Resource Study*, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, May 1993, p. 25.

> The community itself does not have the resources to tell its story and protect its historic buildings. If it does not receive help, the town will be gone: the structures will be lost and the human story will be fragmented, scattered throughout the country in the hearts and minds of those who once had ties to this small town. Eventually, the story, too will be lost.

The question, though, was the cost to the community that could come with this assistance. Any management plan, the report claimed, must "minimize the social impacts to this community by creating conditions under which Nicodemites themselves control the pace and manner of the change that is inevitable."[78]

In the summer of 1993, following release of the final suitability report, the Midwest Regional Office announced plans for a public workshop in Nicodemus to begin drafting legislation. The reason for a public workshop was to find a balance between the needs of the community and the interest on the part of Congress and NPS in preserving and protecting Nicodemus. According to an announcement of the meeting, "we are concerned that our efforts to preserve and rehabilitate Nicodemus will destroy the character and tradition of the town and its residents." The town's history of survival as the oldest African American community west of the Mississippi could "provide NPS with one of our most compelling interpretive stories. However, preserving and interpreting the story at the sacrifice of the living community is an outcome NPS would rather not gamble."[79]

Although the Special Resource Study concluded that Nicodemus was suitable as a national historic site in the summer of 1993, the issue of legislation to establish the site remained dormant throughout 1994. This is not to say that the proponents of Nicodemus' significance remained quiet, however. Angela Bates remained very active, continuing to conduct research and make presentations about the history of Nicodemus and develop educational programs and curriculum guides through her company, the Nicodemus Group. She brought additional recognition to Nicodemus in 1994 when she was one of three new appointees to the Kansas Humanities Council, and regional and national newspapers and magazines continued to run articles about the town. In October 1993, Bates and the Nicodemus Historical Society organized the first annual Pioneer Days, an event open to the public with local foods, presentations on the history of Nicodemus, and demonstrations of traditional crafts including horseshoeing that continued though 1996. In early 1995, Bates developed an exhibit on the Kentucky origins of the original Nicodemus settlers that opened at the Georgetown and Scott County Museum in Kentucky. In the summer of 1995, Bates garnered news for Nicodemus again when she was married to Barrie Tompkins, a farrier from Kentucky and an authority on and reenactor of the famous Buffalo Soldiers. Tompkins had taken part as a demonstrator and reenactor at the first Pioneer Days event in 1993, and the two were married in a nineteenth century Buffalo Soldiers wedding in late July during the annual Homecoming celebration. According to a news article about the event, Tompkins "is the first person

[78] *Special Resource Study*, 45.
[79] Undated memorandum (c. August 1993), re: Legislative workshop on Nicodemus, Kansas NHL, files of Nicodemus National Historic Site.

from Kentucky to relocate to Nicodemus since the first 350 [sic] settlers came here in 1877."[80]

The legislative wheels began to turn again in early 1995. Senator Dole continued to support the designation of Nicodemus as a national historic site, and, in February, he announced his intention to introduce legislation that year. The Senator's office told reporters that his hope to introduce legislation in February 1995, during Black History Month, had to be postponed due to changes in his staff but that "The support is still there. . .It's just a matter of logistics."[81] Almost another year passed before Senator Dole introduced the legislation. On January 23, 1996, Dole introduced S.1521 in the Senate, a bill to establish Nicodemus National Historic Site. In his introductory comments on the Senate floor, Dole opened with the observation that:

> Time, it is said, is the savior and nemesis of history. The savior because it is the very passage of time that creates history. The nemesis because that same passage of time obliterates history. Today, in Nicodemus, KS, a community is waging a losing battle against time.

After briefly reviewing Kansas' role in the years leading up to the Civil War, Dole identified Nicodemus as one of the most important settlements in the post-war migration of African Americans to the West. The town had been designated a National Historic Landmark, but that status "has not halted the gradual decay of this monument to the struggle of African-Americans for freedom and equality." He then went on to cite the dire warnings from the Special Resource Study about the fate of Nicodemus without substantial intervention: "It was that finding that prompted my legislation granting the town of Nicodemus, KS, national historic site status."[82] In comments to the press after introducing the legislation, Dole observed that "The free soil of Nicodemus allowed blacks to flourish. In my view, it is important to preserve that rich heritage so that future generations will understand the special place of Nicodemus in the settling of the West."[83]

Dole's bill was immediately referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and then to the Subcommittee on Parks, Preservation, and Recreation. The bill never made it out of the subcommittee, but, in April 1996, Representative Pat Roberts (R-KS) introduced an identical bill as H.R. 3256. Roberts' bill was referred to the House Committee on Resources, which, in turn, referred it to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Lands. On April 22, this Subcommittee requested comment on the bill from the Department of the Interior. No further action was taken on Roberts' bill, and no evidence of comments on the proposed legislation by the Department of the Interior has been located.

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[80] "Nuptials in Nicodemus," *Hays Daily News*, July 30, 1995, p. 1; see also "Wedding to Top Nicodemus Event," *Hutchinson News*, July 21, 1995, p. 3.
[81] "Earhart Birthplace, Nicodemus Slated for Historical Landmark, National Park Status" *Topeka Capital-Journal*, February 21, 1995.
[82] *Congressional Record-Senate*, S314, January 23, 1996.
[83] "Town Could Be Named Historic Site," *Salina Journal*, February 19, 1996, p. 1.

Dole then partnered with U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA) to introduce new legislation on May 1, 1996, as S.1720. This bill combined the establishment of Nicodemus National Historic Site and the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, Massachusetts, into one bill.[84] At the urging of Senators Kennedy and John Kerry (D-MA), the Senate passed the bill without having it referred to committee over the strongly-voiced objection of Senator Frank Murkowski (R-AK), who argued that approving the measure without having a committee consider it was irresponsible and a threat to existing units of the National Park System:

> I will continue to oppose the creation of any new units [until] the committee and the Congress come to grips with the reality of what we are doing to the National Park System by continually adding new units and ignoring the responsibility for funding. . .we are faced with another drain on the limited resources of the National Park Service without benefit of committee consideration. The superintendent and other personnel will have to be stolen from other units of the System and the funding will come out of the already strained budgets of existing units.[85]

Having passed the Senate, despite Senator Murkowski's objection, the bill containing both proposed units of the National Park System was sent to the House, which referred it to the Committee on Resources, then the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Lands on May 8, 1996. The bill then languished in committee through the summer of 1996. In September, the bill was incorporated into H.R.4236, the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996. This was a vast, sprawling piece of legislation that established five new units of the National Park System: Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Kansas; Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, Oklahoma; Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, Massachusetts; New Bedford Whaling National Historic Site, Massachusetts; and Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas. The Act also established eleven new National Heritage Areas, modified three existing National Heritage Areas, modified the boundaries of thirteen units of the National Park System, enacted a half-dozen land exchanges, authorized more than two dozen administrative actions, and enacted eight NPS administrative reforms, among many other actions. According to Representative Don Young (R-AK), the reason for such a massive piece of legislation was inaction on the part of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, which:

> stopped moving individual or even small groups of bills for months. This hostage taking became so bad that when a large package of bills was finally freed in that body and attached to a Presidio bill we sent them, we made a conscious decision to try to place as many of the bills stuck over there in this package. They followed suit.[86]

Although the independent bill to establish Nicodemus National Historic Site and the follow-up bill to join it with the New Bedford Whaling National Historic Site bill were referred to Congressional committees, there are no reports from any of those

[84] "Ted, Dole Unite," *The Ottawa Herald* (Kansas), May 3, 1996, p. 12.
[85] *Congressional Record-Senate*, S4587, May 2, 1996.
[86] *Congressional Record-House*, H12023, September 28, 1996.

committees. Likewise, the Omnibus Bill was the product of negotiation between Members of Congress and the White House, with no legislative record in the form of committee reports that described the legislative intent for the creation of Nicodemus National Historic Site. The House passed the bill on suspension of the rules by a vote of 404 to 4 on September 28, 1996, and the Senate passed the bill without amendment by Unanimous Consent on October 3, 1996. President William J. Clinton then signed the bill into law as Public Law (P.L.) 104-333 on November 12, 1996.

The establishment of Nicodemus National Historic Site constitutes Section 512 of P.L. 104-333. The legislated purpose of the park is "to preserve, protect, and interpret" the buildings and locations that represent the settlement and growth of Nicodemus and to interpret the role of Nicodemus "in the Reconstruction period in the context of the experience of westward expansion in the United States." The national historic site was to consist of five buildings: First Baptist Church, St. Francis Hotel, Nicodemus School District No. 1, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Township Hall, all within the 161.6 acres of the Nicodemus National Historic Landmark. Congress authorized the Secretary of the Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with individuals and public or private organizations and to provide technical assistance for the preservation of historic buildings and the cultural landscape and preservation planning of the historic site to owners of real property within the site or interested individuals or organizations who have entered into these cooperative agreements. Congress also authorized the Secretary of the Interior to acquire "such lands or interests in lands as may be necessary to allow for the interpretation, preservation, or restoration" of the five buildings that constitute the park, though only through willing sellers.

The passage of legislation that established Nicodemus National Historic Site clearly was a victory in many ways. Angela Bates and those Nicodemus residents and descendants who supported her for years, holding out hope that Congress would recognize the national significance of Nicodemus, were vindicated. At the same time, the elevation of Nicodemus to the status of a national historic site validated those historians who advocated for a recognition of the importance African Americans in the history of the West. In the aftermath of the legislation, optimism ran high within Nicodemus regarding the National Park Service; Sändra Washington recalled visiting the town with Regional Chief of Cultural Resources Craig Kenkel shortly after the legislation passed, when owners of the three privately-owned properties offered to sell to the National Park Service immediately.[87] A steady refrain throughout the early 1990s during and after the Special Resource Study had been that, although recognition as a National Historic Landmark was important, it did not come with any funding; legislation, the word went, would bring with it the money to restore the town's historic buildings. Nothing is ever that easy, however. The process of activating the park was a challenging one fraught with delays, and long-held concerns on the part of many Nicodemus residents about the impact of federal involvement resurfaced as the initial enthusiasm of some of Nicodemus' residents and of the National Park Service gradually waned. This story, at times a difficult and frustrating one, is the subject of the next chapter.

[87] Washington, oral history interview.

Chapter 3: Activation and Initial Planning

Nicodemus National Historic Site was authorized by Congress on November 12, 1996, while fall was transitioning over to a cold winter on the high plains. The process of activating a new park in Nicodemus was a slow one, as NPS and the residents of Nicodemus came to understand the challenges that lay ahead. Regional officials in Omaha were accustomed to new park activations stretching out to several years or more. Federal funding cycles often imposed significant delays, and the preparation of initial planning documents required assembling teams from multiple locations who had to arrange for suitable meeting times and wade through multiple revisions. If a Visitor Center had to be renovated or built, additional years could be tacked on; Brown v. Board of Education NHS across the state in Topeka, for example, finally opened to the public in the rehabilitated Monroe Elementary School building nearly a full decade after the park was established in October 1994. This is just how things work for new units of the National Park System, even in populous areas like Topeka with a clearly-defined mission.

Even more was this the case with Nicodemus, a tiny community surrounded by agricultural fields some twelve miles east of the nearest stoplight, where NPS owned no buildings and had a hopeful but uncertain relationship with the community's residents. As discussed in Chapter 2, participants in the feasibility and suitability study in 1992 and early 1993 were aware of the potentially damaging consequences of a heavy-handed federal presence on this small, tight-knit community with few resources. The combination of hopefulness and wariness on the part of Nicodemus' residents and far-flung descendants with regard to a federal presence—recognizing the need for federal assistance to preserve the community's built environment while seeking to maintain the independence and self-awareness as a historical entity that had sustained the town through the lean years of the twentieth century—continued at full strength in the months after the park's establishment in November 1996.

Initial Building Stabilization: AME Church

Much of the impetus for establishing Nicodemus NHS, on the part of both NPS and the town's residents, was to protect the few remaining historic buildings. Despite the potentially adverse impact of a federal presence on the independence of Nicodemus and its residents, all recognized, as stated in the Special Resource Study report that resulted from the suitability and feasibility study in 1993, that "Nicodemus is in jeopardy of being lost entirely." Clearly, the significance of Nicodemus resides primarily in the continuity and survival of the community from its origins in the 1870s to the present, but the buildings that date back to the earliest years of the town were the physical manifestation of that history that would allow NPS or others to tell the story of the community's history.

Concern over the fate of the former AME Church building continued throughout the few years leading up to the park's establishment in 1996, a focus that had several causes. First, its historical significance for the Town of Nicodemus is clear; one of the town's first limestone

buildings, it was built in 1885 for use as the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, whose congregation worshipped there until 1895. The building then served as the AME Church from 1910 to 1947, when the few remaining members of the congregation joined the First Baptist Church. It had remained vacant after 1947, serving as storage for farm equipment by the 1970s. Second, by the early 1990s, the building was rapidly deteriorating and was threatened with imminent collapse, following the loss of other significant historic buildings in Nicodemus. Third, Angela Bates, who was related to the owners of the building, Ada Bates and her son, Theodore, Trustees for the Double AA-B Family Living Trust, persuaded her cousins to donate the property to the Nicodemus Historical Society which, she hoped, would provide a foundational component for the anticipated establishment of Nicodemus NHS and engender Congressional support. The quitclaim deed by which the property was given to the Nicodemus Historical Society was executed on April 20, 1993, and filed with the Graham County Clerk on May 5.

In 1995, Bates requested that the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) visit the building and provide technical assistance regarding its protection and stabilization. In response, Preservation Architect Desmond Anyanwu traveled to Nicodemus in early June to look at the building, which he found to be in an advanced state of deterioration, particularly on the north side where the wall was crumbling, resulting, also, in a failure of the roof. Anyanwu attributed much of the damage to trees and shrubbery growing too close to the north façade of the building, allowing roots to undermine the wall. He recommended that the vegetation at the north and east (front) of the building be removed and a temporary covering placed on the roof and walls to protect the building from moisture. In addition, he recommended that the lawn be mowed and existing piles of debris be removed from the lawn to allow easier access to the building. These steps, he cautioned, though, were "only a bandage approach to the real problem," identified as the rehabilitation of the AME Church: "No vacant historic building can survive indefinitely in a boarded-up condition."[88]

In his letter report to Bates, Anwanyu observed that Bates' plan was to request that the Kansas Army National Guard conduct the stabilization efforts at the AME Church in the summer of 1995. This effort did not materialize, but the concept remained in the spring of 1996, when a preservation team led by NPS Senior Historical Architect Craig Kenkel, from the Great Plains System Support Office in Omaha, visited Nicodemus. Kenkel, joined by Chief of Maintenance Kevin Baumgard from Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and Bruce Kozlowski, a mason at Fort Larned National Historic Site, Kansas, led an inspection of Nicodemus as part the National Park Service review of National Historic Landmarks. Kenkel, Baumgard, and Kozlowski met with Anwanyu, together with representatives from the Kansas Army National Guard, the National Trust, the Kansas Preservation Alliance, the Nicodemus Township Board, the Nicodemus American Legion, a local contractor, and Angela Bates and Gil Alexander representing the Nicodemus Historical Society. Bates announced her hope that clean-up and stabilization work on the five buildings that were then being proposed for inclusion in the National Historic Site could begin during the summer of 1996.[89]

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[88] Desmond O. Anwanyu to Angela Bates, June 8, 1995; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 7.

[89] Nicodemus Stabilization Recommendations, attached to Trip Report, Senior Historical Architect, Stewardship & Partnerships Team, Great Plains Systems Office to Superintendent, Great Plains System Support Office, September 11, 1996; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.

Of the five buildings, the site investigation team determined that the Township Hall was in good condition, and the St. Francis Hotel had no obvious signs of deterioration or failure, though the team was unable to conduct an inspection of the interior. The School District No. 1 building, likewise, was in fair to good condition, though there was evidence that the roof leaked. The First Baptist Church was in fair to poor condition; the team observed that the east wall was leaning outward, despite an earlier application of four exterior buttresses, and water was entering through the roof of the tower, causing deterioration of the flooring. The AME Church, however, was "the most deteriorated of those inspected," and its condition was described as "extremely poor." The limestone block walls had been coated with stucco, much of which had fallen off, allowing the mortar to be washed away from the stone joints. Approximately fifteen feet of the north wall had collapsed, leaving the rest of the wall in a highly unstable condition. Substantial portions of the roof sheathing and framing had failed, which, combined with missing windows, allowed water into the building, causing additional deterioration of the floors and architectural finishes. As Kenkel concluded, "This structure is in a very fragile state and extreme care will be necessary to avoid exposing anyone to physical harm during stabilization work."[90]

Kenkel submitted his report, with detailed recommendations for stabilization of the AME Church, in early September 1996. Although the meeting participants had discussed the possibility of the Kansas Army National Guard conducting the stabilization work, Kenkel quickly changed plans and organized a preservation team from the Southwest Regional Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to travel to Nicodemus for the work. In late October, Kenkel approached Great Plains System Support Office Curator Carolyn Wallingford regarding an emergency review of materials that remined in the church's interior. In early November, Wallingford traveled to Nicodemus for an initial assessment together with Kenkel and Regional Landscape Architect Sherda Williams. This small team met with Angela Bates and with Bernard Bates, who owned the property adjacent to the church and who offered the use of his Butler building for temporary storage of artifacts. Wallingford's initial visit indicated the presence of potentially valuable artifacts in the vestibule, congregation hall, and pulpit areas of the church interior, but the church grounds had been used for dumping trash, including televisions, appliances, furniture, and tires. As she noted, the church had been abandoned for approximately fifty years, during which time it was subject to not just dirt and trash accumulation, but also to pest infestation, raising the possibility of contamination from hantavirus, a family of viruses first detected in Canada in 1994 and spread mainly by rodents, which could cause severe pulmonary and other diseases in humans.[91]

The passage of legislation establishing Nicodemus NHS less than a week later gave added urgency to efforts to stabilize the AME Church building and preserve its contents. Wallingford returned to Nicodemus on November 18 with a team comprised of NPS staff from throughout the Midwest Region, including from Effigy Mounds National Monument, Iowa; Fort Scott NHS, Kansas; the Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska; and Fort Larned NHS. Wearing face masks, full-body Tyvek suits, and other protective gear, the team applied disinfectants to objects and surfaces in accordance with curatorial guidelines. Work commenced

[90] Ibid.
[91] Combined Trip Report, Curator, Great Plains System Support Office to Superintendent, Great Plains System Support Office, January 10, 1997; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.

to remove large trash items from the ground surrounding the church and identify artifacts for salvaging from within it, including paper materials such as books and photographs, architectural fragments, stonework, and miscellaneous furniture (Figure 6). After an initial triage at the site, the artifacts were taken by truck to Gil Alexander's barn in Bogue for provisional storage until a formal evaluation and cataloging process could take place.[92]

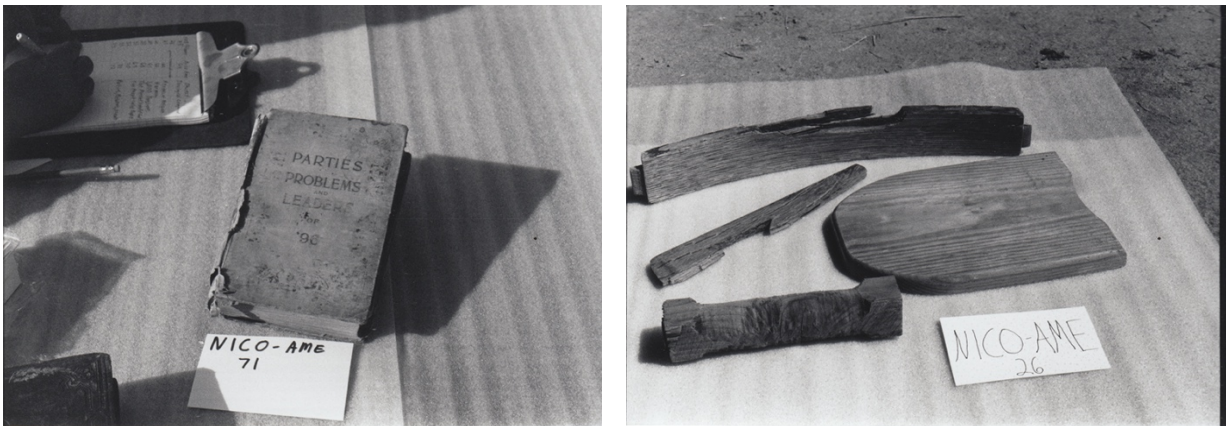

Figure 6. Artifacts recovered from the AME Church, 1997. Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20

This emergency curatorial work was a necessary first step in the overall effort to prevent the AME Church building from collapsing. Later in November, before a budget had yet been established for the new park, the Great Plains Cluster Management Team authorized $37,500 for emergency stabilization of the building. The Midwest Regional Office in Omaha assigned administrative responsibilities for the new park to Fort Larned NHS, where Superintendent Steve Linderer and the park's administrative staff set up the funding systems that would facilitate the rapid mobilization of staff from multiple offices and parks.[93] The funding allowed the preservation crew from the Southwest Regional Office in Santa Fe, which Kenkel had coordinated in September, to travel to Nicodemus for emergency work. The work consisted of shoring the limestone blocks of the failing north wall and covering the opening that had formed in the north wall as a result, boarding the windows, and installing a temporary tin roof. The roof was supported on two rows of four wooden posts sunk into the ground beneath the floor. Winter arrived early on the plains that year, and the crew members from New Mexico "placed the last sheet of metal on the roof, as the wind blew and the temperatures dipped to more than 25 degrees below zero."[94] As the newsletter for the Nicodemus Historical Society also noted, four of the five NPS crew members who traveled to Nicodemus in December were American Indians: "120

[92] Ibid. George Elmore, then a Park Ranger at Fort Larned NHS and now Chief Ranger, recalled that the debris was so thick in the AME Church that cleaning took place with shovels, not with brooms; telephone interview with the author, May 3, 2023.

[93] See chain of emails among Fort Larned Administrative Manager Debbie Frost, Regional Contract Specialist Debra Imhoff, and Great Plains Cluster Management Team Chair Chas Cartwright, November 26-27, 1996; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2. See also Briefing Paper, December 6, 1996; files of Nicodemus NHS, L60.

[94] *Nicodemus News Review*, Winter 1997 issue; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2. See also brief summary of preservation activities in email, Steve Linderer to multiple recipients regarding the Cultural Landscape Report, October 9, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 11.

years after the first Native Americans were on the townsite helping to save the lives of the starving Nicodemus settlers, four Native American NPS workers, representing various tribes were ironically working to save one of our historic structures." One of the crew members, Vernon Barney, summarized the significance of their participation: "It is the coming together of the two cultures that we have an opportunity to right the wrongs done to both, by telling the truth in defense of the great lies that have been perpetuated by the misrepresentation of our histories."[95]

General Management Plan: First Steps

After this brief but intense flurry of activity to stabilize the AME Church building, Nicodemus, throughout the winter of 1997, was quiet, with initial planning activities moving slowly and behind the scenes. An article in the *Wichita Eagle* newspaper in mid-February discussed the residents' questions about what would come next for the town and how the relationship between NPS and the town should be shaped. As the article observed, "Residents haven't decided what they want, and they are uncertain how much control they want to give the federal government." Angela Bates, president of the Nicodemus Historical Society, and Veryl Switzer, owner of the St. Francis Hotel, expressed hopes for development in the town, with the five buildings that constituted the park restored and maintained. This, they hoped, would lead to increased visitation and generate new economic opportunities for the town's residents. Others expressed concern that NPS might be moving too quickly, and urged a slower pace that would allow the residents to decide the best direction.[96]

In part due to the time of year when Nicodemus NHS was established, in mid-November, shortly after the start of the federal fiscal year, no funds had been appropriated for the park for Fiscal Year (FY) 1997. Although administrative responsibility for the new park had been assigned to Fort Larned NHS, the Regional Office in Omaha had not assigned any staff specifically for Nicodemus. However, barely a week after the enabling legislation was passed, Fort Larned Superintendent Steve Linderer envisioned sending interpreters from his staff to Nicodemus in the summer of 1997 "to operate out of a vehicle on weekends."[97] As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Midwest System Support Office Management Team appropriated $37,500 for the emergency stabilization of the AME Church. In addition, according to the Nicodemus Historical Society, the Regional Office authorized the use of funds in early 1997 to install a roadside sign for U.S. Highway 24, with the NPS arrowhead, to identify the presence of the park and also install a radio antenna that would broadcast basic information about Nicodemus for anyone who visited.[98]

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[95] *Nicodemus News Review*, Winter 1997 issue, page 3. Reference to the internal supporting structure for the roof is described briefly in email, Bill Hunt to Jim Creech et al., May 31, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[96] "Historic Nicodemus Awaits the Next Move," *Wichita Eagle*, February 17, 1997, pages 1-2; clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.
[97] Email, Steve Linderer to Tim Priehs, November 17, 1996; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[98] *Nicodemus News Review*, Winter 1997 issue, page 3.

In the absence of any other activities by either NPS or the Nicodemus Historical Society, the most vital aspect of the new park's activation was the development of a General Management Plan (GMP). Not only was it mandated in the park's enabling legislation, it was also seen as the venue in which all of the vexing questions regarding how much and what type of federal activities would be called for, what kinds of accommodations could be made for local input into the site's management and interpretation, and what would be the nature and extent of the technical assistance as proposed in the legislation when it came to stabilizing and preserving the five buildings that constituted the park could be addressed.

Figure 7. Regional Planner Sändra Washington, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Planning for the GMP began in the late winter and early spring of 1997, under a team led by Regional Planner Sändra Washington in Omaha (Figure 7). In early April, Washington contacted other members of the team: an interpretation specialist, a historian, a landscape architect, management and operations specialists, and a writer/editor, along with Angela Bates. In addition, the GMP team was aided by several consultants from various NPS offices to provide input on historic architecture, archeology, anthropology and ethnology, natural resources, land acquisition, and administration and budget development. The team first gathered for a three-day scoping meeting in Omaha in early June 1997, followed by a one-day visit to Nicodemus.[99] In June, following up on the scoping meeting, Superintendent Linderer announced a public meeting for Nicodemus residents and descendants and wrote to key leaders in the community inviting

[99] Email, Sändra Washington to multiple recipients, April 9, 1997; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 6. Team members at that time included Sherda Williams (Historical Landscape Architect, Regional Office), Bill Gwaltney (Interpretation, Fort Laramie NHS; Intermountain Region), Steve Linderer (Management, Fort Larned NHS), Felix Revello (Operations, Fort Larned NHS), Moriba McDonald (Historian, Chesapeake and Ohio NHP), Marilyn Gillen (Writer/Editor, Regional Office), and Angela Bates. Consultants were identified as Craig Kenkel (Historical Architect, Regional Office), Carolyn Wallingford (Curator, Regional Office), Bill Hunt (Archeologist, Midwest Archeological Center), Mike Evans (Regional Office, Ethnographer), Bess Sherman (Management, Brown v. Board of Education NHS), Fred Suarez (Property, Regional Office), Gay Flynn (Budget, FDO), Steve Cinnamon (Integrated Pest Management, Regional Office), and Superintendent Dick Lusardi (Fort Scott NHS and Kansas State Coordinator,).

them to a meeting in mid-July; it is unknown if this meeting took place. During the summer of 1997, however, the principal component of the GMP process was completing the Task Directive. Washington circulated a draft Task Directive in early July, setting out the basic information about the park, its contributing elements, and statements of purpose and significance. On the basis of the earlier scoping meetings, Washington then outlined the desired features and goals of the park and defined the ends toward which the GMP was oriented along with the likely problems and obstacles that the planning team would face. Washington described the preferred visitor experience as one that would encourage a connection between the place and "the people who built and sustained the town" among the visitors. She also intended for visitors to have an opportunity to learn about such topics as African American pioneers in the West, where they came from, and what they experienced, and to be inspired by an understanding of the "traditional values and the strength of the human spirit" that sustained past and current community members. The park's interpretive programs, moreover, "should be an expression of the values, pride, self-determination, and endurance shown by the people of Nicodemus in the face of economic and environmental hardships."[100]

Regarding the park's cultural resources and management, the Task Directive contained the recommendation that the GMP include provisions to minimize any impacts on the character of the community and recognize the "traditional and evolving character of the town as an expression of the connections and meanings of Nicodemus." In addition, the Task Directive advocated that the GMP should include means for providing encouragement and assistance to the owners of the five buildings that constitute the park and the development of basic visitor facilities. It noted that these goals, however, were closely related to the potential problems and obstacles that NPS would face in developing and managing the site. The Task Directive observed that Nicodemus remained a living community where people reside and from which they draw a part of their identity, and NPS, with its culture and bureaucracy, would be challenged "to balance the needs of the community for privacy and respect with the desires of the visitors." With the limited resources in Nicodemus, and with the five contributing buildings remaining in the hands of private entities concerned about government involvement, the Task Directive predicted that "establishing the infrastructure to support site management" such as visitor services, and also maintaining the buildings, would be difficult.[101] A final draft Task Directive was prepared later that month and submitted to the Kansas SHPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the final Task Directive was approved in August 1997.[102]

Throughout in the summer of 1997, the GMP team also worked on the plan's outline, with another team meeting planned for early September. These discussions resulted in a preliminary draft GMP in February 1998. This initial version set in clear terms the need for management guidance for the new park: "Due to the complete lack of visitor services, the plan will set the management direction for providing basic services in interpretation, protection, health and safety, as well as identify and set priorities the [sic] future planning needs for the site." The fundamental purpose of the GMP, according to this early version, was "to articulate a

[100] Draft Task Directive, General Management Plan, Nicodemus National Historic Site, attached to email, Sändra Washington to multiple recipients, July 3, 1997; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Task Directive, General Management Plan, Nicodemus National Historic Site, approved by Regional Director William Schenk, August 21, 1997; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 14.

vision for the site and provide a rational decision-making tool for future management teams.[103] The document, moreover, provided a useful summary of the significance of Nicodemus, the oldest remaining western town settled by African Americans:

> As a symbol of black pioneer spirit, Nicodemus represents a rejection of rampant racism and the overcoming of social, economic and natural obstacles. Nicodemus remains a lasting legacy that can be seen in the buildings that survive, that can be felt in the determination to succeed in business and agriculture, and in the proud memories that live in the hearts of residents and descendants.[104]

This initial draft in early 1998 also included the first reference to the "five pillars" of many African American communities that are represented at Nicodemus: home, church, school, business, and traditions of mutual assistance that led naturally to local governance. William Gwaltney, a long-time interpretation specialist, chief naturalist, and superintendent who was then serving as Assistant Regional Director for Diversity and Workforce Enhancement for the Intermountain Regional Office, recalled that, on his first visit to Nicodemus while serving on the GMP team:

> my interest, always, was the interpretation and what the themes might be. And one of the things I think I identified pretty early was that I saw in the structures remaining there, sort of, the essential building blocks of African American community. There was the farm. There was the church. There was the school. There were businesses. There was the idea that local government was made up of people from the community. … I identified these five, six things as sort of columns, if you will – structural columns for… African American community writ large.[105]

Identifying these five pillars was, he recalled, his principal contribution to the development of Nicodemus NHS and has remained a key component in interpreting the history of the town.

After repeating the management goals and obstacles and the principal interpretive themes for the park, including the five pillars of African American communities, the draft GMP presented four alternatives. The first, the No Action alternative, would leave the town largely untouched by a federal presence, only managing the natural and cultural resources of the National Historic Site in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The remaining three alternatives presented decidedly different management approaches, the first two of which carried through all subsequent drafts with minor revisions. The first, titled "Community," emphasized Nicodemus' self-determination by allowing the community, through mechanisms that remained undefined, to define the visitor experience, with either NPS personnel or consultants serving only to provide technical assistance for any preservation and interpretation actions initiated by the community and training for interpreters. The second, titled "Parks as Classrooms—Parks as Workshops," outlined a process by which Nicodemus would be an ongoing case study for local educators, interpreters, historians, and preservationists. The park

[103] Draft GMP, attached to email, Sändra Washington to Steve Linderer, February 5, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.
[104] Ibid.
[105] William Gwaltney, oral history interview, September 28, 2020.

would be staffed by a mix of NPS personnel and consultants for interpretation, administration, maintenance, and security, and would be focused more on research than on operations. For this alternative, partnerships would be crucial, with local individuals and entities and national organizations, including youth groups, as work crews. The third was simply titled "X," and was focused on documenting and interpreting the lives of historical and current Nicodemus residents. This alternative would require a "quality museum setting" with a strong reliance on oral histories and interpretation that sought to "understand the human dimension of Nicodemus over time." Under this alternative, NPS staff would primarily be involved in museum operations, and NPS would actively seek to acquire the five properties that constitute the park from willing sellers only.[106]

AME Church Acquisition

Following this initial draft, the Nicodemus GMP lay fallow for more than one and one-half years. Nevertheless, this period was a productive one for the park, as attention had returned to the AME Church building in early 1998. After the building was stabilized in December 1996 and the contents were removed and placed in temporary storage, a proposed second phase of collections preservation for the summer of 1997 was put on hold. With the dawning of 1998, a major obstacle to further work on the AME Church and its collections emerged in the form of uncertain ownership. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the owners of the building, Ada Bates and her son, Theodore Bates, trustees of the Double AA-B Family Living Trust, donated it to the Nicodemus Historical Society in 1993. In early January 1998, however, a Sheriff's Notice of Sale was filed, to sell the former AME Church property for back property taxes of $3930.44 that the Trust had owed prior to transferring the building to the Nicodemus Historical Society. During the weeks that followed, as NPS staff looked into the matter, it emerged that, because of changes to the Trust, its Quit Claim Deed to the Nicodemus Historical Society was invalid, and ownership of the former AME Church reverted to the Double AA-B Living Family Trust.[107]

With the Trust under pressure to sell the building for back taxes and the uncertain status of the building, which NPS crews had only recently stabilized, Steve Linderer and Felix Revello at Fort Larned NHS immediately began identifying possibilities for acquiring the building, including either Linderer or Revello personally purchasing it for the taxes owed and donating it to NPS. In the meantime, Sändra Washington contacted a staff member at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which had a loan program for acquiring historic buildings. Washington also suggested contacting the Kansas SHPO as well as the Trust for Public Land (TPL) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A non-profit created in 1972 by a group of lawyers, real estate professionals, and finance experts formerly associated with The Nature Conservancy, TPL works with local organizations to help protect historic places, initially by supporting local land trust organizations who endeavored to protect open spaces. The organization quickly developed what had become one of its core programs: purchasing land targeted for development and holding it

[106] Ibid.

[107] See summary of the AME Church acquisition process in email, Steve Linderer to multiple recipients, September 9, 2002; files of Nicodemus NHS. Linderer in his email notes that the Sheriff's sale was announced on March 25, 1998, but emails between Linderer and Sändra Washington on January 6, 1998 refer to the tax sale and potential strategies for acquiring the building; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.

until it could be transferred for public use with suitable protective easements in place. The organization began working with NPS on historic sites in 1989, including Weir Farm NHS, Connecticut and with NPS and the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research in Topeka, Kansas in advance of the authorization of Brown v. Board of Education NHS.[108] In an email to Linderer, Sändra Washington recommended contacting TPL regarding the AME Church building: "They can move very quickly. . .I would say that TPL is the fastest organization we can work with to get the church protected."[109]

Later that month, Washington and Regional Chief of Land Resources Fred Suarez wrote to TPL Regional Director Cynthia Whiteford, requesting assistance in acquiring the former AME Church building. Suarez explained that NPS did not have the authority to bid on the property at a tax foreclosure sale and that no funds had been appropriated for land acquisition. Whiteford replied in early February that TPL was willing to provide a grant of up to $10,000 to a qualified non-profit organization that would purchase the AME Church on behalf of TPL, which would then transfer it to NPS, assuming that NPS had conducted its necessary environmental and title due diligence to allow it to accept the property. Later in the winter, the tax foreclosure sale was scheduled for April 30, 1998, and, in early April, NPS informed TPL that Kansas Preservation Alliance, Inc. had agreed to acquire the property on behalf of TPL and NPS. Unfortunately, complications over the title caused Graham County to postpone the sale.[110]

Washington, Linderer, and Suarez continued to work together throughout the rest of 1998 to find ways to acquire the AME Church building. In late May, TPL agreed to extend its deadline for providing a grant to acquire the building to December 31, 1998, and the process gained momentum in the autumn. In September, Suarez contacted the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which agreed to waive the outstanding federal tax lien against Ada Bates on the church property as soon as NPS could certify that it had acquired the land. In October, Suarez negotiated with the Bates family, who agreed to sell the property directly to NPS. The Trust for Public Lands then agreed to support the sale to NPS with a grant of up to $10,000. Later that month, the Graham County Appraiser's Office provided an assessed value of $675 for the land but not the building; as Washington recounted the conversation she had with them, the staff member told her that "the county was not so hard up that they would have to assess a church that was falling down."[111] In November, with assurance from TPL of a grant for up to $10,000, Suarez made an offer to the Double AA-B Family Living Trust to purchase the property for the fair market value of $2,500. In a letter to TPL Regional Director Cynthia Whiteford, Suarez announced the offer and explained that a portion of the remaining $7,500 in grant funds would be used to pay for attorney's fees to close the deal and clear the title. The Bates family then executed the deed on December 7, 1998, and the closing was held on December 21, 1998. The

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[108] Bruce G. Harvey and Deborah Harvey, *Telling a Story of Struggle: Administrative History of Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, Kansas* (National Park Service, Omaha, NE, 2021), 30-31.
[109] Email, Washington to Linderer, January 6, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[110] Cynthia M. Whiteford to Sändra Washington and Fred Suarez, February 13, 1998; Margaret J. Madden to Fred Suarez, April 2, 1998; Madden to Kansas Preservation Alliance, Inc. c/o Jody Craig, April 7, 1998; James A. Loach to Craig, April 16, 1998; Loach to Whiteford, April 16, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[111] Email, Sändra Washington to Fred Suarez, October 23, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also Whiteford to Washington, October 22, 1998; Suarez to Bernard Bates, October 15, 1998; IRS, Kansas-Missouri District to Suarez, October 3, 1998; Whiteford to Washington, May 29, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS.

deed was filed with Graham County on December 22, 1998. NPS agreed to place a plaque in the AME Church building in recognition of the grant from the Trust for Public Land.[112]

Return to Planning

After the excitement of acquiring the AME Church in 1998,1999 was a quiet period for Nicodemus. In early November of that year, however, Sändra Washington contacted the GMP team members, noting that "It is time to pull this GMP out of the file cabinet and dust it off."[113] The GMP team met in Hays in mid-February 2000, and again in Omaha in early April. By late March a revised draft was available for review and contained four alternatives that were largely unchanged from those of the 1998 draft GMP. For this draft, completed after NPS had acquired the AME Church, the team identified actions and conditions that were common to all four alternatives, including NPS assurances that it would stabilize the five buildings that constitute the park, that interpretive messages by radio would be available, and that visitor parking would be on existing roads. The GMP team continued to meet and to exchange comments and revisions by email through the spring and summer of 2000, the principal development coming in the identification of management zones or areas. This work resulted in a substantially revised draft in September 2000 with nine management areas, each of which was a conceptual goal overlaid with spatial placements that varied for the several alternatives. Each management area was then described in terms of four categories: visitor experience, resource condition, development, and community experience that included an awareness of the need to maintain a positive relationship between NPS and the town's residents. The nine management areas were:

- Education/Research
- Restoration
- Support
- Traditional Use
- Recreation
- Story
- Spiritual
- Preservation
- Orientation

These management areas were then applied to six alternatives. These included a preferred alternative, the No Action alternative, and four others. The No Action Alternative (Alternative A) and Alternatives B (Community), C, (Nicodemus Academy) and D (Museum Experience) were largely the same as in the previous draft GMP. The fifth alternative, dubbed Stewards and Stories, sought to emphasize "the Nicodemus story and the experiences of its residents from the core of a cooperative interpretive and development program." In this alternative, NPS would

[112] Suarez to Trustees of the AA-B Family Living Trust, November 5, 1998; Suarez to Whiteford, November 9, 1998; Suarez to Graham County Abstract and Title Company, November 24, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also Memorandum, Chief, Land Resources to Superintendent Nicodemus NHS, January 22, 1999; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 10.

[113] Email, Sherda Williams to Sändra Washington, November 10, 1999; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 6. Williams was replying to, and quoting from, an earlier email from Washington.

provide basic facilities, services, staff, and technical assistance for preservation and interpretation, but would sell the AME Church and would not acquire the other four buildings unless they were in danger of being lost and only from willing sellers. Likewise, NPS would not stabilize the five buildings unless they became threatened. Visitor contact and basic orientation would be available year-round at a small NPS visitor center, and NPS would provide basic interpretation services. The Preferred Alternative called for greater NPS participation, in collaboration with the Nicodemus community. This partnership "would sustain the balance between community viability and the community's emotional connection to place while ensuring preservation of the significant resources." The AME Church would remain in NPS ownership, and the remaining four buildings would remain under local ownership, though NPS might seek preservation easements and short-term acquisition in order to stabilize the buildings, and then sell them back to local owners with deed restrictions. The National Park Service would also collaborate with Nicodemus residents to develop an interpretation plan and an introductory experience for visitors, and "would work with the community to develop and provide visitor contact experiences with privately owned NHS properties."[114]

Following this new draft in the summer of 2000, the GMP again lay fallow until the following spring and underwent only occasional efforts at completion into the summer of 2001. Dennis Carruth entered on duty as the park's first Superintendent in March 2001, and helped to spur some renewed activity on the GMP. Carruth provided initial thoughts on the process in June 2001, with questions regarding the degree of public participation in the GMP process, and, in early July, produced the first GMP newsletter for Nicodemus. Without providing any details regarding the alternatives, Carruth outlined the general need for the GMP in the newsletter and invited the public's comments and participation. In recognition of the concerns of the local community, the newsletter reminded readers that NPS would acquire properties in Nicodemus only from willing sellers with the consent of the landowner, using a larger, bolded type to emphasize the point.[115]

By the summer of 2001, Fort Larned NHS and the Regional Office had already contracted for and begun work on the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) and the Historic Structures Report (HSR) for Nicodemus NHS, spurring renewed interest in completing the GMP. In late July, contractors for both projects met with NPS staff from the Regional Office and Fort Larned NHS, together with Superintendent Carruth, to discuss preliminary findings regarding significance and integrity of architectural and landscape resources, and to "double-check against the GMP preliminary alternatives to make sure we were not in conflict with implied treatments." The group offered minor modifications to two of the draft alternatives, but also had more searching questions regarding the overall approach of the GMP. In particular, the participants suggested the need for greater clarity regarding the nature and the role of the surrounding community. "If we base GMP purpose and significance on the continuity of the population," according to a summary of the discussion, "does the NHS lose significance when the population dies?" As a corollary to this question, the meeting participants questioned "who makes up the Nicodemus 'community'? What are the boundaries? Is [sic] the residents, absentee landowners,

[114] Draft General Management Plan, September 19, 2000; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[115] Emails among Dennis Carruth, Sändra Washington, and Sherda Williams, June 15, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12. See also Nicodemus National Historic Site, General Management Plan Newsletter, Issue No. 1, July 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 6.

descendents [sic], township and county residents? Who has 'ownership.'? Potentially, the 'community' may change between the alternative [sic]." Finally, recognizing the potential impact that NPS could have on Nicodemus, the participants urged that the GMP "more clearly articulate the relationship between the community and the NPS. How much interference in the social fabric and daily lifestyle will each alternative entail?"[116]

These questions remained unanswered through the fall of 2001 as NPS staff continued to discuss revisions to the GMP in light of ongoing planning projects. In a discussion by email regarding a list of required baseline studies to include in the GMP, Midwest Region Architectural Historian Dena Sanford observed that the original NHL nomination was, by current standards, insufficient and did not identify a period of significance for Nicodemus. In a lengthy response, Midwest Region Historian Jill O'Bright, then conducting initial research for the park's Historic Resource Study, explored the ramifications of assigning a period of significance for a living community. By framing the importance of Nicodemus as the only remaining African American community among those established in the West after the Civil War, O'Bright postulated, the park's enabling legislation implies a period of significance that continues to the present. With the creation of Nicodemus NHS, however, Congress ran the risk of fundamentally altering the community's nature: "What if, for example, the site's establishment results in a mixed-race town simply because some of the NPS employees who might choose to live there would be non-black? . . . At that point, has the character of the town changed to the point that it is no longer significant?" Based on her historical research, O'Bright suggested the 1930s as a defensible end point for the period of significance. This was the decade when many Nicodemus descendants found that they had to leave the town to find the kind of economic opportunities that their forebears had found in Nicodemus in the nineteenth century. By the mid- and late twentieth century, O'Bright argued, the decline was accelerating despite the HUD housing in the 1970s and the creation of the park in the 1990s, which, she believed, were short-term supports rather than harbingers of stabilization and growth. Instead of being based on its status as a viable community, O'Bright concluded, Nicodemus' significance

> is that it continues to be 'home' for the homesteaders' descendants and their families. Even though they have found ways to establish themselves as political, social, and economic equals wherever they live, the extended Nicodemus community continues to think of Nic [sic] as home, continues to come back to re-energize, to re-establish their ties to this place which, for them, was their 'birthplace of freedom.' Based on that, the period of significance arguably continues, and will continue as long as the extended community continues to retain the geography and the concept of 'Nicodemus as home.'[117]

The next draft GMP was released in June 2002. In the wake of discussions since the last complete draft in September 2000, the number of alternatives had been reduced to four: a No Action Alternative, Alternative 2—Community, Alternative 3—Learning Center, and Alternative 4—Joint Stewardship, the NPS Preferred Alternative. This draft of the GMP also included, for the first time, an Environmental Assessment. Similar to the Preferred Alternative developed for

[116] Unsigned meeting summary, with initials dated August 3, 2001 and August 4, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 6.
[117] Email, Jill O'Bright to Dena Sanford et al., November 16, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.

the September 2000 draft GMP, the 2002 Preferred Alternative called for full collaboration between NPS and the community while emphasizing Nicodemus' status "as a living, evolving community." Continuing from the earlier draft GMP, under this Preferred Alternative, NPS would seek to acquire a portion of the Roadside Park lying immediately north of Township Hall and adjacent to U.S Route 24, for a visitor contact facility and would acquire or lease another space within Nicodemus for use as an administrative center. In-depth interpretation of the Nicodemus story would take place at the St. Francis Hotel, School District No. 1, and First Baptist Church, while the AME Church would remain as a place for spiritual contemplation. The National Park Service would seek to acquire the three buildings in private hands—St. Francis Hotel, School District No. 1, and First Baptist Church—from willing sellers but, until then, would seek façade preservation easements to allow for the protection and stabilization of the buildings.[118]

Following this draft in September 2002, the Nicodemus GMP was subject to further discussion and review into early 2003. Denver Service Center (DSC) Planner Marilyn Hof circulated another revised draft GMP in April 2003, and, for the first time, included a range of internal NPS reviewers in several different specialties beyond the immediate GMP team as well as the Midwest Regional Office, the SHPO, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). Later in April, NPS Washington office Historian Laura Feller and Park Cultural Landscape Program Lead Lucy Lawliss provided extensive comments from their respective perspectives, asserting the need for greater clarity of the historic context and of the nature, significance, and impacts to the cultural landscape. Lawliss, in particular, questioned the provision for NPS to acquire a portion of Roadside Park for a visitor contact station: "If this is a traditional open space, it would be impaired by the addition of an NPS structure. . . .there has to be a more appropriate place for a development of this nature."[119] Heritage Preservation Services Senior Resource Planner Sue Renaud, an archeologist by training, urged a greater awareness of the potential impacts to archeological resources, particularly in discussions of stabilization of the five buildings, and the need for investigations earlier in the process rather than as mitigation that might stop work.[120]

In early May, the Regional Office provided its comments, drawing, in part, on the earlier comments by Lawliss, Feller, and Renaud. The Regional Office's review contained searching critiques of the plan and raised challenging questions. These included procedural questions such whether NPS has the authority to expend funds for stabilization as described and recommended in the GMP on buildings that it does not own or otherwise have an interest.[121]

On a broader, more fundamental level, the Regional Office questioned the sustainability of the park given the proposed hand-off approach of the preferred alternative and the history of the community in recent decades. In a lengthy discussion about one of the alternatives that was

[118] Nicodemus National Historic Site, General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, June 2002; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 14.
[119] Memorandum, Lucy Lawliss to John Haubert, as an attachment to email from Lawliss to Haubert, April 24, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12. See also email, Laura Feller to Haubert and Dwight Pitcaithley, April 17, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 8.
[120] Email, to Haubert, April 24, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.
[121] Memorandum, Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities and Lands to Regional Director, Midwest Region, May 7, 2003 (draft); Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.

considered earlier and eliminated from further evaluation, that the National Historic Site be expanded to include the entire National Historic Landmark boundary, the Regional Office questioned the assumption for removing it from consideration: that to do so "could have converted the town into an outdoor exhibit, hindered the future of Nicodemus as a living community, and destroyed the community's hallmark of self-determination." In response, the reviewer for the Regional Office observed that

> These reasons seem quite peculiar given present circumstances that the town's population has been reduced to fewer than 20 residents, mostly over the age of 60, that there are only about 60 residents in the entire township, and this sparsely populated county has been losing population steadily for decades. Although there is a dearth of information about the NHL in the plan, the plan indicates on page 18 that 'many of the buildings, particularly in the commercial blocks of Nicodemus, have been removed or torn down.' Would this NHL even qualify as an NHL if it were reevaluated today, based on a loss of integrity" Is this the reason the plan does not describe the cultural landscape? Shouldn't the plan acknowledge that without more NPS intervention than this plan proposes, this town will not only cease to exist as a community in a few years, but the few surviving buildings within the NHL other than the five in the current NHS will be lost?. . . . We appreciate the need to be sensitive to local feelings, but it would be a shame to lose an opportunity to preserve as much of the NHL as possible.[122]

In June 2003, a revised draft GMP was produced and released to the public for comment, and NPS held a public meeting in the Township Hall on June 30. Approximately fifteen people attended the meeting, with Sändra Washington, Sherda Williams, and Felix Revello representing the NPS. The attendees had several questions about the ownership of Roadside Park, and the benefits and drawbacks of NPS leasing Township Hall. According to notes taken by Sherda Williams, the meeting generated a lively discussion, and the attendees wanted to take more time to digest the report than the forty-day review provided, requesting that the deadline for comments be extended to August 11, after that year's Homecoming celebration.[123] After the Nicodemus Township Board submitted a formal request to the Regional Office, an extension of time was granted that allowed comments until August 15. In early August, the GMP team gave an informational talk at the annual Homecoming Celebration. Later in August, Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Linderer met with the pastor and trustees of the First Baptist Church, who expressed their strong preference that their church be removed from the Story Management Zone, which would have allowed for NPS restoration as an area designated for interpretation and visitor contact, and, instead, place it in the Traditional Use Management Zone. Their feelings, Linderer, explained, "were that the old church is one of the most important historic buildings to the community and should be used by the congregation for church purposes, rather than general use by the NPS." The First Baptist Church representatives understood that NPS funds could not be used for restoration but only for stabilization, but Linderer expressed assurances that NPS "would work with them to help find grants or other funding for restoration of the building." Once

[122] Ibid.
[123] Handwritten meeting notes, attached to facsimile transmittal, Sherda Willaims to Felix Revello, July 3, 2003 Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 8.

the original church had been thus restored, the pastor and trustees tentatively approved leasing the more recent portion of the church to the NPS for park purposes.[124]

With these final comments and decisions in place, Sändra Washington oversaw the production of the final GMP in September 2003. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued on September 30, 2003, recommended by Steve Linderer, who was again Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS as well as Fort Larned NHS following Carruth's transfer to another park, and approved by Midwest Regional Director Ernest Quintana. The FONSI identified the Preferred Alternative as Joint Stewardship, in which Nicodemus "would retain its character as a living, evolving community," with the public invited into the community in several areas for onsite interpretation and community stories. The National Park Service "would present interpretive programs, workshops, and skill development opportunities in consultation with community residents and organizations." The FONSI noted that two of the provisions from the most recent draft GMP had been changed in response to public comments. First, NPS would no longer seek to acquire a portion of Roadside Park for a visitor contact facility because the community had expressed its desire to retain traditional uses there. Instead, NPS "would lease or build a facility for administration and visitor contact as close to the historic site as possible." Second, the GMP no longer included the possibility of acquiring the First Baptist Church. Other provisions included seeking a cooperative agreement from the Township Board to continue to allow public access to the Township Hall, providing appropriate curatorial storage for objects associated with Nicodemus, and conducting archeological investigations in both the National Historic Site and the National Historic Landmark.[125] The DSC then oversaw the final editing and production of the GMP, released in April 2004.

Cultural Landscape Report

At least from the early 1980s, during the HABS study and the book that resulted from it—*Promised Land on the Solomon*—those who sought to understand Nicodemus recognized the need to approach the story of this place with an eye to the landscape. The place that the first settlers from Kentucky encountered was strikingly different from what they had known: flat, dry, and largely treeless. These original settlers, who took up residence on a 160-acre tract, created a village center which eventually included commercial and residential buildings surrounded by agricultural fields. The ongoing relationships among buildings, landforms, vegetation, and waterways were important to the development of the town and remain import for interpreting the history of the town and its residents through time. An awareness of the importance of the landscape informed the General Management Plan. Its discussion of the sources that contribute to the significance of the site observed that the town center "is surrounded by an open farming landscape. The exposed location of the town is probably the most compelling and consistent characteristic."[126]

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[124] Memorandum, Superintendent, Fort Larned to Files, August 22, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 8.
[125] Finding of No Significant Impact: General Management Plan, Nicodemus National Historic Site, approved by Midwest Regional Director Ernest Quintana, September 30, 2003; files of Nicodemus NHS, D18.
[126] *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas: General Management Plan* (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2004), 6.

As discussed in Chapter 2, NPS had only recently identified cultural landscapes as a resource to be managed when work on the HABS documentation was completed. By the time that Nicodemus NHS was established, however, NPS procedures for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of cultural landscapes were well-developed. The principal vehicle for identifying and outlining management of cultural landscapes was the Cultural Landscape Report (CLR), a large and multi-disciplinary undertaking that involved extensive historical research and field surveys. In the Midwest Regional Office, Historical Landscape Architect Sherda Williams, who entered on duty in June 1992 after working for several years in the private sector, served as coordinator for CLRs throughout the region. Williams, who was part of the GMP team led by Regional Planner Sändra Washington, took a particular interest in the CLR at Nicodemus, for which work took place simultaneously with the GMP. At Williams' direction, Regional Cultural Landscape Inventory Coordinator Roberta Young began work on the first phase of the CLR, a Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI). Young traveled to Nicodemus in the summer of 1997 to conduct a reconnaissance of potentially significant cultural landscape features throughout the entire 160-acre Township.[127] The CLI included the completion of individual Cultural Landscape Inventory survey forms for the five buildings that constitute the park, together with the sites of other buildings that had been demolished, cultural features such as the town's baseball field, Scruggs Grove (where Emancipation/Homecoming celebrations had been celebrated through the mid-twentieth century), churches and cemeteries, roads, and two waterways: Spring Creek and the South Fork of the Solomon River.[128]

A preliminary report of findings, prepared to assist the GMP team with its work, provided an initial assessment of the contributing elements of Nicodemus as a cultural landscape. The spatial organization of the town was a type of rural hamlet, where most of the town's residents, rather than living in the town center, "lived in dispersed rural homesteads in close proximity to the cluster or central place. Yet they represented a definable community of rural neighbors, with strong kinship ties, who regularly used the store, school, and other services of the hamlet. This type of hamlet area was typical of the upland South." The town's buildings, after the original dugouts and sod houses, were typically constructed of readily-available stone rather than timber, which was more scarce in this arid region. The town, historically, was largely treeless. Much of the existing vegetation was the result of a beautification movement begun in the 1940s under the auspices of the local 4H Club, including the grove of Siberian elm trees that surround Township Hall. Much of the town outside the center, however, "is a loose cluster of buildings with open visual connections to the surrounding agricultural land—a consistent feature through time." This is a consistent theme throughout the initial report, which also observes that "The exposed, openness of the town is probably the most character-defining feature historically."[129]

The following year, 1998, Sherda Williams prepared a draft project statement for the CLR which she delivered to Fort Larned Superintendent Linderer in June, in time, she hoped, for

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[127] Memorandum, Roberta Young to Superintendent, Fort Larned, June 11, 1997; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 7.
[128] Individual inventory forms can be found in Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12. See also "Cultural Landscapes [sic] Inventory—Level I: Nicodemus National Historic Site, July 29-30, 1997," c. 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2215.
[129] "Cultural Landscapes Inventory," passim.

the FY 1999 budget cycle.[130] Despite Williams' efforts, CLR funding was not secured until FY 2000. The contract was awarded to Bahr Vermeer & Haecker, Architects (BVH), that, in turn, subcontracted to Oculus, a small firm focused on landscape architecture, urban design, and historic preservation, and to Rivanna Archaeological Consulting. The project kicked off in December 1999 with a meeting among the participants in Nicodemus.[131] In preparation for the meeting, Williams and Fort Larned Chief Ranger Felix Revello informed the BVH and Oculus contractors of the political situation in Nicodemus, where residents were concerned about government trespass on, and held fears of government condemnation of, private property. Williams, Linderer, and Revello also planned for an informal open house at Township Hall while the contractors were in Nicodemus, giving them a chance to meet on a casual basis with residents and explain the process in a non-threatening way.[132] The owners of the buildings that constitute the park, aside from the AME Church, were also asked to sign a form that authorized NPS's contractors to survey and mark the boundaries of the buildings, with clarifications that this process in no way meant that the government was taking a material interest in the property.[133]

The Oculus team for the CLR included landscape specialists and historians and planned to conduct oral history interviews as part of the project. Luis Torres was subcontracted to conduct the interviews. Arrangements for archival and oral history research were discussed at the kickoff meeting in December 1999, including the suggestion from Oculus Principal in Charge Rob McGinnis that the BVH team contract with Angela Bates on an hourly basis for research assistance and provide additional funds to the Township board for assistance with oral history.[134] The BVH team then conducted research for the project through early 2000, and completed a draft CLR that was distributed for public review in the fall of that year.[135]

Only two sets of comments for this initial draft CLR were located during the present research. James Bates, on behalf of the Nicodemus Township Board, offered clarification on several historical points but had no further substantive comments.[136] The Kansas SHPO, however, offered more extensive and challenging comments, most of which revolved around the thorny questions of the statement of significance and the period of significance. The original National Historic Landmark nomination, the SHPO noted, "is very brief and contains errors," requiring corrections that the CLR did not contain. The repetition of these errors then became

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[130] Emails between Sherda Williams and Steve Linderer, June 18, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS, H22. See also emails between Williams and Connie Slaughter regarding budgets and proposal language, July 27-28, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 2.
[131] Emails among Williams and Linderer, November 5-10, 1999; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.
[132] Emails between Williams and Dan Worth (BVH), November 10-11, 1999; files of Nicodemus NHS, H22.
[133] Copies of letters with the forms attached to Verle Switzer (St. Francis Hotel), Freddie Switzer (First Baptist Church), Robert Brogdon (School District No. 1), and James Bates (Nicodemus Township Hall), all dated December 16, 1999; in files of Nicodemus NHS, H22. The executed forms, dated between December 20 and 29, 1999, are in Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 10.
[134] Meeting Minutes, in Memorandum, Dan Worth to Sherda Williams et al., December 21, 1999; files of Nicodemus NHS, H22.
[135] Duplicate letters dated December 26, 2000 from Fort Larned Acting Superintendent Felix Revello to Graham County Historical Society, Nicodemus Township Board, the Nicodemus Historical Society and Angela Bates, Graham County Commissioners, the Kansas State Historical Society, and owners of the private houses that constitute the park, announcing that the comment period for the review of the draft CLR was being extended to January 10, 2001; files of Nicodemus NHS, H22.
[136] James R. Bates to Steve Linderer, January 15, 2000 [sic]; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.

part of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) evaluations, which the SHPO argued needed to be clarified and strengthened. Even more challenging, however, were the recommendations for a period of significance for the town, variously listed as 1877-1888 and 1889-present. The latter period of significance reflected the NPS' growing understanding of the significance of Nicodemus as a living town representing a continuation of the historical impulse that led to the town's creation. The SHPO, however, focused on firm boundaries for the purposes of future determinations of effect under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, typically defined a period of significance that ended fifty years before the present. "It is important," the SHPO concluded,

> to include in a nomination information from the more recent past, but the events are typically not included in the period of significance. We recommend you choose one period of significance, for instance 1877 to 1950, then divide the text chronologically to discuss the changes which occurred in the community.[137]

The BVH team began work on extensive revisions to the CLR throughout the spring and summer of 2001 while also continuing to conduct oral history interviews. The draft final report was ready by the fall of 2001 and was distributed following a public meeting held in the Nicodemus Township Hall on December 13, 2001. The BVH team had addressed all the SHPO's concerns over the initial draft, and the SHPO had only minor technical comments on the revised draft. The Township Board, likewise, had additional historical revisions, but also strongly objected to the suggestion for potential removal of the recreation and sports facilities, which had been found not to comply with federal safety standards. The Township Board argued that the site for the playground was donated by Berniece Jones Sayers to benefit the town's children. In the Township Board's formal comments, the author found the proposal "insulting and destructive thinking to even be considered," but urged that any replacement be consistent with federal safety standards.[138]

Work on revisions to the CLR continued through 2002, and the final document was approved in early January 2003.[139] The final document presents a clear and convincing statement of the significance of Nicodemus, both the township overall and the townsite where Nicodemus NHS is located. The CLR begins by confirming the definition of the town's significance as presented in the NHL nomination, that Nicodemus is "a rare example of a predominantly black community surviving from a late nineteenth century movement to relocate freed slaves from the injustices and difficulties encountered in remaining in the South after Reconstruction." Beyond this, however, the CLR made a case for Nicodemus being significant as a Traditional Cultural Property:

> a rural community of predominantly African-American friends, neighbors, and relatives, many of whom are descended from those who founded the townsite, or were early residents, and which continues to reflect beliefs and practices which have evolved with the community since its conception.[140]

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[137] Richard Pankratz to Steven Linderer, January 8, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.
[138] Comments of Nicodemus Township Board to Steve Linderer, January 25, 2002, Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11; Richard Pankratz to Steven Linderer, April 25, 2002, Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.
[139] Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects, Ltd. and Oculus, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Approved by Midwest Regional Director January 7, 2003).
[140] Ibid., 10.

The applicability of the Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) designation, according to the CLR, is reflected in and evidenced by the annual Emancipation Day/Homecoming celebration. Observing that traditional geographical boundaries have limited usefulness in discussing the significance of Nicodemus, the CLR identifies kinship ties extending throughout the United States and renewed during the annual celebration as significant:

> This long-standing cultural practice serves to celebrate and reinforce who Nicodemus' African-American families are and where they came from. By re-establishing kin and social networks, Nicodemus' African Americans continue to practice a nearly 125-year-old tradition of cultural renewal and reaffirmation.[141]

In its review of the initial draft of the CLR, as discussed earlier, the SHPO raised concerns about the period of significance, both the presence of two periods of significance and having one of them extend to the present. This, the SHPO noted, was not standard practice, and the reviewer asked that the BVH team choose just one period and structure the discussion of contributing resources around it. The CLR addressed these comments in the discussion of the importance of the landscape to Nicodemus' significance and retained the use of two separate periods of significance: 1877 to 1888 for its national significance as an early African American settlement in the West, and 1877 to the present as a Traditional Cultural Property. Oral history interviews with former and current Nicodemus residents, the authors explained, "have consistently identified buildings, structures, and other regional cultural and natural features that are important to the community and its sense of place." This landscape, the CLR went on,

> continues to be viewed and valued by descendants of the community's early settlers as a reflection of the purpose and meaning behind the exodus and settlement of their ancestors. Descendants have continuously used this landscape to maintain the historic identity of the community. In addition, though the landscape has changed since the late nineteenth century, the land use patterns, farm clusters, road systems, and towns continue to be understood as connected with the early settlers.[142]

According to the CLR, the ever-changing nature of the landscape should lead not to a determination of a loss of integrity, but as evidence of continuing use according to traditional customs and ways: "future change will be character-defining as long as the period of significance extends into the future." The authors of the CLR argued that seeing the landscape in terms of contributing and non-contributing resources misses the point: "the CLR focuses on patterns and resource types that may be representative of the entire history of the community." Exploring and defining "these character-defining characteristics, features, and systems" the authors concluded, should help to provide a foundation for NPS and the community to manage change and growth in the future.[143]

The CLR also addressed questions of resource management and the attempt to both preserve Nicodemus' significance and allow visitors to gain an understanding and appreciation for it. Echoing the comments made by several NPS reviewers of the various drafts of the GMP,

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid., 11.

the authors of the CLR expressed concern for the future of Nicodemus, asserting that NPS and the community would need to work together to address the change that is inevitable, both from natural progression and as a result of Nicodemus being a National Historic Site. It is vital, the CLR argued, for the community to find a source of economic support such as the presence of NPS might engender, but striking a balance between preserving and altering the community through growth and change is a grave challenge. "The absence of descendants occupying and using the landscape," the CLR argued, "would potentially diminish the ability of the landscape to convey its significance." Preserving the landscape may slow the process of deterioration, "but cannot ensure the ability of the site to convey its significance unless they also bolster the population." The introduction of changes to the landscape by non-descendants, however, "may dilute the significance of the overall landscape." As a result, the CLR's recommendations focused on protecting the town's ongoing historical significance through the rehabilitation of buildings to be used while protecting their character-defining features, supporting local agriculture to keep the traditional farmlands in productive use, and using land and scenic conservation easements to preserve private lands and viewsheds. At the same time, the CLR recommended that the town seek to balance the preservation of Nicodemus' traditional ways of life with the benefits of a potential increase in tourism. Rightly managed through the model of heritage tourism, with appropriate strategies and solutions, it was felt the town could support the protection of its historic and landscape resources through the process of economic development.[144]

In October 2001, as the BVH team was preparing its draft final report, Nicodemus Site Manager Dennis Carruth contacted the Publications Manager for Southwest Parks and Monuments Association (SWPMA), the cooperating association that managed the educational bookstores for several parks in the region including Nicodemus. Carruth's request for a site history book to be published by SWPMA was well-received, and, at Sherda Williams' suggestion, Carruth contacted Oculus Project Manager Liz Sargent about writing the book. Sargent coordinated with Rivanna Archaeological Consulting's historian, Ben Ford, who prepared a preliminary draft in February 2002 using the archival and oral history research generated for the CLR. Oculus submitted this preliminary draft to NPS in March 2002. At thirty pages and more than 8,000 words, the draft was praised for the quality of its information but was deemed far too long and formal for the needs of SWPMA, by then renamed Western National Parks Association (WNPA). Instead, WNPA staff edited Ford's book down to a more manageable ten pages with a less formal tone.[145]

Historic Structures Report

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Regional Office, in conjunction with Fort Larned and, eventually, Dennis Carruth, concurrently prepared three major planning documents.

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[144] Ibid., 11-13.

[145] Emails between Sherda Williams and Liz Sargent, October 5 and November 30, 2001 and February 21, 2002; Memorandum, Liz Sargent to Sherda Williams, March 16, 2002; email, Dennis Carruth to Sherda Williams, April 29, 2002; Derek Gallagher [WNPA] to Dennis Carruth, May 13, 2002; email, Sherda Williams to Tonya Bradley et al., May 20, 2002; email, Williams to Theora McVay, September 18, 2002; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.

The first two, the General Management Plan and the Cultural Landscape Report, have already been discussed. The third major planning document was the Historic Structures Report which, like the CLR, was awarded to BVH through an indefinite quantities task order. The Regional Office issued the Scope of Work in September 2000, and held a kickoff meeting to start the project in late October 2000.[146] As with the CLR, BVH managed the HSR project overall but subcontracted much of the work to the architecture and engineering firm of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. and smaller components of analysis to Alvine and Associates, Terracon, and Lamp Rynearson Associates. Revisions to the initial draft CLR were well under way by the time work on the HSR began, and the two documentation projects informed each other: research in the CLR supported much of the work for the HSR, while investigations conducted for the HSR guided treatment recommendations in the CLR.

Work on the HSR began in late January 2001 with the HSR team's first site visit to Nicodemus and a public meeting in Township Hall. The minutes of the meeting included few substantive questions or concerns from the public, aside from what funding might be available (none for buildings until a treatment plan was available), and whether local contractors might be hired for future work (possible, but no guarantees given).[147] The HSR team then began on-site investigations of the five buildings that constitute the National Historic Site and prepared an initial draft report for NPS review in the spring of 2001. The work consisted of detailed investigations of each of the five buildings, both interior and exterior, and included research into the building's history and chronology of changes, measured drawings, paint and mortar analysis, and a conditions assessment and documentation.

In August 2001, following an internal review of the initial draft HSR, Historical Landscape Architect Sherda Williams convened a meeting among the CLR and HSR teams with NPS staff from the Regional Office, Fort Larned, and Nicodemus Site Manager Dennis Carruth. In a memorandum to GMP team leader Sändra Washington and Historian Jill O'Bright, then beginning work on the park's Historic Resources Study, Williams summarized the results of this important joint team meeting and the implications of the two studies for the GMP. By this time, when the CLR team was completing revisions following reviews of the initial draft earlier that year, representatives from Oculus announced that they were increasing their emphasis on Nicodemus being a Traditional Cultural Property, thus including cultural practices, particularly the ongoing Homecoming celebration, with physical resources in understanding Nicodemus' significance. With regard to the buildings themselves, neither the HSR nor the CLR teams had identified sufficient documentation or physical evidence to support restoration to any particular period, thus ruling out restoration or reconstruction of any of the resources. Instead, both teams recommended that basic stabilization and preservation, designed to forestall deterioration and make the buildings safe and accessible, should be the goal. The challenges posed by management of a National Historic Site within a living community continued to vex the team, however, as the participants continued to struggle to define the community and identify what group or groups have ownership of the community's story, leading to a question that was difficult to ask or answer: "If we base GMP significance on the continuity of the population, does the NHS lose

[146] Kickoff meeting minutes in Memorandum, Dan Worth to Bill Harlow et al., November 7, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.
[147] Public meeting minutes in Memorandum, Dan Worth to Jim Creech et al., February 19, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, box 11.

significance when the population dies?" On a more operational level, in keeping with concerns over the traditional persistence of the community, the HSR and CLR teams also questioned the relationship between NPS and the community as defined in the GMP, asking "How much interference in the social fabric and daily lifestyles will each alternate entail?"[148]

The HSR team then revised and expanded the document over the course of the next year and completed a final draft in October 2002. Unlike the CLR, which included discussions of the townsite as well as the larger Town of Nicodemus, the HSR focused exclusively on the five buildings comprising the NHS. In accordance with the CLR, the HSR defined the period of national significance for the buildings as the boom years of Nicodemus from 1877 to 1888. Only two of the buildings, the AME Church and the St. Francis Hotel, were built during this period of national significance, but the other three buildings remain significant for their association with important themes in the history and development of Nicodemus. For each building, the report included an extensive history and chronology of changes and discussion of materials and the integrity of what remains. In its recommendations, the HSR argued that preservation, rather than restoration or rehabilitation, was the most appropriate goal, including the stabilization, maintenance, and repair of historic materials and features rather than replacement or new construction. This final report was approved by the Midwest Regional Director in early January 2003, at the same time that the CLR was approved.

The same BVH team that prepared the HSR in 2002 was contracted again later in the decade to update the document based on a new survey of conditions. Members of the team visited Nicodemus in early November 2009 to update the buildings' documentation and to conduct a visual condition assessment. On the basis of this site visit, the HSR Update was released in May 2010, and acknowledged that the period of national significance for Nicodemus is 1877-1888, when the community was "booming" before being bypassed by the railroads. For most of the buildings, the HSR reported, the preferred treatment option remained preservation, to stabilize and protect the properties as they currently exist. The updated HSR acknowledged the possibility of rehabilitation or even restoration, however, as initiatives from the GMP and Long-Range Interpretative Plan, completed in 2009, were realized or if additional buildings were acquired. The updated HSR recommended, also, that restoration would be the appropriate treatment for the AME Church, focused on approximately 1950, when it was last in use as a church. Rehabilitation was recommended for the St. Francis Hotel, in hopes that it could be adaptively used by the NPS. For the other three buildings, the updated HSR recommended that community interests and needs guide the decisions whether to preserve/stabilize or rehabilitate.[149]

Initial Staff and Administration

The three major planning documents for Nicodemus NHS discussed so far—General Management Plan, Cultural Landscape Report, and Historic Structures Report—were all

[148] Memorandum, Sherda Williams to Sändra Washington and Jill O'Bright, August 1, 2001; files of Nicodemus NHS, H22.
[149] *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Historic Structures Report Update* (Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., May 2010).

organized and managed through a collaboration between NPS staff at the Regional Office and Fort Larned NHS. Immediately after Congress established the site, the Regional Director assigned responsibility for the site to Fort Larned whose Superintendent, Steven Linderer, and Chief Ranger, Felix Revello, took the lead in supporting the new park (Figures 8 and 9). As Linderer recalled, he received no specific directions regarding the park or its direction, though it was clear that protecting the buildings would be key. The only guidance from the Regional Director that he recalled regarding an approach to the management of Nicodemus NHS "was that he told me that he didn't want Nicodemus to blow up into a big project. . . .keep the development small and not let things get out of hand."[150] Linderer and Revello, with the support of other staff at Fort Larned, managed the park and the relations with Nicodemus residents remotely for more than four years until the park's first Site Manager, Dennis Carruth, entered on duty.

Figure 8. Superintendent Steve Linderer 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Figure 9. Fort Larned NHS Chief Ranger Felix Revello, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Linderer and Revello saw interpretation as a key first step to begin getting the story of Nicodemus out to the public and to demonstrate that NPS was taking steps to activate the park. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 regarding the park's interpretation program, Linderer and Revello coordinated with Angela Bates to develop a message about the history of Nicodemus read by the actor Danny Glover and broadcast locally on the radio. In addition, Revello coordinated the development of a twelve-panel interpretive exhibit for display in Township Hall. Linderer regularly sent staff from Fort Larned to Nicodemus, primarily maintenance personnel to take care of the grounds; as Linderer recalled, "we were kind of overwhelmed, and we traded staff back and forth, and we brought a lot of support from Fort Larned to Nicodemus."[151] Linderer first hired Robert Brogdon, a Nicodemus resident who also served as the Commander of the local American Legion post, as a maintenance worker. In addition, he hired interpretive staff, including Park Ranger Reginald Miller, a student trainee who began working at Nicodemus while on staff at Fort Larned NHS, and seasonal interpreter LueCreasea Holmes, a college student who was also a Nicodemus descendant (and at the time of this Administrative History, serves as Park Ranger at Nicodemus NHS) (Figure 10).[152]

[150] Oral history interview, Steven Linderer and Felix Revello, September 1, 2020.
[151] Linderer and Revello, oral history interview.
[152] LueCreasea Holmes' married name is now LueCreasea Horne.

Figure 10. Park Guides Reginal Miller and LueCreasea Holmes, swearing in a Junior Ranger at the 1998 Homecoming celebration.

Nicodemus operated with this skeleton staff for more than two years. Throughout this period, NPS staff from the Regional Office worked on the GMP, HSR, and CLR, and Fort Larned continued to provide maintenance and administrative support. In late 2000, Superintendent Linderer completed the initial planning and documentation for the park as required under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), legislation passed by Congress in 1993 and signed into law by President William J. Clinton that called for an increased awareness of performance by federal entities as measured by pre-determined goals. In late November 2000, Linderer reported that "I expect to hire the site manager within the next two weeks or so since we finally got done with GPRA last week and I can start work on filling the position."[153]

True to his word, in early 2001 Linderer hired Dennis Carruth as the first Site Manager for Nicodemus NHS. Carruth, who entered on duty on March 25, 2001, was a first-time site manager and reported to Linderer, who remained the Superintendent. Carruth, who would go on to serve as Superintendent of several units of the National Park System in the western United States, quickly began to understand the dynamics of Nicodemus while the three initial planning projects were under way. Carruth served as the park's voice in reviews of the GMP, HSR, and CLR throughout 2001 and 2002. In the spring of 2002, Carruth hired the park's first permanent employee, Park Guide Phyllis Howard. LueCreasea Holmes had finished her college degree by that time and accepted a permanent position with Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Missouri. This left Murray, then a Fort Larned NHS employee who was duty-stationed at

[153] Email, Steve Linderer to Sändra Washington, November 27, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 12.

Nicodemus, as the park's only interpretive staff, but, in April, Carruth announced that Howard had accepted the Park Guide position. Howard had, since 1998, been working as a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) employee at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Colorado, while studying for her BA degree in History from the University of Southern Colorado in Pueblo. "By offering Phyllis a permanent position with [Nicodemus NHS]," Carruth informed the Fort Larned staff, "we not only solved our seasonal problem, now we don't have to worry about being short handed next winter as we move to seven day a week coverage, and attempting to increase our outreach endeavors."[154] Howard would go on to serve at Nicodemus for more than fifteen years, by far the park's longest-serving employee and the one constant amid multiple changes in staff. Howard was, therefore, the most lasting legacy of the park's first Site Manager, Dennis Carruth. Carruth's tenure, like many at Nicodemus NHS, was brief. In early 2003, he accepted a promotion to Superintendent of Aztec Ruins National Monument, New Mexico, departing the park on February 22, 2003.

For more than five years after the establishment of Nicodemus NHS, staff from Fort Larned NHS and the Midwest Regional Office coordinated the initial planning and building stabilization efforts while establishing the basis for an interpretive program. While nearly all new parks go through an extended period of planning and development before becoming fully operational, the challenges in activating Nicodemus NHS were unique given the fact that Nicodemus is a living, if sparsely populated, community with a far-flung network of descendants whose identities are deeply integrated with this place on the high plains of Kansas, and the need for NPS to live and work within the parameters of the surrounding community. Through the initial planning efforts discussed in this chapter, NPS acknowledged the active interest of Nicodemus' descendants, both within the town and around the nation, in the management and interpretation of the new park and pledged to work jointly with the residents. The initial planning efforts also indicated the uncertain attitude of the residents of Nicodemus, who had a range of hopes for, and concerns over, the presence of the federal government, and the NPS which, until the arrival of Dennis Carruth in early 2001, managed the park from afar. The dynamics of this relationship continued to oscillate as NPS sought to increase its footprint in Nicodemus with new staff and renewed attempts to preserve and protect the town's historic buildings while seeking to involve the town's residents in the effort.

[154] Email, Dennis Carruth to multiple addressees, April15, 2002; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 4.

Chapter 4: Building Stabilization

The inspiration behind the creation of Nicodemus NHS was, in part, to stem the deterioration of historic buildings in the town. This was not a standard historic preservation effort in the early 1990s, however, as the buildings were then and remain important not just for themselves as artifacts but as part of the broader landscape that generations of descendants of Nicodemus' original settlers, both in Nicodemus and throughout the nation, consider their home. The park's enabling legislation (P.L. 104-333) identified the two-fold purpose as interpreting the role of Nicodemus in the Reconstruction period of American history, particularly the experience of westward expansion, and "to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations, the remaining structures and locations that represent the history (including the settlement and growth)" of Nicodemus. As the Cultural Landscape Report argued in its summary of the town's significance, "Interviews with former and current Nicodemus residents have consistently identified buildings, structures, and other regional cultural and natural features that are important to the community and its sense of place." The townsite, the CLR went on, "has been a religious, educational, social, governmental, and familial center for the larger Nicodemus community for many generations, and the physical evidence of these uses is extant today."[155] The legislation defined the park as consisting of five buildings: First Baptist Church, St. Francis Hotel, Nicodemus School District No. 1, AME Church, and Township Hall. Of these, only Township Hall, built in 1939, was in good condition when the park was established in 1996; the others were in fair to poor condition, and were experiencing deterioration. Both NPS and the residents of Nicodemus thought it was important to protect these five buildings, stabilizing them for public education and enjoyment for generations to come.

The National Park Service, residents of Nicodemus, and the owners of the five buildings all were in agreement that something needed to be done to protect the buildings from further deterioration. Problems quickly arose, however, when it came to the question of how this protection would be effected. None of the five buildings that constitute the park was owned by the federal government at the time of the legislation, and only one has since come into federal ownership: the owners of the AME Church, through a complicated process discussed in Chapter 3, conveyed the building to NPS in late 1998. The St. Francis Hotel is owned by a private individual; the Nicodemus School District No. 1 and the First Baptist Church are owned by private organizations; and Township Hall is owned by the Town of Nicodemus. The lack of federal ownership posed two challenges to the buildings' protection and preservation. First, federal law prohibits the expenditure of federal funds to improve private properties which the government either does not own in fee or in which it has no legal interest, (such as an easement) unless such expenditure is provided for by law. The status of Nicodemus as a National Historic Landmark (NHL), however, allows a wider latitude for federal involvement. Under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended in 1980; NHPA), NPS has the responsibility for overseeing the designation of NHLs, and NHLs are eligible for investment tax credits and technical assistance. In addition, Section 110 of the NHPA requires that federal agencies "to the maximum extent possible undertake such planning and actions as may be necessary to minimize

[155] *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report*, January 2003, pages 10, 13.

harm to the landmark"[156] This responsibility on the part of NPS to support NHL buildings and districts allows a largely-undefined degree of intervention with regard to private properties, latitude which the Midwest Regional Office sought to exploit as much as possible, particularly in the park's early years.

The second challenge posed by the lack of federal ownership in Nicodemus was the general distrust of the federal government by the town's residents. Nearly to a person, NPS staff members and Nicodemus residents alike who contributed oral history interviews to this administrative history spoke of the ambivalence with which Nicodemus residents regarded a federal presence in the town. Initially buoyed by the hope of increased economic activity that being a national historic site would bring, including jobs and tourist dollars, many soon balked at the implications of this increased federal presence for the town's traditional way of life. Despite explicit language in the enabling legislation that NPS could purchase properties in the town only through willing sellers, many remained concerned that NPS would take over the town, fearing a federal takeover in this community which treasured its independence, gained through the struggles and sacrifices of its founders and inhabitants through the lean years of the twentieth century. Nearly all the properties in the Town of Nicodemus remained owned by descendants of the original settlers, though many were unoccupied throughout the year except for the annual Homecoming celebration. There were concerns on the part of NPS staff and Nicodemus residents that a dilution of ownership away from the descendants, all of them African American, might adversely impact the historical significance of the town. Given the relative independence of Nicodemus, moreover, combined with the tradition of passing properties through generations of families, the questions of clean title and property boundary lines made any sort of property transaction problematic.

African Methodist Episcopal Church

Despite these obstacles, and in the face of occasional lack of interest from within the Regional Office itself, NPS staff at the park and the Regional Office made some progress in stabilizing the five historic buildings that constitute the park. It is, of course, no coincidence that the park made the greatest progress with the AME Church, the only one of the five buildings owned by NPS. As discussed in Chapter 3, NPS staff became deeply concerned about the building even before the park was established; as part of a review of NHL properties, Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Steve Linderer reported on its advanced state of deterioration. Nicodemus Historical Society founder and president Angela Bates, members of whose family owned the AME Church through a family trust, in 1993 offered to work with her family to donate the church to the Historical Society as a way to spur Congressional passage of the park's enabling legislation, with the idea that the Historical Society would then donate the building to NPS once the park was established. Although the path to NPS ownership proved more circuitous than anticipated and involved the intervention of the Trust for Public Land, title to the building finally cleared in late 1998, more than two years after the park was established.

[156] National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (P.L. 89-665), Section 110. See also "The Federal Role in Historic Preservation," published online at https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R45800.html#_Toc37148248, as revised April 7, 2020.

Stabilization of the building, however, could not wait this long, and the first action of the new park staff was to arrange for emergency work on the AME Church. As discussed in Chapter 3, the first round of stabilization was conducted by a preservation crew from the Santa Fe System Support Office in New Mexico in late 1996. This crew, comprised, in part, of American Indians, built a new internal structure to support the roof, re-clad the roof with tin, and shored up the limestone blocks on the building's north wall, which had already partially collapsed. This temporary measure allowed NPS to move on to other aspects of activating the park, but, in the summer of 1999, Superintendent Linderer coordinated with Regional Chief of Cultural Resources Craig Kenkel to arrange for a structural condition assessment of the building. The two then worked with the Denver Service Center (DSC) to hire Architecture 2000, a subsidiary of Schroeder and Holt Architects based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to prepare plans for the building's stabilization. Staff from Architecture 2000 visited the site in the fall of 1999, and, in late December, prepared a preliminary draft proposal for work.[157]

Both DSC and the Architecture 2000 team continued to refine plans for the building's stabilization and held an on-site meeting in late February 2000 that included representatives from DSC, the Regional Office, Fort Larned, and Ulysses S. Grant NHS (which was providing preservation staff), along with Architecture 2000. Participants in the meeting assessed the major causes of deterioration: a deteriorated roof that allowed water into the building, a later addition of stucco on the exterior walls that trapped moisture within the limestone block walls, lack of a good foundation, and large openings cut into the north wall and not provided with adequate structural support. The participants also concluded that the north wall of the building, which the preservation crew in 1996 shored up, was not salvageable, nor was the roof; both would need to be documented and demolished. Architecture 2000 presented its recommendation that a new concrete foundation be placed for the north wall, which would be augmented with a temporary wood stud wall clad in a synthetic stucco. As a result of subsequent discussions, DSC also recommended that the 1996 roof structure, resting on eight interior posts, be replaced with a load-bearing one spanning all the way to the exterior walls.[158]

As plans for this second round of stabilization were being finalized through the spring of 2000, DSC requested support from the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC). Because the work of removing and replacing the existing foundation along the north wall would entail ground disturbance, it had the potential to damage historic archeological resources. In mid-June, crews from MWAC hand-dug trenches around the exterior walls, finding a collection of artifacts, but none was of significance, and no further archeological work was recommended.[159] A more significant artifact was located, however, in September 2000 after preliminary stabilization had begun. The DSC arranged for a preservation crew from Ulysses S. Grant NHS to conduct the initial work of removing the north wall, and, on September 18, the workers found a time capsule set within a stone at the northeast corner of the wall. After opening the box, they determined that

[157] The draft document was not located during the present research. See responses to it, however, in email, Bill Harlow to Jana Gross et al., January 20, 2000, and email, Felix Revello to Walt F. Graham and Steve Linderer, January 21, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[158] Architecture 2000, meeting minutes, February 24, 2000; see also email, Kathy Lingo (Architecture 2000) to Walt F. Graham, June 23, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[159] Email, Bill Hunt (MWAC) to Jim Creech et al., May 31, 2000; Memorandum, Archeologist, Midwest Archeological Center to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, June 19, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.

the time capsule had been created in 1940. The box was closed without removing any of the documents and held in safekeeping at Fort Larned's curatorial facility until it could be evaluated by regional curatorial staff.[160] Work crews from Ulysses S. Grant NHS removed the north wall in the fall of 2000, saving as many of the original limestone blocks as possible for potential reuse, removed a brick chimney at the west end of the building, removed stucco from the walls, and repointed many of the original stone blocks (Figure 11).[161] With this work, NPS concerns for safety were alleviated, and additional work waited until the spring of 2001 when the crew from Ulysses S. Grant NHS returned to build a new roof for the building (Figure 12).[162] This work concluded the second phase of stabilization.

Figure 11. The AME Church in 2001, showing the temporary replacement north wall, looking southeast. Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc no. 22, Catalog no. 20.

Following this second phase in 2000-2001, the building received occasional additional work as the needs of the building coincided with funding. In late 2003, for example, NPS staff noticed that portions of the two lower courses of stone along the building's south wall was deteriorating badly, and, in December, crews dug a trench along the wall that allowed the replacement of several of the crumbling original stones with new limestone blocks purchased for

[160] Email, Steve Linderer to Felix Revello et al., September 18, 2000; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217. See also clipping from unidentified newspaper, June 20, 2000; informal files at Nicodemus NHS.
[161] Nicodemus National Historic Site, General Management Plan Newsletter, Issue Number 1, July 2001; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also Memorandum, Superintendent, Nicodemus NHS to Regional Director, Midwest Region, July 8, 2005; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 7.
[162] National Historic Landmark Status Report, Nicodemus Historic District, July 5, 2002; files of Nicodemus NHS, H34.

Figure 12. Repairing the roof on the AME Church, 2001. Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc no. 22, Catalog no. 20.

the site.[163] At the same time, Nicodemus NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams, who entered on duty in late December 2003, worked with Fort Larned NHS Facility Manager William (Bill) Chapman to plan for repair of the existing, deteriorated double entrance doors. The park contracted with the NPS Historic Preservation Training Center in Frederick, Maryland, which began work in early January 2004, to restore the doors and replace the existing frame and jamb. At the same time, the stucco cladding on the sanctuary portion of the building was removed, though the vestibule exterior remained clad in stucco.[164] In 2005, the Midwest Regional Office contracted with RGM Construction Services, based in Quinter, Kansas, to install replacement windows on the building's south side. During the first phase of stabilization in 1996, crews from the Santa Fe System Support Office had covered the original windows with plywood to protect them and as a moisture barrier. In September 2005, crews from RGM removed the original windows to their shop, where they constructed new windows that matched the originals in size, shape, profile, and materials. The crews installed these new windows in December 2005.[165]

The park and the Midwest Regional Office began planning in 2006 for the full rehabilitation of the AME Church for interpretive uses. Superintendent Sherda Williams received word in April 2006 that the Regional Office had tentatively planned for funding in FY 2011.[166] The work would be conducted in accordance with the GMP, which had identified the AME Church as a spiritual space, planned to be a contemplative and reflective visitor experience. The

[163] Email, Bill Harlow to Bill Chapman, December 2, 2003; Section 106 Assessment Form, December 2, 2003; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217. See also email, Bill Chapman to Bill Harlow et al., Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[164] Final Project Agreement, Rehabilitation of the Entrance Door AME Church, September 17, 2003; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217. See also email, Bill Chapman to Sherda Williams and Bill Harlow, January 5, 2004; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2; and Weekly Field Report, Historic Preservation Training Center, January 29, 2004, Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[165] Completion Report, A.M.E. Church Windows, January 10, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS, H3417. See also email, Bill Chapman to Sherda Williams and Linda Clarke, December 5, 2005; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[166] Email, Sherda Williams to Kevin McMurry et al., April 24, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS.

building remained dormant until early 2008, when a second round of planning began for the interpretive program, including an audio-visual component.[167] As planning was under way in the spring of 2008, however, a new issue arose that stemmed from the traditional, informal patterns of property transfers in Nicodemus. In preparing to close on the transfer of the property in 1998, NPS contracted for a survey of the AME Church boundary using the best available information. As planning began for the full rehabilitation of the property in 2008, however, the new survey indicated that, on the east side, the lot extended into the right of way of Third Street, which was owned by the Nicodemus Township Board. In May 2008, Mark Weaver, who had only recently entered on duty as Nicodemus NHS Acting Superintendent, alerted the Midwest Regional Land Office about the problem.[168] At the same time, Weaver also met with the Nicodemus Township Board to discuss the possibility of the Board donating a strip of land approximately twenty-nine feet wide between the west façade of the church and Third Street, which would leave enough of the right of way to allow the Township Board to repair or replace curbing without venturing onto federally-owned land. In November 2008, the Township Board agreed to the donation consisting of 0.05 acres formed by a strip of land 29.5 feet wide by 75 feet long along Third Street, acknowledging the need of NPS to install an accessible ramp to the front door of the church within the boundaries of the property.[169]

The donation remained tabled, however, until May 2009, when Weaver, who entered on duty as the park's permanent Superintendent in September 2008, sent a Memorandum to the Regional Director formally requesting that NPS accept the donation from the Township Board and pay the costs for a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment and associated closing costs. Regional Director Ernest Quintana approved Weaver's proposal in June 2009.[170] This initiated additional discussions with the Regional Office, which observed that a subsequent proposal to build a walkway from the new boundary to Third Street would entail federal construction on private land. The Township Board then agreed to extend the donation all the way to the curbing of Third Street.[171] The matter was again tabled for nearly a year when Midwest Region officials discovered another glitch: the Township Board had not provided the proper public notification for their decision to donate the strip of land to NPS.[172] In January 2011, the Township Board met in a properly-notified public meeting, and adopted a resolution that donated to NPS a strip of land between the AME Church and Third Street, giving NPS the right to install and maintain an accessible ramp from the church to the curb, and to maintain the adjoining curb cut.[173] The donation was finally accepted and approved by NPS in July 2011, when the Nicodemus Township Board gave a quitclaim deed to NPS for the strip of land, more than three years after the issue was raised.[174]

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[167] Project Management Information System entry, Interpretive Media, Nicodemus AME Church, January 14, 2008; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[168] Email, Mark Weaver to Dan Betts et al., May 27, 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[169] Nicodemus Township Board, Resolution 0308, November 6, 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[170] Memorandum, Superintendent, Nicodemus NHS to Regional Director, Midwest Region, approved by David N. Given for Ernest Quintana, June 8, 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[171] Email, Mark Weaver to Dewayne Prince et al., May 29, 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[172] Email, Mark Weaver to Tony Potter et al., March 11, 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1.A.2. See also email, Alan Hesse to Mark Weaver, July 9, 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1.A.2.
[173] Nicodemus Township Board, Resolution No. 0110, executed January 26, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[174] Dewayne S. Prince to Graham County Abstract and Title Co., July 25, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1.A.2.

Although the original funding window of FY 2011 for full rehabilitation of the AME Church had passed while the boundary issue lingered, plans for additional work at the building continued. In advance of rehabilitating the entire interior of the church, Superintendent Weaver and the Reginal Office focused on the building's vestibule, which would allow visitors at least to see into the church interior. In May 2012, HPTC provided plans for making the vestibule accessible, including the installation of clear acrylic interior doors, repairing the plaster interior walls of the vestibule, building a new wheelchair-accessible ramp to the exterior door, and extending a walkway from the ramp to a new cut in the curb at Third Street. The work was conducted in the summer of 2012, allowing visitors an experience in addition to the interpretation at the Township Hall.[175]

Significant planning for the building's rehabilitation resumed in late 2015 and early 2016. A scope of work for the design services was released in March 2016, and, by the next month, funds for designing the project were in place, with Midwest Region Historical Architect Mark Chavez leading the project. As this was the first rehabilitation project at the park, the question of the site's period of significance again proved thorny. This was a vexing problem during the preparation of the CLR and the HSR, as discussed in Chapter 3. The CLR provided the most comprehensive and conceptually challenging definition: the town is nationally significant for its association with the nineteenth century westward movement among African Americans during the early settlement years of 1877 to 1888, and as a traditional cultural property from 1877 to the present. The HSR, meanwhile, hewed to the early settlement years from 1877-1888 as the period of significance, but observed that several of the buildings, including the AME Church, lay outside this period but remained significant for their association "with important themes in the history and development of Nicodemus as well as of other African American communities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." The definition of a period of significance provided by the CLR makes a great effort to understand the complexity of Nicodemus and its role as a living community that embodies nearly 150 years of a traditional understanding of the relationship between a particular set of people and a particular place. The definition provided by the HSR was more focused, while still allowing for some flexibility. Neither, however, provided specific help with the practical questions of how to handle the rehabilitation of the AME Church.

As Chavez prepared the Scope of Work for the AME Church rehabilitation and sought to provide guidance to potential contractors, he requested clarification on how to handle certain issues that might be implicated by the period of significance definition. In particular, it was unclear whether the stucco coating over the limestone blocks that formed the building's walls, which was in place but spalling by the time NPS acquired the building in 1998, should be reapplied. In a reply to Chavez in late July 2016, Midwest Region Historical Architect Bill Harlow provided guidance both conceptually and practically. Noting that the park "is blessed with an unusually high level of detailed resource planning[,] much of it through the same contractors," Harlow clarified that the period of significance is indeed 1877 to the present. However, he suggested further that "if it makes it more workable and conventional consider the site as it had evolved fifty years ago as a base line for what has stood the test of time and gained significance." Some compromise is inevitable, he observed, and, collectively, the CLR and HSR

[175] African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, Cyclic Maintenance, plans prepared by Historic Preservation Training Center, March 30, 2012; NPS Electronic Technical Information Center. See also "Flowering of Nicodemus" newsletter, July 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS.

recommended making the fewest changes to buildings "to get them maintainable but still authentic forms." As for the stucco, he noted that the church, along with several other buildings, were coated with stucco at the same time in the 1940s and that, in the process, the exteriors were "extensively scarified to improve the bond between the stone and the cement stucco." Because of this loss of material integrity, he recommended "renewing the stucco as necessary as a sacrificial layer to present an authentic and consistent mid-century appearance as we have now."[176]

Planning for the project continued through 2016 and into early 2017, and, in the summer of 2017, a contract was let to Anderson Hallas Architects, PC, for the AME Church rehabilitation project. The project team held a kickoff meeting and site visit in late September. The first issue to arise was the north wall, which had been replaced in 2001 as a temporary structure during the second phase of stabilization. How to replace it, and whether to clad it in stucco, led to further attempts to clarify the period when the building was significant and how much change over the years to take into account when preparing final designs for the work. Following on Harlow's recommendations in the summer of 2016, Midwest Region Architectural Historian Dena Sanford attempted to provide clarification in November 2017. Sanford found inconsistencies in the HSR with regard to recommended treatments for the building, at one point suggesting that it be treated as a rehabilitation and, at another, recommending a full restoration. She described possible options, including constructing the wall with masonry blocks and applying a limestone veneer to match the other three walls without stucco (which had been removed in the first phase of stabilization), and building the north wall of an inexpensive material and coating it along with the other three walls in stucco, which would be in keeping with other surrounding buildings.[177]

As a result of these discussions, Midwest Region staff together with Anderson Hallas Architects designed the building's north wall with an inner wythe of concrete masonry blocks, and an outer wythe constructed of 2x6 stud framing with a plywood exterior which was then coated in stucco. The north and south walls were tied together with steel cable, and the roof was supported using box beams. Nearly all of the interior walls were coated in a new layer of plaster (Figure 13). Approximately 80 percent of the floor surface is original, though the floor joist system was built new. Pishny Construction of Lenexa, Kansas, served as the contractors for the rehabilitation project, which was managed by Fort Larned NHS Chief of Facilities Bill Chapman. Construction began in 2019 and continued through the COVID pandemic of 2020 with special guidelines in place. The rehabilitation project was completed in February 2021 which allowed for installation of original pews and other furnishings salvaged from the building during the first and second phases of stabilization. The AME Church was opened to the public in July 2021 (Figure 14). Chapman also organized an innovative approach to a time capsule while overseeing the rehabilitation. Chapman solicited memories and other comments from Nicodemus residents related to the AME Church, which he and his wife then inscribed on the outer wall of the concrete masonry block inner wythe before the frame outer wythe was built, enclosing and protecting the wall of memories.[178]

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[176] Email, William Harlow to Sherda Williams et al., July 20, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[177] Email, Dena Sanford to Mark Chavez et al, November 3, 2017; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also chain of emails among Nanon Adair Anderson (Anderson Hallas Architects), Midwest Region Architect Brent Nie, Sherda Williams, and other NPS staff, October 11 to October 30, 2017; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[178] William Chapman, telephone communication with the author, February 2, 2023.

Figure 13. The AME Church in June 2021, looking southwest. Photograph by the author.

Figure 14. Views of the AME Church interior after restoration, November 2021. Photograph by the author.

First Baptist Church

The First Baptist Church is located at the northeast corner of Washington Avenue and Fourth Street and was built in 1907 to replace an 1880 church at the same location. The building was altered in 1920 when a narrow wing was added to the west side facing Fourth Street. The wing contained a foyer with a bell tower above (which was destroyed by a windstorm in the mid-1930s), a kitchen, and a study. At the same time, a lowered, pressed-metal ceiling was added to the sanctuary, covering the original vaulted ceiling. Later in the 1920s, the building began to

develop structural problems, which the congregation attempted to solve by adding four irregularly-spaced exterior limestone buttresses and filling in the original windows on the east side. In the early 1950s, the exterior limestone block walls were clad in stucco, and the original peaked windows were replaced with double-hung windows (Figure 15).[179]

Figure 15. First Baptist Church looking northeast, June 2021. Photograph by the author.

The church was in faltering condition by the early 1970s when the pastor, Rev. L.C. Alexander, announced plans to build a new church building immediately behind the historic one. A newspaper report described the church, "The walls are cracked, the floor is warped and bare light bulbs hang from the ceiling." As Pastor Alexander confirmed, building a new church "'is a necessity because the old one is falling down.'" With little money to spend, however, and only forty members of the congregation, Alexander sought help from Nicodemus descendants throughout the nation: "From throughout the nation donations—in the form of money, building materials and labor—began pouring in. Past and present residents, church members decided, would build the new structure. And they did." The new, L-shaped church was largely completed by the autumn of 1975. Present and former Nicodemus residents did all of the construction work except the exterior brick walls and contributed the funds for the $30,000 price tag.[180]

The congregation, having a new space in which to worship, focused their energies on that space rather than on the historic church. In 1986 and 1987, Restoration Associates, a division of

[179] *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Historic Structures Report* (Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., October 25, 2002), 2-12.
[180] "With National Assistance, Pastor Builds Own Church," *Hays Daily News* (Hays, Kansas), August 10, 1975, page 1. See also "Nicodemus Baptist Needs More Dollars," *Hays Daily News*, August 24, 1975, page 13.

Solomon Claybaugh Young Architects, Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri, conducted an assessment of the building under contract to the NPS Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Denver, Colorado. The building was then in fair condition, though much of the exterior stucco cladding was in poor condition, exhibiting cracks and delamination, while the joists, floorboards, and bell tower base showed evidence of termite damage.[181]

During the course of the HSR in the early 2000s, the First Baptist Church congregation was open to coordinating with NPS, granting access to the church for a Conditions Assessment and, in the summer of 2001, proposing to lease the historic church to NPS.[182] The National Park Service did not take the congregation up on this proposal. In its assessment of the First Baptist Church, the HSR observed that the building's condition remained the same as recorded in the 1987 NHL Condition Assessment, providing additional details about cracks in the masonry, particularly in the buttresses which were settling outward and separating from the building, together with water damage to wood throughout the building. In its recommendations for treatment, the HSR recommended that stabilization was the principal goal to provide a stable and weatherproof building but did not recommend to return it to use. The repairs suggested by the HSR including replacing portions of the shingles, flashing, and roof decking to help prevent further water infiltration, using temporary wood shoring to support the east wall, and conducting a structural analysis to determine the needs for the buttresses, wall, and foundation. Finally, according to the Conditions Assessment, the church would need extensive general maintenance to prevent further decay, including patching and repointing mortar, replacing rotted wood sections, repairing windows, doors, soffits, and fascia to be more watertight, and disconnecting all mechanical equipment.

In late 2002, Nicodemus Site Manager Dennis Carruth submitted a funding request for emergency stabilization work at First Baptist Church, which he envisioned in two phases: evaluation and design, followed by the stabilization work itself. The following February, Regional Chief of Cultural Resources Craig Kenkel forwarded his request to Acting Regional Director David Given, pointing out that the Regional Office had recently requested input on "what we could make happen at Nicodemus this year."[183] The appeal for funding was successful, and, in November 2003, members of the BVH team returned to Nicodemus to conduct a detailed field investigation in preparation for developing proposed options. The roof structure was determined to be generally stable as a dead load but susceptible to being overstressed by pressure from wind or snow, and the exterior masonry east wall, although displaced, had not, apparently, moved significantly since the 1950s when the stucco was applied. The upper portion of the vestibule, however, was found to be structurally compromised from rot and termite damage in the wood structural members, resulting from neglect over many years.[184]

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[181] Restoration Associates, "National Historic Landmark Condition Assessment Report: The First Baptist Church (Nicodemus Historic District"," 1986-1987; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[182] Nicodemus First Missionary Baptist Church, offer of lease to NPS, signed by Rev. Crawford, Pastor, and three trustees, June 2001; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[183] Email, Dennis Carruth to Craig Kenkel et al., attached to email, Craig Kenkel to David Given et al., February 13, 2003; files of Nicodemus NHS, H24.
[184] Old First Baptist Church Stabilization, report prepared for Midwest Regional Office by Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects, Ltd., with transmittal letter from Dan M. Worth, December 22, 2003; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.

The potential for stabilization work at First Baptist Church brought to light one of the grave challenges at Nicodemus NHS. As discussed earlier in this chapter, federal funds can be spent only on properties which a federal agency owns or in which it has a legal interest, such as an easement. While there are other units of the National Park System that do not own the park's principal resource or resources, in most cases, the entity that owns the resources is willing to collaborate with NPS in order to make it possible for the park to arrange for preservation work. In Nicodemus, however, the traditions of independence and a distrust of federal power and intervention, made private property owners reluctant to cede any authority whatsoever to NPS. In January 2004, Sherda Williams, then Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS, sent a copy of the BVH stabilization report to the Trustees of First Baptist Church, requesting their comments on the several proposals. She also raised the issue of expending federal funds on private properties, explaining that, while the park's enabling legislation allowed NPS to provide technical and preservation assistance, the execution of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the park and the First Baptist Church would help "to place our relationship on a firm legal basis." The proposed MOA would allow cooperation on basic preservation activities.[185]

While discussions were under way regarding an MOA to conduct stabilization work at the First Baptist Church, the congregation's trustees granted permission for the BVH team to install a simple monitoring system in March 2004. This system consisted of nails inserted through the stucco cladding of the exterior east wall, from which plumb bobs were hung to measure whether the wall's outward lean was changing. At the same time, the BVH team was developing several alternatives to protect and stabilize the east wall in case monitoring revealed any additional movement. As Sherda Williams presented them to the congregation's trustees in late March 2004, the options included installing new wooden buttresses against the east wall, tying the east wall to the west wall using steel cables within the building, or demolishing the east wall and rebuilding it on a temporary foundation so as to support the roof. This last option was similar to what had been done for the north wall of the AME Church. By the summer of 2004, however, regular checks of the monitoring system showed no sign of additional movement.[186]

By April 2004, the BVH team had prepared plans for the overall stabilization of the building which involved three phases. The first of these was clearing all furnishings and trash from the interior after complete photographic documentation, retaining sample carpeting, pews and other furnishings, and hymnals and other small features either for reproduction purposes or for curation. The second phase included demolishing chimneys, vent pipes, and the entire bell tower, and removing roofing materials, any unstable rafters, and any delaminating stucco. The final phase was replacing the unstable rafters, reinforcing the intersections of rafters and cross ties, installing new roofing materials, building a new bell tower, covering damaged portions of the floor with plywood, repointing mortar, constructing an interior framed wall to support the roof on the east side, and taking additional steps to protect the building from further water penetration including vented covers over the windows.[187] The principal questions that remained

[185] Sherda K. Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, January 12, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[186] Sherda Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, March 18, 2004, files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217; Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, March 22, 2004, Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 5; email, Sherda Williams to Jim Handeland, July 22, 2004, Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 5.
[187] Sherda Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, April 12, 2004, files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417; Section 106 Compliance Form, June 17, 2004, files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.

were sources of funding and the legal mechanism that would allow NPS to conduct the work. In March 2004, Superintendent Williams offered to work with the trustees on submitting grants for the work, which she reinforced in the park's May 2004 newsletter. In July 2004, however, Regional Director Ernie Quintana agreed to make the work at the First Baptist Church the Region's top priority for Historic Structures Stabilization funding for FY 2005.[188] This decision placed additional urgency on the need to clarify the legal basis for work on this privately-owned building. In August, Superintendent Williams provided to the trustees a draft cooperative agreement that a Department of the Interior solicitor had prepared; the cooperative agreement would allow NPS to spend funds on the building's preservation, though the funds would not be provided directly to the congregation.[189]

Figure 16. First Baptist Church during stabilization, 2006. Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc no. 22, Catalog no. 20.

The park received funding for the project in May 2005, and, after additional negotiations with the Trustees of the First Baptist Church, for which Angela Bates served as NPS liaison, the park and the church executed the cooperative agreement in late June 2005. At the same time, the trustees executed an agreement drafted by NPS to allow access to the building for the necessary stabilization work.[190] The Regional Office hired a contractor, Price Construction of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the fall of 2006, and work began near the end of the year as the BVH team

[188] Email, Sherda Williams to Billy Davis, July 7, 2004, NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 5; "Flowering Nicodemus" [park newsletter], vol. 1, issue 2, May 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[189] Sherda Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, August 19, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417.
[190] Sherda Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, May 16, 2005, with letter from attorney for trustees as an attachment, files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417; Cooperative Agreement between NPS and Historic Nicodemus First Baptist Church Foundation, Inc., executed June 30, 2005, files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.

prepared the final drawings. The work to stabilize the building, which was focused on the roof structure, the bell tower roof, and the new interior east wall to support the roof, continued through the summer and was completed in August 2006 (Figure 16).[191] Through 2007, Superintendent Williams encouraged the trustees to pursue grant funding to further the restoration of the building, though there is no record of the trustees having done so.[192]

School District No. 1

The Nicodemus School District was established in 1879 as the first school district in Graham County (Figure 17). The residents of Nicodemus transferred lots to the School District in 1887, upon which the district built a two-story school. That first schoolhouse burned in approximately 1916, and, in 1916-1917, the School District built the present schoolhouse on the same lot. Unfortunately, the population of Nicodemus declined throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and the School District closed the schoolhouse in Nicodemus in 1955. The School District donated the building to the Nicodemus 4-H Club in June 1966, and, in 1983, the Nicodemus American Legion post bought the building for use as a meeting space and for social events.[193]

Figure 17. School District No. 1 looking northwest, June 2021. Photograph by the author.

[191] Memorandum, Michael L. Ward to Jim Handeland et al., containing minutes of on-site meetings among NPS, BVH team, and Price Construction, February 1, 2006, files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217; "Flowering of Nicodemus," vol. 3, issues 2 (May 2006) and 3 (August 2006), files of Nicodemus NHS.
[192] Sherda Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, August 1, 2007; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417. No further record of grants for the First Baptist Church were located during the present research.
[193] *Historic Structures Report* (2002), 2-30.

In 1997, with the first phase of stabilization complete at the AME Church, Midwest Region Planner Sändra Washington coordinated with Regional Chief of Cultural Resources Craig Kenkel to develop a stabilization project for the schoolhouse. Kenkel and Washington contacted the Corporation for National and Community Service, more commonly known as AmeriCorps, an independent federal agency created in 1993 that provides opportunities for volunteer service, for help with stabilization of the schoolhouse. Regional staff prepared the general work plan, which included re-shingling the roof, repairing or replacing wooden siding, and repairing windows and doors. AmeriCorps approved the project in August 1997, with a proposed start date in late October or early November 1997, and NPS agreed to pay for housing and food for the volunteers.[194] Unfortunately, the project soon encountered obstacles. Congress failed to pass an appropriations bill for FY98 on time in the autumn of 1997, forcing NPS to rely on continuing resolutions that allowed for no discretionary spending. Unless alternative sources of funding could be found, such as the National Park Foundation or the Trust for Public Land, the project would have to be postponed until the FY98 budget was passed. At the same time, the schoolhouse was found to have a large hive of bees inside the south wall. By October, it looked more likely that a portion of the wall would have to be removed for access to the hive, which would add time for the necessary reviews under Section 106 of the NHPA.As a result, the park decided to postpone the project to the summer of 1998.[195]

In April 1998, Associate Regional Director James Loach again contacted AmeriCorps, requesting that the previous year's approved project be approved for June 1998. In his request, Loach agreed to remove all loose lead paint in the building and to remove the hive of bees from inside the south wall before the volunteers arrived; AmeriCorps quickly approved the project.[196] In early May, Robert Brogdon, Commander of the American Legion post that owned the schoolhouse and also a part-time maintenance employee of the park, executed an agreement of the American Legion post to allow NPS to conduct the stabilization work at the building and to conduct an initial inventory of the collections inside the schoolhouse, and the Regional Contracting Office found this agreement to be sufficient legal grounds to allow the stabilization work.[197] After initial planning work in June, the AmeriCorps volunteers, with assistance from NPS staff and guided by Midwest Region Architect Jana Gross, conducted the stabilization work and a curatorial assessment of the contents in July 1998. The stabilization work focused on the siding and the roof, replacing decaying clapboards with new boards before applying a new coat of paint to the entire building, and replacing the existing wood shingles and metal flashing. The interior was thoroughly washed and disinfected to prevent possible hantavirus contamination before the interior objects were inventoried (Figure 18). As Fort Larned NHS Park Ranger

[194] Memorandum, Craig Kenkel to Kevin Rumery, June 20, 1997; email, Felix Revello to Steve Linderer et al., August 11, 1997; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[195] Multiple emails among Sändra Washington, Steve Linderer, and Craig Kenkel, October 1-2, 1997; email, Linderer to Kenkel et al., October 21, 1997; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3. See also Linderer to Karen Labat [AmeriCorps], October 21, 1997; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[196] James A. Loach to Kevin Rumery, April 3, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[197] Emails between Jana Gross and Linderer et al, May 7, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217. Agreement with the American Legion Post 270 in the form of a letter from Linderer to Robert Brogdon, May 7, 1998, and countersigned by Brogdon May 8, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.

Figure 18. Books inventoried during the 1998 stabilization project at School District No. 1. Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc no. 22, Catalog no. 20.

George Elmore described the interior to Regional Curator Carolyn Wallingford, "I do not think I would want to eat dinner inside, but at least now it smells like disinfectant instead of mouse."[198]

The Historic Structures Report, completed in 2002, proposed a variety of treatment plans for the building, including investigations of several cracks in the foundation. Superintendent Sherda Williams coordinated with Regional Office staff to develop a second stabilization project in early 2005, focused on the north wall, which was then starting to collapse as a result of moisture infiltration. Maintenance staff from Fort Larned conducted the work in August 2005, which consisted of excavating holes beneath the building's crawl space for five new concrete foundation piers that bore a temporary frame north wall to support the roof structure. The existing north wall was then demolished. Nearly all the wood structural members and clapboard siding proved unusable due to rot. Once the new frame wall was installed, the workers installed new sheeting and siding.[199] A proposed project to paint the schoolhouse in the summer of 2007 using volunteer workers through the Colorado Range Riders Youth Corps, was cancelled when the park could not secure funds to remove all lead paint from the building.[200]

The BVH team which had prepared the original HSR in 2002 returned to Nicodemus in 2009 to evaluate any further deterioration of the buildings and to recommend new treatments. With regard to the schoolhouse, the findings of the updated HSR were dire: the foundation had become ineffective and should be replaced, the roof was being pulled downward by the weight of the plaster ceiling below, the chimney was in imminent threat of collapsing, the east wall was leaning outward, the front porch floor structure and roof supports should be replaced, and the exterior siding was quickly deteriorating. In early 2010, after the BVH team had completed its site inspection but before the report was released in May, Superintendent Mark Weaver wrote to

[198] *Historic Structures Report* (2002), 2-31; email, George Elmore to Carolyn Wallingford, June 19, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.
[199] Email, Sherda Williams to Donald Moore, Sr. [American Legion Post 270], August 17, 2005; Project Completion Report, Nicodemus NHS School House North Wall Stabilization, undated but describing work carried out August 22-24, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[200] Draft Cooperative Agreement between NPS and Colorado Range Rider Youth Corps, with attached handwritten note reporting that "Project cancelled due to lead abatement issue; email, Sherda Williams to Nora Lehmer et al., July 12, 2007, regarding the park's inability to use allocated funding for the painting project; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1.A.2.

Legion Commander Robert Brogdon regarding the seriousness of the building's condition. By this time, however, the Regional Contracting Office's position regarding repairs to privately-owned buildings, on the advice of Department of the Interior solicitors, was that NPS must have a stronger legal interest in a property before conducting any further stabilization work, either in fee or in the form of an easement. Weaver explained the implications in his letter to Brogdon:

> With an easement the Legion would retain ownership and the National Park Service would purchase the development rights as well as the right to actively preserve the structure and the grounds. A fee simple purchase would place the Schoolhouse in National Park Service ownership. Both the easement and purchase options would ensure the Legion has access and use of the grounds and structure for Legion activities, and the Park could have access for staff and visitors to enter the Schoolhouse to view interpretive exhibits and for educational programs.[201]

Weaver prepared a funding request for the work in early 2010, but the American Legion declined to convey an easement on the building at that time. As discussions continued, Weaver was successful in securing funding for the work for FY 2012. Following negotiations throughout 2010 and 2011, NPS and the American Legion Post agreed to enter into a Cooperative Agreement, which was executed in early October 2011, in the hope that it would provide a sufficient legal basis for the expenditure of federal funds.[202] The project was being coordinated by the NPS Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC), which provided compliance, design, and construction. Based on a site visit in January 2012, HPTC prepared plans for the stabilization work in April, including a new foundation, porch repairs, reinforcement of walls to support the roof, and window repair or replacement.

Unfortunately, the project lost its momentum at that point amid difficulties between NPS and the American Legion. By this time, the cooperative agreement was deemed no longer sufficient to serve as a federal "interest" in the property. Instead, the owner would at least have to convey a façade easement, which would apply to the entire outside of the building and the grounds, for NPS to spend funds on the building's stabilization. At a meeting held in Township Hall to discuss the schoolhouse, as Superintendent Mark Weaver recalled, Nicodemus resident "Gil Alexander stood up and said, 'Well, this is a no-brainer. Of course, sell them a façade easement so they can protect the building.'" The park's Maintenance Worker, Robert Brogdon, who was also the Commander of the American Legion Post, however, steadfastly refused to convey the easement despite facing opposition from other members of the post. Weaver contacted the American Legion national headquarters for advice and was told that, since the local post owned the building, it would require the local commander's agreement.[203] Efforts to conclude the agreement by subsequent Superintendents have proven fruitless. In the spring of 2014, Superintendent Angela Wetz wrote to Brogdon requesting that he no longer serve as the point of contact for the American Legion, mirroring an identical request that Weaver had made in 2011. The park still hoped to acquire an easement on the schoolhouse "and try to obtain funding to stabilize the building, if you are interested." His role as both an employee of the park

[201] Mark Weaver to Robert Brogdon, undated (between November 2009 and May 2010); files of Nicodemus NHS, H3015.
[202] Cooperative Agreement, District No. 1 Schoolhouse, Nicodemus, Kansas, executed October 6, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[203] Mark Weaver, oral history interview, October 14, 2020.

and the point of contact for the entity that would benefit from the agreement created the potential for a conflict of interest.[204] Two years later, former Nicodemus Superintendent Sherda Williams, by then Superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education NHS with oversight responsibility for Nicodemus NHS, was in correspondence with Nicodemus Historical Society president Thomas Wellington. Wellington was also a member of the American Legion post and disagreed with Brogdon's stance regarding an easement on the schoolhouse. Brogdon, he complained, had taken no actions and was refusing to schedule meetings at which the issue could be discussed. He had hoped to get the members to vote Brogdon out as Commander, but was unable to secure the necessary votes and, by March 2016, had "decided to cease that effort, due to local politics." Both Williams and Wellington hoped to continue to move toward an easement that would allow the stabilization to move forward, but the issue had stalled.[205] By the time of writing of this administrative history, the issue has not been resolved.

St. Francis Hotel/Fletcher-Switzer Residence

The St. Francis Hotel/Fletcher-Switzer Residence is, with the AME Church, one of the two park buildings that was built within Nicodemus NHS' period of national significance from 1877 to 1889. The building was built as a hotel in 1881 by Zach T. Fletcher, one of the original arrivals in 1877, as a one-and-one-half story, limestone block building with a square footprint. Fletcher sold the business after the railroads failed to connect to Nicodemus in 1889. In the 1920s, one of Fletcher's grand-nephews, Fred Switzer, purchased the building with his wife, Ora Wellington Switzer. The Switzers made their home in the former hotel and added to it several times from the 1920s into the 1960s, It was in its current form by the early 1970s, with one-story, wood-framed additions surrounding the original limestone building. At the time of the original HSR in 2002, the building was in generally fair to poor condition, with multiple cracks in the stucco cladding, cracks and spalling in the concrete foundation, significant water damage in the center of the first floor, and other evidence of water infiltration throughout the building. The roof was in good condition, however, because new shingles had been applied in 1998 (Figure 19).[206]

Ora Switzer moved in 1976 to the new Villa Housing, constructed with funds provided by HUD and managed by the Nicodemus Housing Authority. Ownership of the house passed to her son, Veryl Switzer, then working at his alma mater, Kansas State University, as Assistant Athletic Director for Academics, He continued to own the property until he died in June 2022. Switzer was one of the early proponents of protecting the town's history, having worked with both the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Ira Hutchinson with NPS in the early 1970s to encourage recognition of the importance of Nicodemus' history. Switzer gave permission for the BVH team to access the house during preparation of the HSR, but, given the new condition of the roof, the house was not considered in danger of collapse, and other buildings took priority during the park's early years.

[204] Angela J. Wetz to Robert Brogdon, April 3, 2014; files of Nicodemus NHS, H3015. See also Weaver to Brogdon, June 24, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[205] Email, Sherda Williams to Daniel Betts et al, March 16, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[206] *Historic Structures Report* (2022), 2-21, 3-41.

Figure 19. St. Francis Hotel looking southeast, June 2021. Photograph by the author.

In 2003, however, the stucco siding, which had been applied in the early 1950s, was substantially failing and was allowing moisture to enter the building. Fort Larned NHS Facility Manager William Chapman installed monitors on the west wall of the house in November 2003 to determine the rate of increase of cracks in the masonry. In January 2004, Chapman prepared a funding request to remove the stucco cladding and repair and tuck-point the limestone block wall, together with repairing doors and windows, installing roof flashing, and replacing the stucco siding.[207] Nothing came of that funding request, but, in August 2004, Switzer expressed his interest in preserving the building and a willingness to prepare a grant application for the work. Switzer continued his discussions with Superintendent Sherda Williams through 2006, exploring possibilities for either conveying an easement on the property to NPS or entering into a cooperative agreement that would allow NPS to conduct stabilization work on his house.[208] During the course of these discussions, Williams prepared another funding request to stabilize the house: a $1.4 million dollar, multi-phase effort to rehabilitate the St. Francis Hotel for visitor use and interpretation that would include extensive stabilization work.[209]

[207] Emails among Felix Revello, William Harlow, William Chapman, and others, November 26, 2003, files of Nicodemus NHS H3015; Project Identification Form, Stabilize St. Francis Hotel, last updated January 16, 2004, files of Nicodemus NHS H1.A.2.
[208] Sherda Williams, Memorandum to File, August 6, 2004; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 5. See also Williams to Switzer, March 15, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417.
[209] Project Identification Form, Rehabilitate Historic St. Francis Hotel, last updated December 24, 2006; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 5.

Rather than this grand project, however, NPS secured funds for FY07 to repair and stabilize the exterior walls, seeking to keep water from entering the building. Switzer had executed a Cooperative Agreement with NPS in July 2007, and, in early October, the park contracted with Vehicles of Kansas, a firm based in Emporia, Kansas, to conduct the work. Subcontractors for Vehicles of Kansas completed the work in December 2007, including removing and replacing loose stucco, installing missing sections of roof flashing, and painting the exterior. At the same time, Switzer contributed to the project by making and installing windows and door coverings.[210] As Chapman discovered during a site visit in mid-December, however, the work was not being performed to NPS standards. He noticed that new stucco had been applied over existing loose stucco and that roof flashing had not been installed as claimed. These problems were corrected over the winter of 2008, however, and the work was accepted as complete by late March 2009.[211]

These repairs kept the exterior of the St. Francis Hotel in fair to good condition for several more years, though, by 2013, the roof, installed in 1998 needed replacement. In April 2014, Superintendent Angela Wetz wrote to Switzer seeking to continue discussions with him begun by Superintendent Williams regarding conveyance of a façade easement on the property. Wetz noted that, in January 2013, as part of the process of accepting the easement, NPS had contracted for a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA). This earlier ESA reported the possibility of contamination from earlier gasoline storage containers and from possible lead paint from earlier buildings on the site and recommended that a Phase II ESA be completed.[212] Switzer reaffirmed his intent to convey a façade easement on the property, and NPS conducted the Phase II ESA. As Regional Chief of Real Estate Division Daniel Betts recalled, the items identified in the Phase II ESA were resolved, and Switzer formally donated a façade easement to NPS. The National Park Service accepted the donation, though clarifications relating to the title were still being processed in October 2020.[213] With the donation of the façade easement, Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams, in December 2016, prepared a funding request to install new asphalt shingles on the main roof and rolled asphalt roofing on the shed on the north side of the house. Williams received notice that the funds had been approved in June 2017 and contacted Switzer's daughter, Teresa Switzer, about conducting the work. In order not to disturb the interior of the building, which was a condition of Switzer's donation of the easement, the project scope called for the installation of a rafter structure above, and largely independent of, the existing roof structure, and applying new shingles to that new structure. Williams received verbal approval from Switzer to proceed with the work in late July 2017, and NPS issued a Notice to Proceed for the work in early September.[214]

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[210] Sherda Williams to Verle Switzer, October 15, 2007, files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417; Completion Report, Stabilize St. Francis Hotel, December 2007, files of Nicodemus NHS, H3417.
[211] Trip Report by William Chapman, December 19, 2007, files of Nicodemus NHS, H3015; Trip Report by William Chapman, March 13, 2008, with handwritten note by Sherda Williams that final punch list items would be complete by March 31, 2008, Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 5.
[212] Angela J. Wetz to Verle Switzer, April 3, 2014; files of Nicodemus NHS, H3015.
[213] Daniel Betts, oral history interview, September 22 and October 1, 2020.
[214] Email, Sherda Williams to Terri Switzer and Enimini Ekong, June 16, 2017; "Roof Surface Replacement, St. Francis, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas, April 11, 2017," Sherda Williams to Verle Switzer, August 28, 2017, with handwritten notes regarding verbal approval and notice to proceed; files of Nicodemus NHS.

Township Hall

Nicodemus Township Hall is the most recent of the five buildings that constitute Nicodemus NHS, completed in 1939 as a Works Progress Administration project to employ out of work men in the area. It is a rectangular building with a front gable roof facing south toward Washington Avenue, built of limestone blocks quarried near Webster Reservoir in Rooks County. The building was built for the Township and has remained in use as a community center since its completion. The interior features an open-plan assembly hall that occupies nearly the entire building, with a raised stage at the north end opposite the entrance from a foyer that gives on the front façade of the building. Aside from the front door and interior walls, ceiling, and floor coverings, Township Hall has remained essentially the same since 1939. As discussed in Chapter 3, Superintendent Linderer negotiated with the Township Board to secure a lease for the building in 1998 in order to provide for a visitor contact station. Intended to serve as a temporary measure while the park pursued a separate visitor center, Township Hall has remained the park's only visitor contact station for twenty-five years. (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Township Hall looking northeast, June 2021. Photograph by the author.

Township Hall had been well maintained and was in generally good condition when the park was authorized in 1996. As described in the original HSR, the only potential issue was the lack of gutters which allowed rainwater to drain toward the exterior walls, but the limestone blocks that form the walls remained generally intact with only a limited number of cracks and localized failures of small size.[215] Under the terms of the lease agreement with the Township

[215] *Historic Structures Report* (2002), 3-72.

Board, NPS was to pay for all regular upkeep maintenance including janitorial, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, lawn care, and snow removal; utilities including two adjacent streetlights; internet access; and two wheelchair accessible Porta-Potties on the Township Hall grounds. Under the terms of this lease, NPS arranged for two emergency actions in the early years of the lease. In 2004 the park secured funds to remove eight of the Siberian elm trees that had been planted near Township Hall in the 1940s as part of a beautification program. The trees were dying and creating a safety hazard, conditions exacerbated by a severe windstorm in early July 2004, which damaged or toppled several of the trees. After removal, the Siberian elm trees, which are classified as an invasive species, were replaced by American Liberty elms, which have a similar canopy shape, are hardier, and are resistant to Dutch elm disease.[216] A year later, in early summer 2005, the existing septic system for Township Hall failed. The park secured emergency funding for remedial work, which included a geophysical survey of the excavation area by the Midwest Archeological Center. Using ground-penetrating radar on a grid measuring forty meters by forty meters, the survey indicated the likely presence of artifacts and a possible historic stone outhouse. The report recommended that construction for the proposed septic system would have no effect on significant archeological resources as long as the possible outhouse location was avoided.[217] The park contracted with Bollig's Ditching, a firm in WaKeeny, Kansas, to conduct the work, which included sealing an abandoned well and removing the pump, pressure casing, and piping. This allowed work to begin on the septic system, which consisted of excavations for two 1,000-gallon tanks, one connected to the building and the other connected to the newly-excavated leach field, before being backfilled. All work was inspected by the North West Local Environmental Protection Group to insure compliance with state law, and was completed in late August 2005.[218]

In early 2007, Superintendent Sherda Williams and Maintenance Worker Robert Brogdon began noticing spalling damage on the limestone blocks of the exterior north wall of Township Hall. NPS staff, particularly Fort Larned NHS Facility Manager Bill Chapman, continued to monitor the damage over the next several years, attributing the problem to the lack of gutters and the presence of concrete immediately adjoining the limestone block foundation.[219] Finally, in 2009, the condition had progressed to the point that Superintendent Mark Weaver prepared a funding request for a stabilization project designed to address the water drainage issue surrounding Township Hall's foundation. The proposed work as updated in 2011 included removing the concrete sidewalks that surrounded the building, installing French drains, repairing or replacing particular limestone blocks, and repairing other items above the foundation including water leaks at the chimney and subsequent interior water damage, and reglazing and repairing windows.[220]

When Weaver first prepared the funding request, he assumed that the work could be done through a Cooperative Agreement with the Township Board, "as is permitted in the Enabling

[216] Section 106 Compliance Form, July 6, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217. See also Sherda Williams, oral history interview.
[217] Memorandum, Trip Report, Archeologist, Archeological Assistance and Partnership Program to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, July 8, 2005
[218] Completion Report of Nicodemus Township Hall Septic System Project, undated but describing work completed August 26, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS, H3417.
[219] Emails between Sherda Williams and Bill Chapman et al., February 12, 2007; files of Nicodemus NHS, H3017.
[220] Project Information Form, Stabilize Township Hall, last update December 1, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.

Legislation and supported by a recent Solicitors Opinion."[221] As the project processed through the planning phase in 2012, however, the Department of the Interior's Solicitor made a subsequent determination that a Cooperative Agreement was not a sufficient federal interest, and that a façade easement would be required before any funds could be spent. The negotiations over the easement pushed the start date for the work, which was to be conducted by HPTC, from FY 2012 to FY 2013; this decision also affected the stabilization projects at the schoolhouse and the First Baptist Church, as discussed earlier in this chapter.[222] The Township Board was amenable to conveying the façade easement, and, in July 2013, the easement agreement was filed with the Graham County Register of Deeds. As certified in the deed, the Township Board donated a façade easement on the building, including exterior walls, roof, and grounds, to NPS for a period of ninety-nine years for the purposes of preserving, protecting, and interpreting the building. Through the easement, NPS agreed to maintain, preserve, and restore the Township Hall's exterior, and the Township Board agreed "to maintain the interior in a good and sound state of repair." The easement also includes provisions for archeological investigation and the avoidance of impacts to archeological resources, notifications of special events or other uses, and provisions for damages and liability.[223]

Agreement by the Township Board to donate an easement on Township Hall allowed work to move forward on the stabilization project. In early 2013, after Angela Wetz entered on duty as Superintendent, the park contracted with HPTC to prepare drawings and specifications for the project, which were completed in June. The work to stabilize Township Hall as described earlier was then funded and completed in 2014.

Leasing Township Hall

The façade easement which allowed NPS to conduct stabilization work in 2014 was in addition to the ongoing lease of Township Hall initiated in 1998. Discussions over the uses of the building were the principal contact between the Township and NPS, sometimes for good when it brought the two to work together for major events and celebrations, and sometimes for ill when conflicting uses caused disagreements and disaffection. The initial lease agreement in 1998 recognized that certain community events, particularly the annual Homecoming celebration, would take priority and that NPS would relocate its exhibits and other materials as best as it could. The National Park Service also urged that it have responsibility for basic maintenance and groundskeeping, though major repairs would still be the Township's responsibility. The National Park Service also reserved the right to place two handicapped-accessible portable toilets on the

[221] Ibid.

[222] Email, Mark Weaver to Sue Bruns, May 23, 2012, files of Nicodemus NHS, H3417; email, Mark Weaver to Sharon Busch, June 22, 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also Weaver's comments in *Flowering of Nicodemus*, July 2012: "Ah, government bureaucracy. Recent review of the laws that govern operations here require an easement to be established before federal monies can be invested in privately owned properties. We are working with the Township, the American Legion and the First Baptist Church congregation to get this required paperwork in place so these important stabilization projects can proceed this coming spring or summer."

[223] Easement Agreement, Township Hall, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas, recorded with Graham County, Kansas Register of Deeds, Book 262, page 736, July 22, 2013; files of Nicodemus NHS, H3417. See also Daniel Betts, oral history interview.

grounds and a National Park Service sign at the front of the building.[224] The original lease was for one year, renewable for up to five years, with a monthly rent of $200.[225]

The original lease for Township Hall, in one-year increments and renewed for up to five years, expired in 2003. At that point, NPS continued to pay the original rent on a month-to-month basis until 2011, when the Township Board increased the rent to $600 per month. In the summer of 2012, however, the Township Board conducted additional research regarding rental spaces in the area as part of its re-negotiation of the lease. In presenting its terms to NPS, Nicodemus Township Trustee Sharyn Dowdall averred that a review of comparable spaces in Hays, Kansas, and other local communities revealed that a more appropriate rent was $2,000 per month, beginning with the new fiscal year on October 1. As before, NPS would be responsible for all utilities, internet and telephone service, and janitorial and grounds maintenance services, while the Township would be responsible for major repairs.[226] The Regional Property, Fleet, and Space Management Office approved the lease for a term of three years, which was renewed in 2015 for a period of two years, despite that NPS requested a five-year lease. During this period, when the park was being managed remotely from Brown v. Board of Education NHS, Superintendent Sherda Williams and others expressed surprise that the lease was for a term other than month-to-month. As relations between the park and the Town were already strained and declining toward their nadir in the coming years, Williams observed that, regardless of the term of the lease, "we still have the long-term problem with conflicts over our continued use of the [Township] Hall."[227] The changing nature of the relationship between the two organizations and its effect on the operations of Nicodemus NHS will be discussed in the next chapter.

[224] Steven R. Linderer to James Bates, March 23, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[225] The original lease for Township Hall was not located during the current research. However, the annual renewal for the year from June 1, 2001, to May 21, 2002, is attached to Sharyn Dowdall, Trustee to Mark Weaver, August 2, 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[226] Sharyn Dowdall to Mark Weaver, August 2, 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[227] Email, Sherda Williams to Alexandra Picavet et al, November 18, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.

Chapter 5: Community Relations and Programs

The five buildings that constitute Nicodemus NHS, and Township Hall in particular, comprise one of the principal points of contact, along with the annual Homecoming celebration, between NPS and the residents and descendants of Nicodemus. Discussions between NPS staff and Nicodemus residents about the buildings, in particular, manifested the key dynamic in the challenges faced by NPS at Nicodemus NHS. The desire to protect these components of the historic landscape of this town, which many hundreds of descendants see as their true home and to which they return annually for the Homecoming celebration, requires the kind of funding that only the federal government, represented in Nicodemus by NPS, can provide. At the same time, the funding that NPS can provide is dependent on having an ownership stake in the building, which goes against the tradition of independence that is at the center of the town's historical character. On the other hand, the community's awareness of the historical significance of its story and its hope that others will come to appreciate that significance, calls for the expertise, staffing, and national recognition that is central to the mission of NPS. The community's traditional spirit of independence, however, often comes into conflict with the idea of someone else telling its story due to fear that the nuances of the community's lived experiences would be diluted or lost entirely if conveyed by "outsiders." Attempts to solve this dilemma have been at the center of discussions and disagreements between the community and NPS since the park was established.

This challenge for NPS in management of Nicodemus NHS, the conflict between not wanting to intrude upon or change the character of the community yet seeking to protect the town's historic resources and tell its story to visitors, was the subject of countless discussions and emails among the team that prepared the General Management Plan from the late 1990s to its final publication in 2003, as discussed in Chapter 3. The solution proposed in the GMP was to recognize the unique character of the town as it has evolved continuously since 1877, and to operate the new park through a management approach that the GMP dubbed "joint stewardship." This management prescription drew from the perspective of continuity as explored in the Cultural Landscape Report, which argued strongly in favor of Nicodemus's significance as a Traditional Cultural Property whose period of significance begins in 1877 and will continue as long as the community exists. As summarized in the GMP,

> Nicodemus represents far more than a physical place with historical significance. It serves as a focal point for all people to renew spiritual and emotional connections to family, community, and ancestors through this African American experience.[228]

The continued occupancy of Nicodemus, moreover, and the fact that far-flung descendants continue to make an annual pilgrimage there,

> portrays African American perseverance and the struggle of African American emigrants as they journeyed west into an unknown and often difficult physical environment to participate in the American Dream.[229]

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[228] *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas: General Management Plan*, 2003, page 13.
[229] Ibid.

In order to convey the significance of the community that has continued to survive through occupancy by a small group of descendants and the annual return of hundreds of others, NPS in the GMP sought to retain the character of Nicodemus "as a living, evolving, community." This entailed attempts to minimize disruptions to the town both from NPS and from the visiting public, to consult with community members on interpretation planning, and to offer interpretive training and assistance to community members who wanted to provide interpretive services. Throughout the history of the park from its authorization in late 1996 to the present, NPS and residents of Nicodemus, whether as individuals, Nicodemus Township Board trustees, members of the Nicodemus Historical Society, or members of one of the religious or civic organizations in the town, have sought to find ways to collaborate despite occasional misgivings and misunderstandings. This collaboration has taken many forms, including NPS support for local programs and events, especially the annual Homecoming celebration and special events, town residents supporting NPS endeavors such as the historical and archeological research projects described later in Chapter 6, and making accommodations regarding use of Township Hall and the Villas.

Underlying Concerns and Assumptions

Nearly all those who worked with Nicodemus NHS in its early years, whether community members or NPS staff, testified to ambivalence on the part of the town's residents with regard to an NPS presence in the town. Earlie Switzer-Rupp, for example, a Nicodemus resident and descendant who worked with Angela Bates and others to create the Nicodemus Historical Society, recalled an expectation that NPS, through encouraging the restoration of the town's historic buildings, would create opportunities for economic growth and a revival of the town's population. As she recalled,

> we wanted to – not only restore – to restore the town, but also increase the population to keep it alive. You know, my mother used to say to me, you know, "A house – a house only stands as long as there's a breath in it." And it's the same way with Nicodemus. It needs to have breath in it. And, if there's no one there, then you see dilapidation take place, just like in a home that has no breath in it.[230]

Nicodemus NHS Park Ranger LueCreasea Horne, herself a descendant and the park's first seasonal interpreter as a college student, expressed a similar recollection among the community's residents that there was an expectation of support for the restoration of the town's historic buildings. After observing that NPS had acquired and stabilized the AME Church, she explained that

> the other historic buildings that are dilapidated and falling down – some of the community members thought that the Park Service should have stepped up and refurbished these buildings. And so, you know, folks not really knowing Park Service only has so much money that they can do these things, and, also, you know, they want to be able to own the buildings to put the work in. So, if your family member is not selling that house, or giving that house, to the Park Service, they're not really going to be, you know, trying to put the Park Service money into it trying to rehab it and you still own it.[231]

[230] Earlice Switzer-Rupp, oral history interview, December 2, 2020.
[231] LueCreasea Horne, oral history interview.

At the same time, most of the NPS staff who were part of the park's early years recalled that, in addition to anticipating support for the town's growth, many of the residents hoped for a strong voice in how the park was managed and interpreted. Fort Larned Chief Ranger Felix Revello recalled that

> one of the things that I sensed from most, if not all, of the people is that they wanted the help while maintaining their control over their history. You know, "This is my history. I want to make sure that it's preserved and told the way that I feel it accurately reflects our experience here on the Plains."[232]

In a similar way, former Park Ranger Reginald Miller, the first full-time interpretive NPS personnel at the park while remaining on staff at Fort Larned NHS, recalled that "the descendants felt that they were going to have a lot more say-so in how Nicodemus was going to be developed. And then, you've got the Park Service and certain protocols that we have to go through because we're spending taxpayers' dollars."[233]

Challenges to the park's operations came not just from managing expectations on the part of the town's residents, but from NPS assumptions about the park as well. Midwest Region Planner Sändra Washington, who led the development of both the initial Suitability and Feasibility Study before the park's authorization and the GMP, shared concerns from residents that NPS would take too heavy a hand in Nicodemus, seeking to acquire too many properties and causing the town to lose its authenticity. She was, as she recalled, "very concerned about the suitability of the site, and I talked to Angela Bates at some length." She defined her concerns as that

> the National Park Service would muck it up. That we would come in and subsume the community. . . . The average age of the community at the time was probably sixty-four or -five, and all I could imagine was, "How do we manage a park in an area where there's not a lot of – there's no financial resources here that we can tap in and use as partnerships, as we think about that, and there isn't an understanding or a full appreciation of the weight of the federal bureaucracy, which is this agency who is coming in, and, all of a sudden, people are going, 'What?!'" I didn't want people railroaded into selling. I mean, I – there was just so much that concerned me, because I was thinking of them as my grandparents.[234]

Washington was particularly proud of the management recommendation in the GMP in favor of joint stewardship that afforded the residents of the town a stronger say in the management and interpretation of the park, "the idea of really relying on community members to have a real stake in the management… and interpretation of the site, I thought that was the right way to go."[235] Other NPS staff members, however, were less sanguine about the idea of joint stewardship. Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Thomas Richter, for example, recalled that, in the GMP,

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[232] Steve Linderer and Felix Revello, oral history interview.
[233] Reginal Miller, oral history interview
[234] Sändra Washington, oral history interview.
[235] Ibid.

> we stressed community involvement and participation, and, with hindsight, too much. It was such a small community to think that, for example, we were going to train the residents in historic preservation, so then, say, they would. . . restore the AME Church, for example. And that also led to very slow development, because the GMP did not envision a more traditional National Park unit that would have more traditional staff.

This more hand's-off approach to the park's management, Richter believed, was reflected in the staffing structure for the park and the assumption that the town's residents would be a stronger part of the park's management and interpretation: "So, for example, the park never had a Chief of Interpretation. They had a park ranger – a GS-9 park ranger, and so, in terms of advocacy, I would say they were – it was really lacking."[236]

Figure 21. William Gwaltney, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

William Gwaltney expressed in even stronger terms what he believed were the deleterious effects of the reduced NPS presence in Nicodemus and the reliance on town residents for interpretive support. Gwaltney's long career in the NPS included working as Chief of Interpretation, Chief Naturalist, and Superintendent, by 2001 was serving as the Assistant Regional Director for Workforce Enhancement in the Intermountain Region, whose particular focus was building relationships with diverse communities and diversifying the NPS workforce (Figure 21). He visited Nicodemus several times in its early years at the request of Sändra Washington and clearly recognized the atypical aspects of Nicodemus NHS. In particular, he acknowledged the fact that it is a living community, with which NPS typically is not as comfortable as with communities that have ceased to function as such. Gwaltney had experience with parks that sought to manage through cooperative efforts and that had problems doing so: "there were some things that, sort of, fell off the table, not because anybody was being a bad actor, but because there were just too many agendas on the table. So, I felt that that could be an

[236] Thomas Richter, oral history interview, September 4, 2020.

issue here as well," he explained. Gwaltney provided an oral history interview in September 2020, in the immediate aftermath of a period when the Nicodemus Historical Society had operated the park's interpretation and visitor service programs under a cooperative agreement with NPS. The key story of the emigration of African Americans to Kansas, he believed, has not been conveyed in its full complexity, with the result that the interpretive program under the leadership of the Nicodemus Historical Society "has, I believe, failed to become part of a professional interpretive model," in the absence of professional training. In taking too light a hand on the management and interpretive program at Nicodemus NHS, Gwaltney continued,

> the Park Service may have made a mistake when they reduced their physical footprint on the property, because you don't have the flat hat, you don't have the arrowhead, you don't have the insistence – the daily insistence on "Where's your interpretive plan? Where's your program plan? Where's your – where's your six-month report? Where's your twelve-month report? Where's your annual report?" If you're managing it from a distance and not really managing it, you are either solid in your appreciation that person has this well within their capacities, or they don't.[237]

The implications of these disagreements regarding the most effective relationship between NPS and the town were manifested most clearly between 2015 and 2020. During that time, NPS lost nearly all its staff for the park, and the Nicodemus Historical Society managed the visitor center through a cooperative agreement with NPS, leading to some challenging conversations regarding the future of the park and its management. This era will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 7 and 8.

Homecoming Celebration and Township Hall

Because NPS leases Township Hall from the Township Board for use as a visitor contact station, this building became the principal point of both collaboration and conflict. The lease existed primarily in the background throughout most of the year, as the Township Board and NPS had a host of other issues on their desks. The relations between the Township Board and NPS regarding Township Hall came into sharper focus, however, at the annual Homecoming celebration in early August. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, Homecoming is a continuation of the annual Emancipation Day, which the residents of Nicodemus began celebrating in 1887. This event, celebrated on or about August 1st by African Americans through the country beginning in the nineteenth century, commemorated the emancipation by Great Britain of all slaves in its territories in the Caribbean in 1834. As scholars of African American history have argued, August 1st was more actively celebrated than July 4th among most African American communities in the nineteenth century. In the years after the town lost a railroad connection in the 1880s, the annual Emancipation Day celebration, recast as a Homecoming celebration in the early twentieth century, was one of the few things that brought people from the surrounding area to the townsite.

[237] William Gwaltney, oral history interview.

In the twentieth century, as more Nicodemus families moved to other parts of the country in search of economic opportunities, the annual return in the summer for Homecoming became the vital component in the maintenance of Nicodemus as a cultural entity. Through this annual pilgrimage, in which entire families returned to the town in late July, new generations were introduced to the corporate memory of the community, forging connections among cousins near and distant and reinforcing the concept of identity among a particular set of people with a particular place. This annual return by generations of the same families who are descendants of the original settlers, coming back to properties which have been continuously owned by the same families, is the key component in the arguments that Nicodemus qualifies as a Traditional Cultural Property. Midwest Region Historian Dena Sanford oversaw the preparation of a major revision of the National Historic Landmark nomination for Nicodemus and summarized the ongoing intersection of property, family, and place surrounding the Homecoming celebration that defines Nicodemus as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP):

> it's a connection of land ownership and the ability to self-government …to have their own identity, and to be self-sufficient people, because a TCP for African Americans is distinct from other Americans that – everybody wants land, and everybody wants to be able to have their own little piece of land, but, for African Americans, this really does have a resonance as part of their identity. And Nicodemus now – the descendants – the original owners and their children and their grandchildren, they all still continue to own parcels of land, so you get, like, thirty people owning one parcel. Good luck…contacting all these people. But they don't give up their land. It's their connection to their identity. They may be in Denver, they may be in who knows where across the country, but they own land. It's their "little piece of 'demus," as they like to say – I've seen that quote – and they come back on Emancipation Day – Homecoming Day – and they reconnect with their family. And it's all family. They all consider themselves one large family.[238]

With the establishment of Nicodemus NHS in late 1996, the annual Homecoming began in a limited way to incorporate people and events related to NPS. During the preparation of the Suitability and Feasibility Study in the early 1990s, Sändra Washington attended Homecoming celebrations, initiating the tradition of using the annual event to solicit public input for various planning documents when so many residents and descendants were together. As she recalled of these early meetings, "They were probably at a hundred and twelve, a hundred and thirteen years when we first – when we first started going to the Homecomings. But the Township Hall was very full. It was well-attended.[239]

In 1998, Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Steve Linderer coordinated extensively with the Homecoming committee and NPS personnel to hold the park's dedication ceremony jointly with Homecoming. The program was held on August 1, 1998, with approximately 800 people in attendance. NPS Director Robert Stanton, the guest of honor, led the roster of speakers that also included Afro-American Institute for History and Community President Robert DeForrest,

[238] Dena Sanford, oral history interview, September 25, 2020. As Sanford noted in the interview, and as discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, the revised NHL nomination has remained in draft form since approximately 2016 as review staff in different NPS offices disagree on whether Nicodemus qualifies as a TCP.
[239] Sändra Washington oral history interview.

Figure 22. NPS Director Robert Stanton speaking at the Dedication and Homecoming celebration, 1998.

Figure 23. Angela Bates receiving an award from Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Steve Linderer at the Dedication and Homecoming celebration, 1998.

Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS), Kansas State Historical Society Executive Director Ramon Powers, and Midwest Regional Director William Schenk, with Linderer serving as Master of Ceremonies (Figures 22 and 23). The event also featured participation by the Nicodemus Buffalo Soldiers Association and the Birmingham Sunlights, an internationally known African American gospel singing group. Participation by the Sunlights was organized by the National Council for the Traditional Arts, which also led an oral history and photographic documentation project during the celebration. In his comments, NPS Director Stanton related that the agency had been working in recent years to find sites that would fill the "blank chapters of history," including the role that African Americans had played in the nation's development: "'The attempt to capture the spirit of those who settled here is the duty of the National Park Service. It shows that we can make good out of a harsh environment. These were people who didn't accept defeat, and that may be the true spirit of Nicodemus.'"[240]

In subsequent years, NPS staff have taken part in the annual Homecoming celebrations, providing support when needed. As Superintendent Sherda Williams recalled, however, "all superintendents were pretty careful to not claim any kind of ownership of that – the Homecoming event. . . .we were there to help supplement and support the community."[241] It could be a difficult balance to maintain, however, given the importance of Homecoming to the community and the joint occupancy of the Township Hall. Many of the events that comprise the annual program took place either inside Township Hall or on the grounds. As Angela Bates explained,

> when we have our Homecoming Celebration, this is where everything takes place. We have our dance in here. We have our fashion show in here. We have our program in here. This is where we – this, in and around here –we have food vendors out there. . .this is the building where everything happens.[242]

Likewise, Steve Linderer recalled that the use of the building was part of the initial negotiations regarding Township Hall:

> when we did that, and negotiated with them, they wanted to make sure that, when they wanted to use the Township Hall, that we could move our stuff out of the way, and they would have full use of the Township Hall. And that was part of our agreement, that we would do that. And we did that on a number of occasions.

In most years, NPS provided a speaker for the Homecoming celebration, but otherwise tried to keep out of the way. In 2006, however, NPS proposed to hold a tenth anniversary celebration of the park during Homecoming and envisioned an expanded role that year. Superintendent Sherda Williams was concerned about the impact this would have and wrote to the Homecoming Committee's chair, Lisa Rupp, to explain the limits of NPS involvement. The National Park Service had received a grant from the African American Experience Fund to provide travel funds so that former NPS Director Robert Stanton, who had taken part in the

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[240] Robert Stanton, quoted in "Graham County Town Dedicated as a National Historic Site," *The Salina Journal*, August 2, 1998, page A3, clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS. See also email, Steve Linderer to Denny Ziemann, June 18, 1998; Linderer to Mark Engler, July 13, 1998; Linderer to Ziemann, July 14, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4.

[241] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

[242] Angela Bates, oral history interview.

original dedication ceremony at the 1998 Homecoming celebration, could attend. In addition, beyond providing portable toilets as usual, Williams announced that NPS would provide the extra chairs. In subsequent years, however, she expected that NPS would return to its normal, limited level of support for two reasons: anything more would require that NPS issue a special use permit, which would entail additional regulations, and future park budgets might not allow additional support. The most important point, though, was that "this is and always should be viewed as a community (your) event. We always clarify that point to people who call or email us, but it becomes increasingly difficult to keep that distinction clear if our involvement deepens."[243]

Because of the large number of people who attend the Homecoming celebration and the number of activities in Township Hall, the community typically needs all the space in the building. Although the NPS footprint in Township Hall for the first several years was limited, consisting primarily of a desk, a chair, and the twelve-panel interpretive exhibit, some accommodations needed to be made. In the early years, Linderer recalled, the park was able to simply move their furnishings to one side of the Hall, a practice which Sherda Williams also recalled from her tenure as Superintendent. During the superintendency of Mark Weaver, however, the park began the practice of contracting with a moving company to remove NPS materials from Township Hall and store them for the duration of the celebration. Weaver recalled growing tensions with the residents during the Homecoming Celebration:

> And so, I seem to think that I finally just said, "You know what? The best thing we can do is we'll just rent a U-Haul." We didn't have a lot of stuff there in that Visitor Center, so we just moved it all out. We emptied it during Homecoming. And then I smiled as much as I could during Homecoming.[244]

Weaver's successor, Angela Wetz, also recalled the challenges of coordinating with the Township and residents on the Homecoming Celebration. Homecoming, she recalled, "was the one time of the year, especially, where you'd get that opinion that, 'The Park Service is guests here. You need to get out of the Township Hall. It's us during Homecoming week.' You know, the complaints would come in – would start coming in especially around Homecoming time." However, she recognized the importance of the program to the residents and to the park, as well:

> I can't remember what the percentage was, but, like, eighty percent of the visitors that we counted for the Park Service visitation came during Homecoming week. It was, like, 'If we're going to invest an amount – an amount of money for our park, like, this is the time to do it. Like, this is the time when we're having visitation. Like, this is when we're a good partner to the community.' So, we tried to… change that over time. [However], there was views from the Park Service staff, especially, like, 'Well, why are we paying for restroom facilities during Homecoming? It's not our event.' And I'm, like, 'Wait, wait, wait! We're partners on this! We're counting this as visitation. Like, we're reaching visitors. We're part of this.' So, we… paid for some things like outhouses – for port-a-

[243] Email, Sherda Williams to Lisa Rupp et al, June 23, 2006; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4; emphasis in the original. See also email, Sherda Williams to Cynthis Morris, June 17, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS.

[244] Mark Weaver, oral history interview. William Chapman also recalled hiring a moving contractor to pick up and store the park's possessions from Township Hall, which he said created a risk of damages.

> potties and different things, but some of the staff were a little bit hesitant about, like, 'Can we really do this?' And it's, like, 'What's – this is our major event of the year. We can.' And it was – it was very cool.

The Homecoming Celebration frequently involved activities that were not compatible with NPS policies such as charging admission for events, selling food, and serving alcohol. Because of this, NPS often suspended the lease for the duration of the celebration so as to be a good neighbor and not get in the way of the celebration.[245] There were rare cases when this did not happen, and the interior of Township Hall was not available to the community. Angela Bates recalled one such occasion:

> one year, it rained, and everything – and we had to shut Homecoming down because we couldn't come into the building. We're out there, dancing, partying, and having a good time and what have you – which would have been in here [Township Hall] – and it rained. So, where are we going to go? Everybody went to their cars. And then, it was like – it was like – it continued to rain, and then it just shut down Homecoming. And everybody got bent out of shape. And they were, like, "This is crazy! We're having Homecoming, and we can't have Homecoming because we can't get inside this building."[246]

Despite the challenges and occasional hard feelings and resentment on the part of Nicodemus residents and NPS staff, particularly surrounding the annual Homecoming celebration, both ultimately recognized the great value of NPS having a presence in the Nicodemus community by leasing Township Hall.

Lack of Progress and Local Involvement: Bookstore and Buildings

At the time that the park was authorized in November 1996, Nicodemus residents, while still uncertain about how NPS would impact the town, were generally hopeful. According to a newspaper account in February 1997, "Residents still haven't decided what they want, and they are uncertain how much control they want to give the federal government." As is often the case when the federal government is involved, the issue of money quickly raised its head. In the case of Nicodemus, the aspect of money related both to direct federal funds to rehabilitate the buildings and to lease Township Hall and to income generated indirectly by increased visitation to Nicodemus. "The hope, now," the newspaper account continued, "is to not only restore and maintain the five designated historical landmark buildings through federal funds, but interpret the history of Nicodemus through programs open to the public." Veryl Switzer, who owned the St. Francis Hotel, entertained visions of renovating his building for use as a snack shop or a bed and breakfast; he hoped to see the town brought back to life through new development that

[245] Sherda K. Williams to Sharyn Dowdall-Kountz, Trustee, March 23, 2006, counter-signed by Kountz; files of Nicodemus NHS, S74. In his oral history interview, Mark Weaver also recalled that on occasion "we ended up un-leasing the building—the Township Hall—for the week that Homecoming was happening."
[246] Angela Bates, oral history interview.

would attract visitors from throughout Kansas, "and hopefully, by developing it we could provide modest opportunities for people to get involved with entrepreneurship."[247]

William Gwaltney recalled that, in the early years of the park, "I think there was a lot of pride and a lot of enthusiasm," but also observed that "when the federal government comes around, it's easy to smell money, even if there's no money there, or even if the responsibilities to get paid are significant."[248] The apparent slowness on the part of NPS to use federal money to restore the buildings, and local involvement in the direction of the park and visitor relations were the principal concerns among residents in the early years of the park's history. These were exacerbated by the apparent lack of progress during the park's early years as the three concurrent planning projects—General Management Plan, Historic Structures Report, and Cultural Landscape Report—were being prepared. The issues first came out in public in October 2001, before either of these reports was completed, in a meeting at Township Hall. Dennis Carruth, the park's first Site Manager, had entered on duty six months earlier, but the residents felt that he was not fully engaged with the town. As Angela Bates recalled of Carruth, the town's residents "don't even remember [him]. He was in here, quiet. . .didn't interact at all with the community. So, I'm saying, people don't remember him. And then he was gone."[249] Carruth, however, was the lone NPS attendee at a meeting with representatives of the Nicodemus Historical Society, the Nicodemus Township Board, and the Nicodemus Beautification Committee. As Carruth recalled in a memorandum to Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Linderer, Angela Bates began the meeting by noting that she had been hearing "concerns and 'rumblings' about the Park Service." Angela Bates then turned the meeting over to her father, James Bates, who was serving as Nicodemus Township Board Trustee. James Bates proceeded to air an extensive list of grievances that focused on the lack of federal funds being spent in Nicodemus, the lack of positive impact on the community resulting from NPS' presence, the lack of attention to signage on the highway and in the town, and the inattention to maintenance of such things as mowing and streets. Carruth made an attempt to explain what NPS had been doing, "but it seemed to be met with some skepticism." The Township Board, he learned, "was caught in the position of having to defend or explain the actions of the Park Service, and justify us being in the Township Hall." This private meeting ended with an agreement to hold a public, community meeting later that month, "to discuss what the Park Service is presently doing, present a timetable for the planning and reports, and to explain and seek support for the objectives of the Beautification Committee."[250]

One of the concerns among residents was the sale of items at the park's visitor contact station in Township Hall. In 2000, the park began working with Western National Parks Association (WNPA) as its cooperating association to manage an educational bookstore at Nicodemus, standard practice at units of the National Park System. The park's first Park Ranger, Reginald Miller, recalled that one of his duties was to manage the sales and deposits for WNPA's educational bookstore at Nicodemus. The park did not generate enough in sales to justify a full-time WNPA on-site manager for the bookstore sales, so Miller recalled that he

[247] "Historic Nicodemus Awaits the Next Move," *The Wichita Eagle*, February 17, 1997, clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.
[248] William Gwaltney, oral history interview.
[249] Angela Bates, oral history interview.
[250] Email, Dennis Carruth to Steve Linderer, October 18, 2001; files of Nicodemus NHS.

worked with WNPA to select the items for sale.[251] As part of its agreement to sell items at units of the National Park System, WNPA agrees to return funds to the parks in the form of grants for specific educational projects in addition to baseline funding of $2,000 per year for each park serviced. For the first two years, the park merited only this minimum level of support, but, for FY2003, Miller, other NPS staff, and members of the community worked with WNPA staff to develop new products for sale, starting with a park logo designed by WNPA and printed on lapel pins, patches, refrigerator magnets, and T-shirts, as well as postcards and bookmarks.[252]

During this period, members of the community, also with items to sell, approached the park about selling them through the WNPA bookstore. Two products, in particular, were of vital importance to the community. One of these resulted from the formation in March 1999 of the Kansas Black Farmer's Association (KBFA), based in Nicodemus, in response to issues related to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). A smaller group of farmers within the KBFA who grew wheat as their main crop and included Veryl Switzer, created the Nicodemus Flour Cooperative, coordinated by local farmer Edgar Hicks. The goal of the cooperative was to identify new strains of wheat and other grains that would thrive in the region and to build a flour milling facility that would allow them to sell flour and pancake mixes under the cooperative's label. With a grant from Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), the cooperative secured access to a mill in Utah in 2000, and began selling their flour and pancake mixes at the Homecoming celebration in 2001.[253] Hicks approached Midwest Region Historian Dena Sanford in August 2000 about the project, and Sanford connected Hicks and Steve Linderer.[254] By 2003, the park and WNPA had agreed to carry the cooperative's pancake mixes in the park's bookstore.

In 2003, the park also began to carry a barbeque sauce produced by one of the town's oldest descendants, Ernestine DuVall, who operated a restaurant in Pasadena, California, from 1954 until she returned to Kansas in 1975, and opened her eponymous barbeque restaurant in Bogue (Figure 24).[255] In the 1990s, Angela Bates, who is DuVall's niece, encouraged DuVall, by then retired in Nicodemus, to re-open her barbeque restaurant in Nicodemus. The restaurant featured in occasional early NPS planning trips, and DuVall's barbeque sauce was famous throughout the region. In December 2003, Nicodemus residents approached Park Ranger Miller about selling bottles of the sauce through WNPA. Superintendent Sherda Williams approved the proposal after clarifying with Linderer and Miller that the sauce was produced in a licensed bottling facility. Williams anticipated that this would open the door to the sale of other local products.[256]

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[251] Reginald Miller, oral history interview.
[252] Performance Management Data System Report, detail for Nicodemus NHS Cooperating Associations, October 15, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[253] "Developing a Historical Community-Based Wheat Milling Cooperative: Final Report for LNC01-184," on SARE website: https://projects.sare.org/project-reports/lnc01-184/ (viewed December 15, 2022). See also "Former Football Star Returns to Help Save Dying Town," *Lawrence Journal-World*, August 12, 2006; online edition: https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2006/aug/12/former_football_star_returns_help_save_dying_town/ (viewed December 15, 2022).
[254] Emails between Dena Sanford and Steve Linderer, August 17-18, 2000; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[255] Judith M. Fertig, "Home to Nicodemus," in *Saveur*, July 13, 2001; archived online at https://www.saveur.com/article/Travels/Home-to-Nicodemus/ (viewed December 15, 2022).
[256] Emails among Sherda Williams, Reginald Miller, et al., December 16-22, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.

Figure 24. Ernestine DuVall, at the 1998 Homecoming celebration.

Despite the inclusion of these two early products in the WNPA sales program at Nicodemus, Angela Bates and other Nicodemus residents remained concerned that not enough benefit was returning to the community from the sale of items relating to Nicodemus' history. In responding to a report from Park Ranger Murray of growing unrest in the community in October 2003, for example, Linderer replied that

> We can clearly show that far more money is returned to the community than the profits from the small sales there since WNPA has a minimum contribution to any park it serves of $2,000/year. Not only that, but we sell several items purchased from descendants. WNPA has already spent thousands of dollars supporting park-related community projects.

The complaints about the bookstore, Murray reported, were bundled with "a lot of reference to the New Superintendent [Sherda Williams], WNPA, CLR, HSR, and why haven't we started fixing up the Five Buildings." In response to the complaint about the buildings, Linderer observed that "The community's expectations of immediate Federal money to restore the 5 buildings is not very realistic."[257]

Various community members continued to voice concerns that NPS was not doing enough to preserve the buildings, but these concerns were few in comparison to those who sought to reduce the footprint of NPS in Nicodemus. The community's focus with regard to the buildings began to shift in 2013 when NPS began placing a greater emphasis on securing façade and grounds easements for the five buildings. The burden of securing an ownership stake in the properties in Nicodemus evolved throughout the park's history. The first stabilization effort, initiated before the park's authorization in 1996 and completed in early 1997, involved the AME Church, which was in imminent danger of collapse. The Regional Office allocated funds to

[257] Emails among Murray, Linderer, and Williams, October 5-6, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.

conduct the work without securing an interest in the property on the understanding that the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which assigned oversight responsibility for National Historic Landmarks to NPS, provided sufficient authority.

Consultations with the Department of the Interior Solicitor's Office in Lakewood, Colorado, have led subsequent superintendents to require greater levels of interest in the properties. In early 2005, responding to a request from the Midwest Regional Director for clarification, the Solicitor's Office affirmed the appropriateness of NPS assisting private owners of the properties that constitute Nicodemus NHS with preservation and restoration efforts designed to preserve the park's facilities. Although affirming that NPS must acquire an interest in a property before expending funds on it, the Solicitor's Office acknowledged a degree of flexibility: "If the Park Service does not acquire outright ownership or a perpetual easement in the Historic Site Properties, any lesser interest it acquires should be commensurate with the level of activity it intends to undertake on the structure."[258] Using this line of reasoning, as discussed in Chapter 5, in 2005, the Solicitor's Office approved the use of a cooperative agreement with the trustees of the First Baptist Church to allow NPS to conduct an extensive stabilization project. The cooperative agreement, executed in June 2005, cited the park's enabling legislation from 1996, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended through 2000), and the Historic Sites Act of 1935 as justification for the expenditure of funds to stabilize the First Baptist Church in support of the park's legislated purposes.[259] As Superintendent Williams recalled of that period, they envisioned that the cooperative agreement gave them "the legal vehicle to transfer money into the structure…invest the money into the structure. It wasn't actually going to the landowner themselves."[260]

By the time of Superintendent Mark Weaver's tenure from 2008 to 2012, however, the requirements for an ownership interest in the property had expanded beyond the execution of a cooperative agreement. As Sherda Williams recalled, much of the impetus to clarify the degree of interest that NPS would need to spend funds on stabilization was being driven by Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Kevin McMurry, whose background was in maintenance.[261] In response to McMurry's questions, the Solicitor's Office during Weaver's tenure determined that façade easements were required, the conveyance of a partial interest in the exterior features and appearance of the property. Superintendent Weaver and his successor, Superintendent Angela Wetz, made clear in the park's newsletter and in communications that this limited ownership stake was a necessary precursor to spending federal funds on any improvements to the buildings. In this NPS had a strong ally in Angela Bates, who remained an advocate for easements as a solution that would benefit all in the interests of protecting the buildings:

> even today, it's this concept of what is ours, we've gotten, and do you want to give it up? Even if it's falling down, do you really want to give it up? Nah. May

[258] Memorandum, Arthur Kleven, Attorney Advisor to Regional Director, National Park Service, Midwest Region, March 16, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[259] Cooperative Agreement H6345050001 between the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Historic Site and Historic Nicodemus First Baptist Church Foundation, Inc., executed June 30, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217. See also Sherda Williams to Trustees, First Baptist Church, August 19, 2004, in which Williams discusses the evolving approach to providing support for preservation activities; Files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[260] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.
[261] Ibid.

> make sense to give it up, but how can we give it up without giving it up? So, let's do façade easements. I said, "And, if you want to do anything else, you can, as organizations that own these buildings."[262]

The National Park Service has had mixed success in securing the easements necessary to conduct stabilization projects on the four buildings not owned by NPS: Veryl Switzer conveyed an easement to allow stabilization work at the St. Francis Hotel, and the Township Board likewise conveyed an easement for Township Hall. The American Legion Post, however, has refused to convey an easement for the schoolhouse, and the First Baptist Church trustees are willing but have not yet conveyed the easement. By approximately 2017, however, Williams pointed out that the Solicitor's Office had identified an additional requirement, "that we not only have to have some kind of legal interest in it, but we have to have – the landowner has to show, kind of, a in-kind, concurrent investment in keeping the building standing now." This limitation, she feared would have a chilling effect on investments in protecting the buildings that constitute the park: "I mean, we're basically unable to really help with maintaining those buildings of the National Historic Site. So, it is really – it's – it's not getting any easier, I know."[263]

The Question of Collections: NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society

The community, particularly through the Nicodemus Historical Society, remains protective of its history and how it is portrayed and collected. Former Fort Larned NHS Park Ranger George Elmore recalled conducting initial historic research on Nicodemus at the Spencer Research Library and the Kansas Historical Society at the time of the park's authorization, but did less in the succeeding years in deference to the work of the Nicodemus Historical Society through its collections and oral history efforts.[264] Midwest Region Curator Carolyn Wallingford, as discussed in Chapter 3, began an initial assessment of the objects salvaged during the first stabilization project at the AME Church in late 1996 and early 1997. She arranged for temporary storage of the objects in Gil Alexander's barn in Bogue, Kansas, while they were inventoried. Subsequent collections management work for objects in the AME Church and the schoolhouse was postponed, however, due, at first, to uncertain ownership of the objects. In summer of 1999, Fort Larned Chief Ranger Felix Revello summarized the status of the collections to Wallingford, opining that most of the objects found in the AME Church could legitimately be claimed as belonging to NPS, since NPS had recently acquired the building. They had remained in Alexander's barn since late 1996, however, and NPS needed to remove them. Alexander had not expected to house them for so long and appeared willing to give them away, and the delay in working with them "could become a source of resentment by some people in Nicodemus as residents will either assume that the NPS is not really interested in preserving their history or we are taking advantage of Gil."[265]

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[262] Angela Bates, oral history interview
[263] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.
[264] George Elmore, telephone interview with the author, May 3, 2023.
[265] Email, Felix Revello to Carolyn Wallingford, August 5, 1999; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4.

The limited number of objects from stabilization projects at the AME Church, the First Baptist Church, and the schoolhouse in the early 2000s were relocated to a secure storage facility managed by the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC) by 2003. Although MWAC accessioned these collections to establish custody and ownership, the collections were not cataloged because the park did not yet have a Scope of Collection Statement (SOCS). Given the number of planning documents for the park that had recently been completed—GMP, HSR, and CLR—the Regional Office did not envision developing a SOCS for Nicodemus NHS until at least 2004, though it eventually took far longer. In late 2003, Wallingford provided advice on how to plan for the eventual cataloging process, observing that the Nicodemus collections could be cataloged using Fort Larned's license for the Automated National Catalog System (ANCS+), the collections management software developed specifically for NPS. Wallingford urged caution, however, against making assumptions about the artifacts being stored:

> The "collection" of material is loosely defined at this time as a considerable number of items were in such poor condition during the mitigation effort, that triage should be a plan of action to be rid of the mildew and rodent damaged papers—and heavily damaged books etc. that were literally scooped into plastic bags, many damaged books and leaflets were disinfected then surface cleaned and photo documented during an earlier museum curation project. This is not to say these items will be retained in spite of condition—the documentation effort was undertaken to capture and preserve the intellectual content.[266]

In 2004, Park Ranger Miller prepared a draft interim SOCS with the support of Felix Revello to help guide the park, though funding for a full SOCS remained elusive. This interim document remained in place until FY2009, when funding for the park's first SOCS was approved. Carolyn Wallingford prepared the plan, which was completed in late September 2009. The document was a ringing endorsement of the GMP's proposed "joint stewardship," as it called on the park to fully support the collections programs of both the Nicodemus Historical Society and the Graham County Historical Society. As Wallingford observed, "The Park recognizes the great importance the community of Nicodemus places upon the collection, preservation and controlled use of Nicodemus-related historic objects and documents." The SOCS reported that the Nicodemus Historical Society and the Graham County Historical Society had complementary collections related to Nicodemus, but that neither held a substantial collection of archeological materials. At the time, the park's principal collection, then curated at MWAC facilities in Lincoln, Nebraska, consisted primarily of archeological materials, together with a small number of architectural elements, mill work, and furnishings salvaged from the AME Church. The collection also included numerous items that ought not to have been collected—citing "a rusty paint can" as an example—and that would be deaccessioned in accordance with NPS procedures. Most of the archeological materials were collected on the AME Church property, owned by the federal government. Therefore, the artifacts must remain in federal custody. The National Park Service, according to the SOCS, would consult with the owners of other properties, such as the First Baptist Church and the schoolhouse, regarding the status of archeological materials collected in those places. The SOCS asserted that the park would continue to add archeological artifacts from lands owned by the park to the collection and

[266] Email, Carolyn Wallingford to Felix Revello et al., December 29, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 3.

would also collect archival materials related to "events, activities and undertakings generated as part of a compliance project."[267]

With regard to offers of donations of artifacts or documents related to the history of Nicodemus, however, the SOCS acknowledged that the park would consult with the Nicodemus Historical Society on a case-by-case basis. The park, the SOCS confirmed, "does not have plans to actively acquire additional objects and documents." Instead, park staff "will work to support the efforts" of the Nicodemus Historical Society and the Graham County Historical Society "as they maintain their standards of museum and collections excellence." The park would, instead, "focus its efforts to the collection of objects and documents discovered on park owned lands within park boundaries and those objects and documents that are specifically and freely donated to the Park."[268]

The park's collections remained in storage at MWAC in Lincoln until summer of 2011, when a first group of artifacts was relocated to the Independence Multi-Park Facility (IMPF) in Independence, Missouri. This is a secure facility that curates collections for several units of the National Park System in the Midwest Region, and is managed by the curatorial staff at Harry S Truman NHS, Missouri. The Nicodemus collection was fully inventoried prior to being packed and transferred, and, in 2012, information on the collection at IMPF was added to the park's database in the Interior Collections Management System, a commercial software developed for and licensed to the Department of the Interior as a replacement for the original ANCS+ database. A second set of artifacts was then transferred to IMPF in May 2012. Park Ranger Michelle Huff, who oversaw the collections management and reporting process until her retirement in late 2015, described the collection as including

> all of the smaller Nicodemus AME Church collection items, including the church candelabra, the time capsule cigar box and its contents, parts to two small tables, various light fixtures and globes and Reverend Wilson's religious and non-religious book collection that includes a very interesting collection of various notes, envelopes, programs, announcements and other paper items used by him as bookmarks.[269]

In addition to the park's collection as described in the SOCS and as discussed in Chapter 2, the Nicodemus Historical Society under leadership of Angela Bates had undertaken an ambitious collections program since she founded the organization in 1989. Her initial goal, she recalled, was to use the Historical Society to gather together the history of the community, primarily from among her extended family members and other descendants:

> And I thought, "You know, we need to have a way to collect all of our history, all the stuff that's being written about us." And I knew that we needed to start a historical society. So, I got five of my cousins – or, four of my cousins that represented a wide variety of families, and I convinced them – they didn't know what they were getting into, but I convinced them that we needed to have this

[267] *Scope of Collection Statement: Nicodemus National Historic Site*, prepared and recommended by Carolyn Wallingford, September 30, 2009, files of Nicodemus NHS, H18; quotes on pages 2 and 3.
[268] Ibid., page 8.
[269] *Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, July 2012; archives of Nicodemus NHS. See also "Transition Report on Areas of Responsibility of Retiring NICO Park Ranger Michelle Huff—12/30/2015," files of Nicodemus NHS.

> historical society and start collecting stuff. And so that's what I did. I got them all together, and I said, "This is what we need to do, and we represent most of the families, so we've got to create an organization that's called the Nicodemus Historical Society. We've got to become non-profit, and we're going to ask family members and people to buy memberships so that we can begin to collect our history."[270]

The Nicodemus Historical Society's collection by 2005 included genealogical files on the initial settlers, their families, and their descendants, and an extensive set of photographs including historical images, living descendants, and public events since 1988. The Society also forged a partnership with the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas (KU) in Lawrence, encouraging families and descendants to collect items that can be donated to the Nicodemus Historical Society Collections there. The KU collection is organized, in part, by the names of individual donors who shared photographs or documents. The Nicodemus Historical Society's collection is organized separately. The first finding aid for the collection was produced in 2006, and subsequent revisions were made from 2010 through 2022.[271]

In a 2005 memorandum to NPS, the Nicodemus Historical Society argued that "the collection of materials and photographs by the Park Service is a major issue of concern. This creates a major duplication of effort and discourages descendants to use their own Nicodemus collection at KU." The Nicodemus Historical Society had developed a process for providing historic photographs and other collections for use in publications and exhibits and was dismayed that NPS was using these materials without attribution. The 2005 memorandum requested that the National Park Service "acknowledge the use of photos in our collections in everything that is duplicated with these photos. Rather than just use the photos, use of photos need [sic] to be coordinated in the legal and professional manner at all times, with prior approval before they are used or published."[272] The staff at Nicodemus NHS typically respected these wishes regarding the use of the Historical Society's images and, as codified in the 2009 SOCS, deferred to the Nicodemus Historical Society when donations were proposed. In 2006, for example, the Kansas State Historical Society was awarded a three-year grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, an independent federal agency, to support the Kansas Collects program, which was designed to encourage collections by local museums and resource sharing among these museums. Kansas Collects Project Director Donna Rae Pearson contacted Superintendent Williams in October 2006, shortly after the grant award was announced, to invite the park to take part in the project. Williams responded quickly, sharing with her that "we have heard a few complaints about 'appropriating' Nicodemus history, plus we currently do not have curatorial space or exhibit cabinets to speak of." Recognizing the importance of collecting artifacts about the history of Nicodemus, however, Williams suggested that Pearson partner, instead, with the Nicodemus Historical Society, since Angela Bates "has obtained grants to organize and store

[270] Angela Bates, oral history interview.
[271] A description of the collection and its restrictions is provided at the Spencer Research Library's website: https://archives.lib.ku.edu/repositories/3/resources/3590 (viewed December 17, 2022).
[272] Nicodemus Historical Society Position Paper, July 6, 2005, presented to Nicodemus National Historic Site; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.

their materials (primarily papers at this point) and now has museum cataloging software."[273] In 2009, as the SOCS was being completed, the park also developed a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the use of historic photographs. As updated in 2014, the SOP acknowledged that the historic photographs in the Nicodemus collection at the Spencer Research Library are not public property and outlined the procedures to request the use of images from the collection by either NPS or the public at large.[274]

Regional Affiliations

In addition to maintaining good relations with the residents of Nicodemus and the Nicodemus Historical Society, successive Superintendents at Nicodemus NHS have sought to foster connections with regional civic, tourism, and heritage organizations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the park helped to support the Kansas Black Farmers Association, which was formed in 1999 to provide mutual support for the remaining African American farmers in and near Nicodemus, funded in part by grants from the Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), which, in turn, is funded by the USDA. Superintendent Sherda Williams in 2004 offered to work with the Nicodemus Flour Cooperative to develop a workshop which, she suggested, would "serve as an effective way to communicate an aspect of the history of Nicodemus that we do not adequately address in our current programs, thereby broadening the [workshop] participants' understanding and knowledge of this Historic Site."[275] In 2009, SARE funded a conference held in Bogue and Nicodemus that included tours of Nicodemus NHS as well as speakers from Kansas State University, the Natural Resources Conservation Services, and organic food proponents from Illinois and Michigan. Quarterly and annual meetings of the KBFA continue to be held at Township Hall, and the park's newsletter included updates from the organization.[276]

Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Steve Linderer recalled that, shortly after the park was established, he offered to give a program to the Hill City Rotary Club but was declined with no reason given.[277] A more promising outlet for regional collaboration came after 2000 with the creation of the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Alliance. The Alliance was created to support rural preservation issues, in large part through the promotion of heritage tourism, in the Solomon River corridor. This region stretches east-west across the northern portion of Kansas from Hoxie, in Sheridan County approximately 150 miles east to Glasco in Cloud County, including Hill City, Nicodemus, and Stockton. Initial planning meetings in the summer of 2000 spurred development of themes and identification of communities interested in collaborating. Chief

[273] Emails between Donna Rae Pearson and Sherda Williams, October 9-10, 2006; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4. No records were found to determine whether the Nicodemus Historical Society ever coordinated with the Kansas Collects program.
[274] Standard Operating Procedure, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Use of Historic Photographs, June 29, 2009, updated November 10, 2014; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[275] Sherda Williams to Edgar Hicks, July 2, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS, H4217.
[276] Agenda, SARE Diversity Grant, "The Continuing Face of Agriculture, the Gathering in Nicodemus," May 4-6, 2010; meeting minutes, Kansas Black Farmers Association, Visitor Center, Nicodemus National Historic Site, June 18, 2010; *Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, July 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also the KBFA website: https://kbfa.org (viewed December 17, 2022).
[277] Steven Linderer and Felix Revello, oral history interview.

Ranger Felix Revello first interacted with the new Alliance, occasionally attending their meetings. In early 2004, Revello introduced the Alliance's first president, Joan Northern, to the representatives of the Nicodemus Flour Company in response to Northern's request for support on promoting agri-tourism; the company, he suggested "might be a good example of a related 'value-added' component."[278]

The concept of heritage tourism, an approach to travel based on experiencing the history and heritage of a place, though it draws upon centuries of travel, was being increasingly promoted by the 1990s through public and private entities. A 1995 publication by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, for example, argued that "Heritage tourism is emerging as one of the most promising areas of economic development for inner city neighborhoods, smaller communities, and even isolated rural areas. It offers an appreciation, even a celebration, of that which is significant in our heritage—historic resources that have value for the present and the future," and cited a study showing that understanding culture is "the single greatest motivator for travel in the 1990s."[279] Superintendent Sherda Williams eagerly embraced this approach after she entered on duty in early 2004, recognizing the potential to connect the park with other communities and heritage organizations and to promote awareness of Nicodemus and its history. Williams actively supported the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Alliance, providing advice, offering space in the park's quarterly newsletter, and taking part in programs sponsored by the Alliance. In 2005, Williams responded to an invitation from Northern to partake in a symposium, noting that because "the mission of the Alliance is compatible with our efforts to preserve and interpret the history of Nicodemus, we are glad to continue certain partnership activities with the Alliance."[280]

Although the park maintained a relationship to the Alliance after Williams transferred to another park in 2008, fostering these regional partnerships proved challenging due to the combination of turnover in NPS staff and local resistance. Williams recalled that "during my tenure there as superintendent, I tried to generate some interest in regional heritage tourism and had no interest from – expressed from the county level in that kind of economic development." Her hope, she continued, was to connect communities in the region through their cultural heritage as immigrants from a variety of places:

> what I was approaching people with, was the idea to connect the cultural history of these – Nicodemus with the other towns that have some kind of ethnic settlement – like, nearby Damar was French-Canadian, the area down around Hays and south of there was very strong in Germans from Russia, and then there was a Cottonwood Ranch State Historic Site west of Hill City which was English settlement, and they had some cultural expression in the landscape about that culture. So, there was opportunity to pull people off the interstate and do this looping heritage tourism, but the people in Hays did not seem to be interested in that, either.[281]

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[278] Emails between Felix Revello and Joan Northern, January 28, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[279] "The Promise of Heritage Tourism," *National Trust for Historic Preservation Forum*, January/February 1995; published online in *Preservation Leadership Forum*, December 9, 2015: https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/the-promise-of-heritage-tourism (viewed December 19, 2022).
[280] Sherda Williams to Joan Northern, December 8, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also *Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, August 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[281] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

Williams cited two factors for the reluctance to embrace these regional heritage tourism initiatives. First, the residents of Nicodemus were ambivalent about the prospect of bringing more visitors to the town, concerned about the town losing its independence if NPS continued to draw more tourists there. Second, Graham County and its neighbors put more of its development focus on efforts to build wells to extract oil than on tourism.[282] Although the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Alliance remains active, its website no longer includes a reference to Nicodemus NHS.

Buffalo Soldiers

The park also has a long-standing relationship with the Buffalo Soldiers. Historically, members of the original Buffalo Soldiers regiments, the U.S. Army's 9th and 10th Cavalries, established in 1866, were among Nicodemus' early settlers. In more recent times, the connection to the Buffalo Soldiers revived in the early 1990s, when Angela Bates met Barrie Tompkins, a Kentucky native who was already an experienced Buffalo Soldiers reenactor in Lexington as well as a farrier and blacksmith. Bates was in Kentucky to give a talk about the Buffalo Soldiers and the origins of Nicodemus, and Bates later invited Tompkins to visit Nicodemus to give a demonstration of the daily life of the Buffalo Soldiers. In July 1995, the two were married in Nicodemus in an 1880s-period outdoor wedding.[283] Upon relocating to Nicodemus in 1995, Tompkins established the Nicodemus Buffalo Soldiers Association, a non-profit organization to educate people about the history of African American soldiers in the West, a rarely-taught component of America's military history. The Nicodemus Buffalo Soldiers Association soon found an interested partner in Reginald Miller, the first NPS staff member at Nicodemus NHS. As discussed in Chapter 3, Miller is a veteran of the U.S. Army, serving in the 10th Cavalry, founded as one of the Buffalo Soldiers regiments. He took great interest in the history of the unit. The Buffalo Soldiers were an important component of the interpretation program at Fort Larned NHS, and Miller was hired as a student trainee due to his knowledge of the Buffalo Soldiers, He recalled being excited to have the chance to work in Nicodemus: "you can go out to the graveyard and find those same headstones that talk about the Black soldiers of the United States Colored Troops that settled in Nicodemus because they heard about this all-Black town out West, and they wanted to go there and settle and get land."[284] The Nicodemus Black Soldiers Association, composed of men from the Nicodemus area, has taken part in numerous public demonstrations throughout the region and, with the early support of Angela Bates and Reginald Miller, has remained a staple at Homecoming celebrations as well as at other special events in Nicodemus (Figure 25).

[282] Ibid. The proliferation of oil drilling in the region will be covered in Chapter 8.
[283] "Nuptials in Nicodemus," *Hays Daily News*, July 30, 1995, page 1.
[284] Reginald Miller, oral history interview.

Figure 25. Barrie Tompkins and other Buffalo Soldiers reenactors, 1998.

Regional Support for the Park: Kansas State University and Plans for the Future

The town of Nicodemus and the Nicodemus NHS have had a long and productive relationship with Kansas State University (KSU). Nicodemus descendant Veryl Switzer, following his careers in professional football and as a teacher, spent the last decades of his academic career as an administrator at his alma mater and was instrumental in drawing attention to the place and its history. Kansas State University Professor LaBarbara Fly Wigfall, who served as the project manager for the HABS documentation of Nicodemus as a cultural landscape in the early 1980s, recalled being introduced to the town by Switzer following a guest lecture that she gave at KSU. Wigfall spent a great deal of time in Nicodemus conducting the landscape and oral history research for the HABS project and retained a strong interest in the town, a relationship she continued after accepting a teaching position in the Landscape Architecture and Regional and Community Planning program at KSU, partly with the assistance of Switzer.[285]

In 2011, the Van Alen Institute announced a design competition for a visioning and planning project for several different communities hosting units of the National Park System. The Van Alen Institute, the successor to the Society for Beaux-Arts Architecture which was founded in New York City in 1894 to promote accessible design education serves as a funding organization for the use of design to assist historically disinvested communities gain stability and

[285] LaBarbara James Wigfall, oral history interview, September 2, 2020.

improve the lives of their residents.[286] The Van Alen Institute's program, titled "Parks for the People: A Student Competition to Reimagine America's National Parks," was created in association with the National Parks Conservation Association to involve college students in planning and reimagining existing National Park System units. Winning teams were asked to develop proposals for particular sites after field research and study. A team from KSU, led by Wigfall, entered the competition for a study of Nicodemus, but the Van Alen Institute awarded the project for Nicodemus to a team of students and professors from the City College of New York (CCNY). The CCNY team began with a public charrette in New York City in late 2011 that included CCNY faculty and students, architecture and landscape architecture scholars from around the country such as Charles Birnbaum from the Cultural Landscape Foundation, historians, Nicodemus NHS Superintendent Mark Weaver, and Nicodemus descendant and resident Twillia Berry. In February 2012, the CCNY team of students and faculty visited Nicodemus and interviewed members of the community and NPS staff.[287]

In its report, in the form of a proposal for future work, the CCNY team drew upon these interactions as well as investigations into NPS policies and practices regarding marginalized communities to make a series of recommendations (Figure 26-28). The framework of the team's proposal, much like the five management areas the GMP had used as a conceptual and a geographic structure a decade before, was built around three "trails": the Ellis to Nicodemus Trail, the Townsite Trail, and the Last Mile Trail. Of these, the Townsite Trail was the only one located in Nicodemus. The others encouraged visitor participation in other surrounding areas tied to the history and experiences of Nicodemus' settlers and descendants; the CCNY team recommended an annual recreation of the hike from Ellis to Nicodemus that the original settlers made in 1877, and the Last Mile Trail offered visitors an opportunity to travel from Nicodemus to the town's cemetery, "recapitulating the chronology of the Town of Nicodemus along its one mile length." In its proposal, the CCNY team also followed the lead of the GMP and the CLR by recommending a decentralized approach to interpretation in which Nicodemus residents retained ownership of the properties in the town and of the town's story, and by stressing the importance of the site as a continuously inhabited landscape rather than a static historical exhibit.[288]

The CCNY team also saw in Nicodemus a manifestation of NPS' interest since the 1980s in diversifying the types of places and stories that it managed by including a wider array of parks reflecting often-marginalized communities. Nicodemus, though historically significant as a survivor of adverse conditions for more than a century, is also a fragile community; NPS planners and Nicodemus residents were concerned that it could easily be overrun by visitors. This threat, however, as observed by the CCNY team, was tempered by the remote location of the park which limits the numbers of people likely to visit the park in person. In response, the CCNY report urged the development of an online experience to help people understand Nicodemus:

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[286] Information on the history and practice of the Van Alen Institute can be found at their website: https://www.vanalen.org/about/ (viewed December 20, 2022).
[287] *Finding Common Ground: A Plan for Nicodemus National Historic Site* (The City College of New York, Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture Program, Spring 2012 Studio II), 26-31, 41.
[288] Ibid.

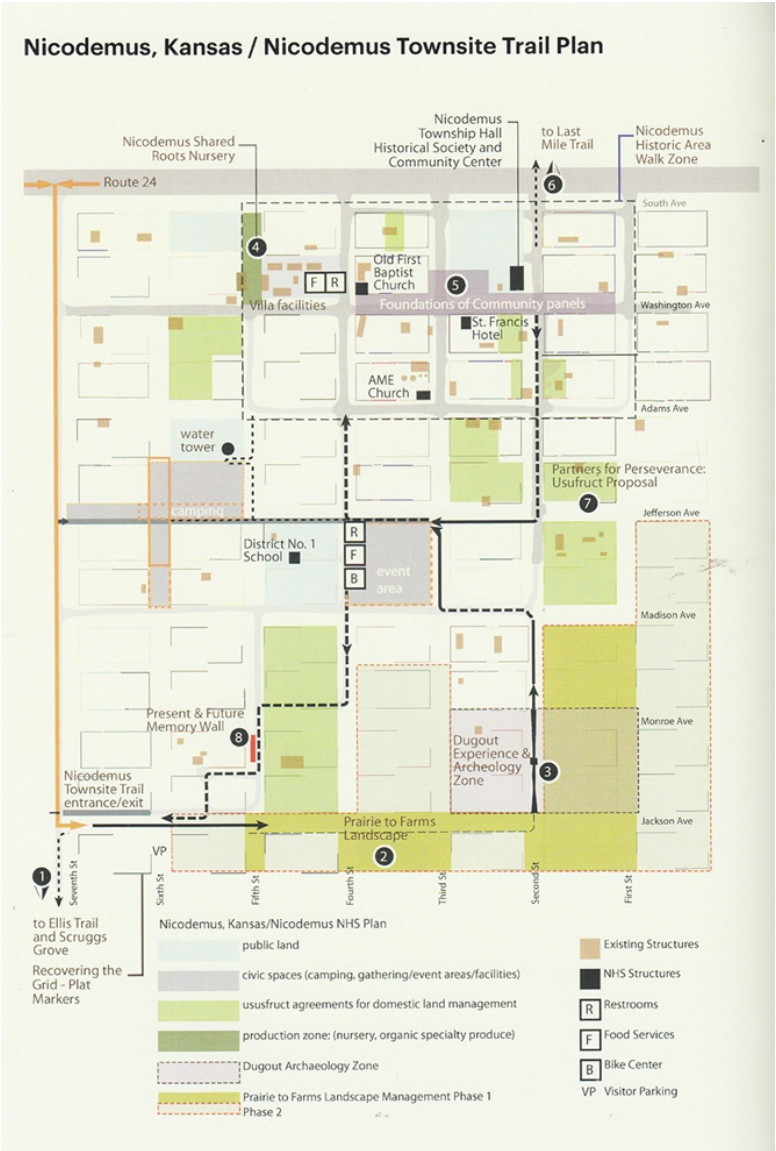

Figure 26. Map of the proposed Nicodemus Townsite Trail Plan, CCNY report, 2012.

> The class asserted that it is likely that many more people will visit Nicodemus online than will ever drive the 5 hours from any major airport to get there. Further, this may be a blessing and not a curse, as the site infrastructure to sustain large numbers of visitors would potentially be an agent of the Town's destruction. The studio revealed partnerships and processes that could comprise a new ecology to sustain the idea of Nicodemus without overwhelming its physical terrain.

The National Park Service, according to the report, may have to adjust its thinking with regard to Nicodemus and similar other parks, the interpretation of which "may be most evident in a dynamic virtual realm, or even more effectively connected to its descendants in remote locations across the country."[289] Within the town itself, however, the CCNY report urged NPS to support

[289] Ibid., 44.

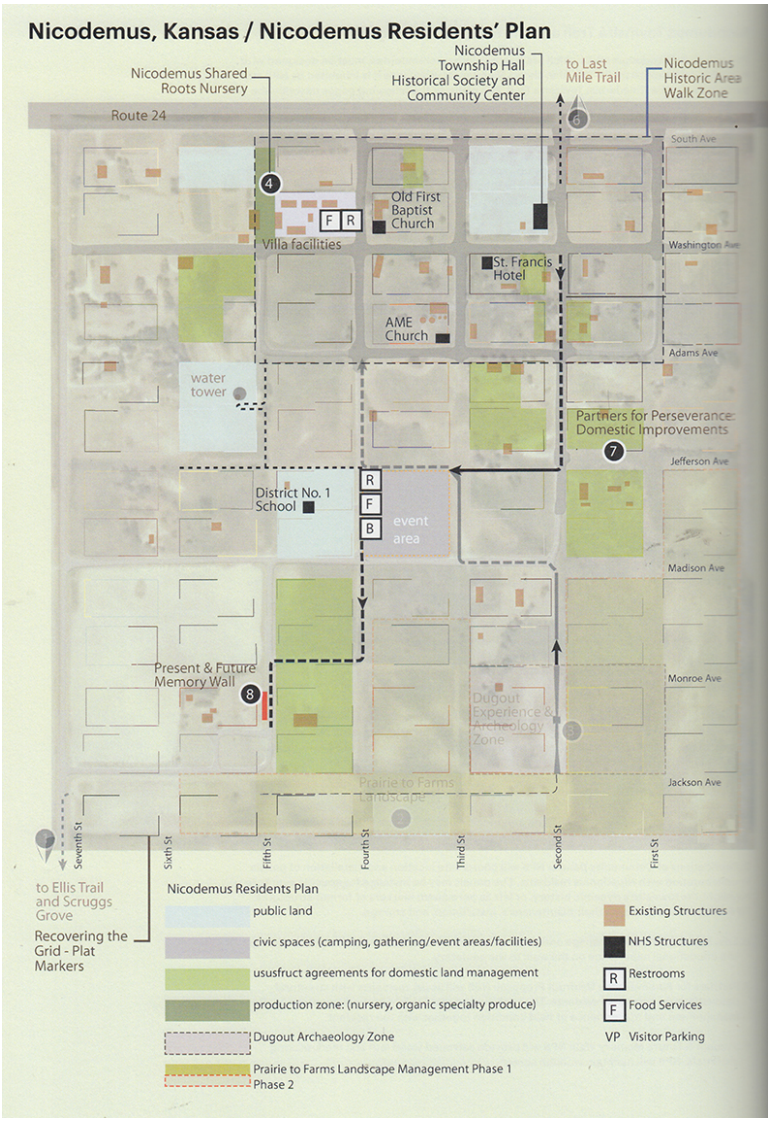

Figure 27. Map of the proposed Nicodemus Residents' Trail Plan, CCNY report, 2012.

the community as a living entity rather than placing priority on preservation of the five buildings: "In addition to preserving fragments of our nation's material culture, NPS can take on the challenge of building structural relationships to tell under-told narratives; it's mission can be focused to preserve both the complexity and the veracity of American histories."[290]

The Van Alan Institute conceived of the Parks for the People program in two phases, and the CCNY team won the bid for the Phase I portion in 2011. Although the Kansas State University team's bid for Phase I was not successful, NPS and the Van Alan Institute were both impressed both by the commitment to the town which Kansas State University as an institution and Wigfall as an individual had demonstrated over the years and by the realistic nature of their bid. As a result, Wigfall was part of a large team at Kansas State University that was awarded a grant for a Phase II project at Nicodemus in 2012. The Landscape Architecture-Regional and

[290] Ibid., 52.

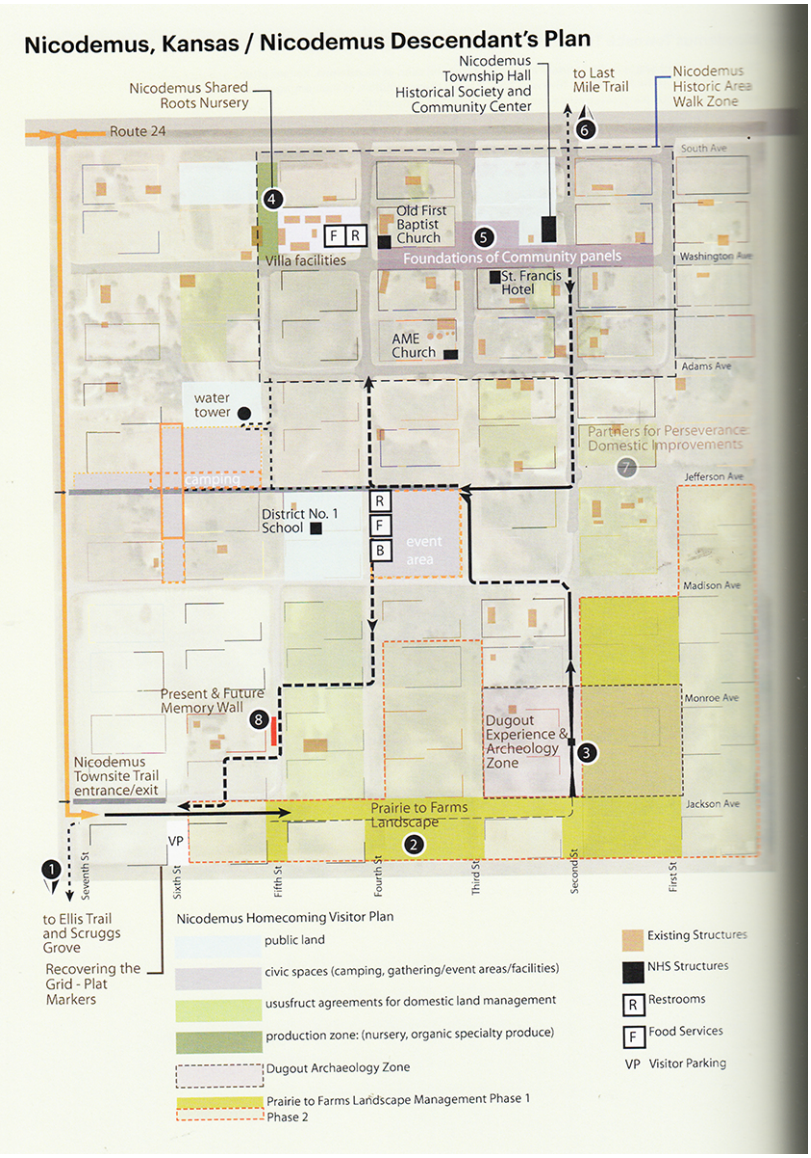

Figure 28. Map of the proposed Nicodemus Descendants' Trail Plan, CCNY report, 2012.

Community Planning program at Kansas State University led the project, which included several other university departments, the Kansas State Historical Society, the Kansas Preservation Alliance, the Nicodemus Historical Society, other residents of Nicodemus, and NPS staff.

Unlike the CCNY team, the KSU team took advantage of its relative proximity to Nicodemus to foster a far greater degree of community engagement and made multiple visits to Nicodemus. The KSU team and its partners held three town hall meetings there during 2012, in addition to holding on-campus workshops, design critiques, and a symposium. One of the KSU team's partners, the Kansas Preservation Alliance, funded a student to work at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka to organize the available digital records of Nicodemus and Graham County, and NPS awarded and supervised a KSU student intern at the park in the summer of 2012. The team examined issues that were specific to Nicodemus as well as about NPS in general and presented a wide-ranging series of recommendations designed to help overcome the

challenges of limited economic opportunities and depopulation while also addressing issues of mutual concern to the community and NPS, including a public process that often seemed stagnant to both entities.[291] Wigfall recalled that an ongoing concern of hers, before, during, and after the Van Alan Institute project, was the economic viability of Nicodemus, which was, in turn, based on drawing new and younger people to the town.

In addition, she was concerned for the viability of the park which, she thought, was structured in a way that created a sense of disappointment for visitors. Because it is a part of the National Park System, she argued, visitors have certain expectations for facilities and amenities:

> it's under the Park System, and it's categorized in its parks. And it says what it provides – what it has that are amenities that people expect parks to have. So, my thing is, why would you invite people to travel that far, and, like the first (laughs) – like the first families that went out there and looked at it, and the wife cried – I mean, you don't want to repeat that history just because you want to go see it. . . Now, if you categorize it different than calling it a park, you see, then the perception of what to expect doesn't make people go out there and be disappointed. They've got a long way to go on [Highway] 24.[292]

In discussing the recommendations of the KSU team in relation to those of the CCNY team, Wigfall argued that

> it's a nomenclature issue. So, that's what we spent more of our time doing, but then looking at phased development. And we did that where there's the minimal – do nothing – and the maximum. That's the way we set up all the phases of development over time with it. So, it was really very much about planning [more] than just, you know, saying, "Well, how could you celebrate it digitally?" We did all kinds of things that – some of those things were things that the winning team [from CCNY] mentioned, but theirs was, perhaps, more elaborate, but not, to me, things that would have mattered or been possible out there when you didn't address the isolation of the place but would have celebrated it wherever you were.[293]

In recent recollections, Wigfall went on to discuss other proposals based on the work of the KSU team, all of which envisioned a more sustainable future for Nicodemus and involved the descendants spread throughout the country and those who remained in or near Nicodemus. In addition to supporting such enterprises as the Nicodemus Flour Cooperative and encouraging the creation of other businesses, Wigfall recommended the establishment of a type of credit union where income from these businesses as well as deposits from those who lived far away could be used to support future growth in Nicodemus. This, she explained, could be integrated with another proposal to establish a summer training program for students at Nicodemus. As she recalled, the KSU team recommended that

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[291] No correspondence or other documents related to KSU's project through the Van Alan Institute were located during the present research. A summary of the project is provided on a KSU website: https://www.k-state.edu/engagement/waystoengage/partnerships/initiatives/ParksforthePeople.pdf (viewed December 21, 2022).
[292] LaBarbara Wigfall, oral history interview.
[293] Ibid.

> We could get young people who wanted to come out there for a summer, who would be trained by the Park Service, so that they might want to become superintendents and live there and be residents – or descendants' children who would, then, know the history and would – they could tell it themselves.[294]

This proposal from the KSU team echoes a suggestion from Assistant Regional Director for Workforce Enhancement William Gwaltney, whose comments on NPS' management of Nicodemus NHS were discussed earlier in this chapter. The park, he argued, "given its many challenges and opportunities, could be an amazing field training opportunity." Gwaltney also was concerned about the isolation and lack of amenities that makes Nicodemus a challenging place, both to visit and to work, and acknowledged that certain facilities would have to be built, including basic housing and social facilities:

> You'd have to get the appropriations to build something but, not only is there an opportunity for intensive training to not just train the Black Rangers but to train all kinds of Rangers, all kinds of managers, future and present. It's an opportunity for learning about racial equity at a very local and neighborhood way that – you can't do that just with a book. So, there's – they – you know, there's just a tremendous opportunity there, but there would have to be some infrastructure.[295]

All these proposals for encouraging stronger community relations and supporting economic development in Nicodemus, however, have fallen flat. As discussed in this and in previous chapters, challenges that are both intrinsic to Nicodemus and the result of inaction on the part of NPS have stymied nearly all attempts at long-term change and substantial development. The combination of distrust of the federal government, the community's traditional self-reliance and independence, a desire to maintain control over the telling of its own story, and a disinclination to convey property to non-residents and the concomitant passing of land and buildings through generations of a family have made Nicodemus a challenging place to build anew, and NPS never truly overcame the initial impulse from late 1996 and 1997 to keep it a small park and downplay the possibility of more active presence in Nicodemus, a decision that found support in the difficulty of attracting staff on a long-term basis. This combination of factors resulted in a nadir in the relationship between the Township of Nicodemus and NPS from 2015 to 2020, though a renewed commitment to Nicodemus NHS on the part of the Midwest Regional Office since then has helped to create a breakthrough that bodes a more hopeful future.

[294] Ibid.
[295] William Gwaltney, oral history interview.

Chapter 6: Research

The goal of much of the social history movement in the historical profession since the 1960s was to tell the stories of groups of people who had largely been ignored by historians in the past. Historians began finding ways to bring to public awareness the histories of immigrants and migrants, industrial workers and farm workers, urban dwellers and members of rural communities, African Americans of both genders, women of all races, and more, including the stories of everyday lives together with the physical surroundings of their architecture and material culture. As discussed in Chapter 2, black historians had been telling the stories of African Americans since the early twentieth century, and, in the years after World War II, the field of African American history emerged as a growing specialization within college and university history departments as a new generation of historians continued the work of earlier historians to explore the development of distinctive themes in African American culture. In 1970, Robert DeForrest and his brother, Vincent DeForest, began translating this emerging academic interest in African American history to the realm of public history when they established the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development. Through their organization, the DeFor[r]ests brought the stories of many places associated with African American individuals and communities to greater public awareness through successful nominations as National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark sites. Several of these sites became units of the National Park System, including the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Virginia, the Carter G. Woodson National Historic Site, District of Columbia, and Nicodemus NHS, Kansas.

1983 HABS Study

Drawn there by Veryl Switzer, the Afro-American Institute prepared a successful National Register of Historic Places nomination for Nicodemus, including only the townsite with seven contributing resources in 1974. In 1976, NPS expanded the nomination to the entire 160-acre township and raised it to the level of a National Historic Landmark (NHL). As an NHL, Nicodemus thereby became subject to monitoring by the National Park Service. As described more fully in Chapter 2, the NPS Rocky Mountain Regional Office initiated a cultural landscape study of Nicodemus in 1981, leading to the documentation of the town to the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey. This study, led by LaBarbara (Fly) Wigfall and her husband through their consulting firm, Entourage, Inc., was one of the first cultural landscape studies in the nation and resulted in the development of a book, *Promised Land on the Solomon: Black Settlement at Nicodemus, Kansas*, in 1986. This book, the first scholarly study of Nicodemus in the context of the westward migration of African Americans from the South in the wake of the Civil War, drew upon archival research, field investigations of existing and former building sites, and extensive oral history interviews for its content. In a later interview, Wigfall recalled the close integration of archival research, informal discussion, and formal interviews. She assigned one student the task of researching in Graham County land records the history of each parcel of land in Nicodemus: “I said, ‘You will go into the County Courthouse and look at the land records. And, whenever you are on the site with me – I don’t care what year it is. I’m

going to ask you, 'Who owns that piece of property, and when did they own it?' and you've got to be able to tell me all of the sequence. You have to tell me all.'"[296]

At the time, Wigfall recognized that she had little understanding of how farmers worked and that such an understanding would be vital to being able to tell the story of Nicodemus:

> First of all, I'd never seen this operation, so I wanted – that was interesting to me, because, if I was going to write about this longevity of their tradition as dry-land farmers, I needed to go out there and understand it. So, by doing that, I could ask them questions on the spot. When they were harvesting a particular piece of land, I could ask them about it, because we were right there. I didn't have to say – they didn't have to say, "Well, which piece are you talking about?" and I pull out a map. We're on it, right now.

Wigfall also worked with the schedule of the farmers in Nicodemus, assigning research tasks for the students while the farmers were completing their work so that the team could ask more direct questions after the farmers' day was done:

> I gave my students things to do while we were waiting. So, by the time the farmers all came in, we had some drawings that we could say, "Come in here every day, as we're drawing, and tell us whether we have it right or wrong, and X it out or write on our drawings so that we get it right." . . . . it was really helpful to not start with a blank slate. They [the farmers] could come in, and they told us, as we interviewed them, "Boy, you're asking me things I haven't thought about forever!" And they could – and we would conjure up those things which made the book richer – the history richer – than it had been from other kinds of scholars who came out for a week or two and left for thesis work, because we were out there for three months, and we'd done our pre-homework.[297]

Oral Histories

Beginning in the late 1980s with the creation of the Nicodemus Historical Society, Angela Bates led development of a collection of research materials drawn largely from Nicodemus descendants. With this collection, primarily paper ephemera consisting of historic photographs together with written materials, the park has not sought to build a collection of archival research materials. Instead, the bulk of research that NPS has led or conducted at Nicodemus has consisted of a series of oral history and archeological projects. The first oral history project was funded in the park's first full year, FY1998, driven by awareness of the advanced age of many of Nicodemus' residents. In discussions with Bates shortly after the park was authorized in late 1996, Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Linderer agreed that oral history interviews should begin as soon as possible. Rather than go through a traditional contracting process, Linderer recommended that the park work with the National Council for the Traditional

[296] LaBarbara Wigfall, oral history interview.
[297] Ibid.

Arts (NCTA), which was already providing cultural services to NPS through an existing Memorandum of Agreement.[298]

With this contracting vehicle already in place, Linderer was able to contract with Dr. Jenny Michael to conduct the interviews. Michael had received a Ph.D. in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania and was then serving as Visiting Assistant Professor at the Indiana University Department of Folklore. Michael began work in early 1998, conducting interviews with residents in Nicodemus and with descendants throughout the country. She encountered opposition, initially, from some Nicodemus residents, including Angela Bates, who was concerned that Michael's approach to conducting interviews lacked focus and direction and that Michael did not fully understand the cultural differences that could prevent interview subjects from being fully open with her. The NCTA project manager, who had overseen many similar federal research projects over more than thirty years, sought to reassure Bates that Michael, who was under contract to the federal government, would treat all information with respect, that copyright restrictions would be put in place, and that Michael and the NCTA would continue to engage with her on planning efforts. Despite these reassurances, the NCTA project manager opined in August 1998 that:

> I sense a conflict that only she can resolve. It is obvious that for Nicodemus she wants public interest, public respect, public funding, and the considerable outreach of a public place. But she does not seem to understand that the administration of such matters must be governed by rules that are also based on the public interest, and with an openness and clarity that are not easily manipulated for private benefit.[299]

By early October 1998, however, Michael and Bates had come closer to a meeting of the minds when Michael traveled again to Nicodemus and conducted an oral history interview with Bates. It was a long evening of conversation, she reported, "and I think we have mended whatever differences there were between us—at least as individuals. We had a pretty interesting discussion about racial and cultural issues here, and I think she understood the sincerity of my interest and desire to learn." During that visit to Nicodemus, Michael also was invited to the weekly "ladies night" at the Crackerbox Schoolhouse building next door to Township Hall, "where Angela [Bates] opens it up as a sort of juke, where she serves beer and maybe fries up some chicken. People of all ages from the community come to listen to music, talk, and dance." As she concluded in an email to Fort Larned staff, "Who could have imagined that being able to do the 'Electric Slide' would prove such a valuable fieldwork skill?!!" As a result of this informal gathering, she noted, she gained permission to interview other Nicodemus residents who were previously distrustful.[300]

During her project, Michael conducted approximately one hundred interviews, though the hastily-arranged project did not include funding for these recordings to be transcribed. Regional

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[298] Steve Linderer to Angela Bates-Tompkins, December 17, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[299] Email, unreadable name to Felix Revello, August; 27, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[300] Email, Jenny Michael to Felix Revello et al., October 9, 1998; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.

Landscape Architect Sherda Williams, in the summer of 1998, submitted a proposal for funding to prepare transcripts of Michael's interviews. In the project justification, Williams recognized the practical realities of the situation—"over 90-percent of the remaining African-American residents are over 65 years of age"—and emphasized the project's direct connection to the GMP process, which was then in its early stages. The GMP team, she noted, "recognized that the emotional connection felt by descendants of the original settlers to the physical place was an important value to protect." Transcribing the interviews that Michael was then conducting, she concluded, "will make them more accessible to future generations, and will, therefore, protect one of the essential qualities of Nicodemus NHS," and will assist NPS "in the restoration and protection of the historic landscape character in the future."[301] The project was funded with a proposed completion date of August 2001.[302]

The park continued to prioritize oral histories in its research program. The teams preparing the HSR and the CLR all drew upon oral histories to complete their studies. The CLR team, in fact, included an oral historian, Luis Torres, as a member. Torres returned to Nicodemus again as a contractor in 2006, conducting the park's second stand-alone oral history project. This project was funded by a grant from the National Park Foundation (NPF), a Congressionally-chartered, non-profit entity that is the only national charitable partner of the National Park Service. The NPF funded the project through the African American Experience Fund (AAEF), a program established in 2001 to support NPS in preserving sites associated with African Americans and to support interpretation and engagement programs related to African American history in the National Park System. The project was also supported by a small grant from WNPA. The initial plan was for Torres to complete nine interviews with long-time Nicodemus residents and descendants, notably including Mrs. Ora Switzer, then 102 years old, two of her sons, then in their eighties, and others. Torres was able to interview six of the intended people in early May 2006, and transcriptions were completed in August 2006.[303] As Superintendent Williams recalled the next year, previous oral history projects had focused on the physical development of the town. The goal for this small project was, instead, "eliciting and recording social history from prominent members of the Nicodemus community." The interviews, she told WNPA Assistant Editor Melissa Urreiztieta, "will be invaluable as the park develops interpretive material. Information from these oral histories will be integrated into wayside media, a film for the visitor center, and more park subject-specific brochures."[304]

Superintendent Williams initiated the planning for a third oral history project in 2008, funded in FY 2009. In describing the proposed project to her successor, Superintendent, Mark Weaver, in December 2008, former Superintendent Williams revisited the positive aspects of the 1998 oral history project. Dr. Michael, she recalled, "lived in Nicodemus for a summer and it really seemed to help win people's trust and elicit some fairly good information." Her idea, she told Weaver, was "to repeat that methodology by having an ethnographer live in the

[301] Project Description Form, Transcribe Oral Histories, August 10, 1998; files of Nicodemus NHS, H20.
[302] Email, Felix Revello to Liz Sargent, May 22, 2001; files of Nicodemus NHS, H22. By May 2001, only fourteen interviews remained to be transcribed. No record of completion was found during the current research.
[303] Sherda Williams to Gerrard Jolly (AAEF), May 26, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS, H1417. See also summary of the interviews in *Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, August 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[304] Email, Williams to Melissa Urriztieta, February 27, 2007; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2. This email also contains several quotations from the interviews.

community."[305] Williams also suggested that the NCTA, which had maintained a cooperative agreement with NPS, would again be a good contractor for the proposed new project. As the project developed in early 2009 under Weaver's guidance, however, the park worked through a cooperative agreement with the Piedmont-South Atlantic Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit (CESU) to hire Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson, Assistant Professor and Director of the University of South Florida Department of Anthropology Heritage Research and Resource Management Lab, as Principal Investigator (PI).

A consistent complaint on the part of Nicodemus' residents regarding NPS was that NPS, either on its own or through its contractors, intruded into the community's efforts to document its own history and tell its own stories. The conflict engendered during the first oral history project in 1998 was a manifestation of the community's frustration, which has remained an underlying theme that occasionally resurfaces. Superintendent Weaver and Regional Chief of Ethnography Michael Evans took these concerns into account in the planning for this latest oral history project. Sherda Williams had recommended a division of labor in which Angela Bates would conduct the interviews focused on family and social history, and the ethnographer would conduct interviews focused on community history and events; "Then, perhaps they could work together to combine their results into a book."[306] While eschewing the specifics of Williams' recommendation, the Scope of Work for the project in 2009 was clear regarding the need for cooperation between NPS and the town: "The PI will offer expert guidance to dovetail with work being performed by the Nicodemus Historical Society o[n] the internal knowledge of the community to ensure that results are academically professional while also being true to the local culture, history and expectations of the NPS."[307]

The project was designed in two phases spanning 2009 and 2010. Phase I, in late 2009, was intended to introduce Jackson to Nicodemus residents and conduct initial research and interviews. The bulk of the work occurred throughout 2010, including developing of a statement of methods, coordinating with NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society on themes, topics, and schedules for interviews, conducting two ethnographic and oral training workshops for Nicodemus residents, and working with residents and students to conduct the interviews, including during the 2010 Homecoming celebration.[308] Superintendent Weaver announced the project's initiation in the park's newsletter and briefly described the proposed collaboration. The project, he observed, is designed "to identify and train potential interviewers who will then interview willing friends and family members. We hope this personalized technique will draw out richer stories about the history of this wonderful place."[309] The Midwest Regional Office executed an agreement with the University of South Florida for the project in July 2009, and followed this in August with a cooperative agreement with the Nicodemus Historical Society. Under the cooperative agreement, the Nicodemus Historical Society agreed to assist NPS in planning, implementing, and archiving the oral history interviews with Nicodemus descendants and others, conduct genealogical research, increase accessibility of the Historical Society's

[305] Email, Sherda Williams to Mark Weaver, December 2, 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Scope of Work, Ethnographic Technical Assistance and Research Support, c. 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.
[308] Scope of Work.
[309] *The Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, July 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS.

museum collections, and develop educational programming; the National Park Service, for its part, provided $37,000 in funding.[310]

The project began in late October 2009 with a meeting in Nicodemus among Weaver, Bates, and Jackson to discuss the general approach and schedule. By late December, University of South Florida students working with Jackson had prepared an annotated bibliography together with reports about and critiques of the portrayal of Nicodemus found on the internet generally and in the NPS Ethnography website in particular, including gaps in the presentation and specific recommendations. The students also prepared separate, internet-based content modules for Nicodemus between 1865 and 1915, and between 1915 and 1965, establishing the relevant cultural, social, political, and economic contexts.[311] Jackson and a group of students traveled to Nicodemus in late June 2010 for an orientation to the community and to conduct research and initial oral history training. The principal oral history interviews took place during the 2010 Homecoming celebration, and NPS modified the cooperative agreement with the Nicodemus Historical Society to provide an additional $20,000 to allow them to hire a professional videographer to record interviews.[312]

Superintendent Weaver and Regional Chief of Ethnography Evans were both pleased with the work the University of South Florida team did. In late June, Evans wrote to Ray Albright, who served as the CESU Coordinator in the Southeast Regional Office, informing him that the work at Nicodemus "has gone well, so good in fact, that both the park and the Nicodemus Historical Society would like to continue with more of the oral history project."[313] Evans agreed to apportion additional funds to the project and, in July, coordinated with Jackson to develop a revised scope of work that went beyond the oral history work to include contributions "to the development of a longitudinal study of the community through an analysis of connections to home of Nicodemus descendant families over time from the original homestead period to the present." The amended project was again divided into two phases: conducting additional research and identifying new interview subjects through the winter and spring of 2011, followed in the summer of 2011 with two additional oral history training workshops and up to forty new interviews.[314] Weaver, Jackson, Evans, and Angela Bates all worked collaboratively on the project, and NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society worked in parallel to conduct research and interviews. The project also included extensive involvement by several undergraduate and graduate students who took part in archival research and oral history interviews and who also prepared and gave scholarly papers at regional conferences regarding the oral history project at Nicodemus. One outcome of the extension of the University of South

[310] Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and the Nicodemus Historical Society, executed by Thomas Wellington (Historical Society), Superintendent Mark Weaver, and Regional Contracting Officer Theora McVay, September 3, 2009. The funding amount totaled $37,630, as detailed in a Task Agreement executed the next day, September 4, 2009. Files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.
[311] Notes from kick-off meeting, October 26, 2009, updated December 29, 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.
[312] Modification to Task Agreement for Cooperative Agreement between National Park Service and Nicodemus Historical Society, executed by Theora McVay, August 2, 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.
[313] Email, Michael Evans to Ray Albright, June 29, 2010; files of Nicodemus, H2217.
[314] Emails between Michael Evans and Ray Albright, September 12-13, 2010, with attached Modification to agreement between National Park Service and University of South Florida, September 13, 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.

Florida contract was to allow Jackson to incorporate the work being conducted by Bates and her colleagues into the final University of South Florida report.[315]

The University of South Florida team under Jackson's direction incorporated a range of research activities during the spring and early summer of 2011 beyond conducting additional oral history interviews. The team expanded beyond Nicodemus, including site visits and research trips to nearby communities such as Bogue, Stockton, Logan, and Speed, and initiating GIS-based mapping projects for the route that the original settlers took in 1877 from the railroad station in Ellis to Nicodemus and for the Nicodemus and Mount Olive cemeteries. The students also organized and gave presentations at two community workshops, one to discuss the several projects that they had done and another to introduce the participants to the use of podcasting as a way of generating and presenting historical information.[316] The work of the Nicodemus Historical Society, through its cooperative agreement, which was extended to a third year in early September 2011, was also successful, completing sixty interviews of Nicodemus residents and descendants with training provided by the University of South Florida team.[317]

Archeological Studies

While the Nicodemus Historical Society began conducting research in historic photographs and documents, largely among descendants of the original settlers, NPS conducted research into the history of Nicodemus principally in two ways: oral history and archeology. Drawing on the resources of the Midwest Archeological Center, the park had undertaken preliminary archeological surveys for the purposes of complying with Section 106 requirements during early stabilization projects at the AME Church and the First Baptist Church in the park's early years.[318] As the second oral history project was being completed, however, planning was under way for the park's only significant archeological research project that was not for compliance for other work.

Superintendent Williams had developed a relationship with the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS), which conducted an annual archeological field school during the summers. In late 2004, Williams initially conceived a multi-year collaborative project with KSHS for a summer field school to study the early settlement period at Nicodemus with a particular focus on sites of dugout houses.[319] In the summer of 2005, Williams approached KSHS about collaborating on an archeological field school project to evaluate the potential significance of multiple dugout sites in Nicodemus and an archeological excavation of at least one site. Williams

[315] Email, Mark Weaver to Michael Evans, May 27, 2011, report of meeting among Weaver, Jackson, and Bates; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[316] 2011 USF Nicodemus Heritage Project Update, June 8, 2011, submitted Antoinette Jackson; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217.
[317] Nicodemus Historical Society, Oral History Project Summary, Final Report, September 17, 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2217. The cooperative agreement extension was executed on September 1, 2011, with a completion date of September 30, 2012, executed August 28, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS. In a recent oral history interview, former Superintendent Weaver recalled that the project "was a very good, symbiotic relationship."
[318] See Chapter 3 for discussions of the incorporation of archeological surveys in building stabilization projects.
[319] Project Identification-PMIS Form, Conduct Archeological Field Schools to Document African American Settlement Period at NICO, final update, December 30, 2004; files of Nicodemus NHS, H24.

recommended that the project also include the Kansas Anthropological Association and the Midwest Archeological Center and informed them that she was preparing proposals for funding from WNPA and from the NPS Challenge Cost Share Program grant, an annual program designed to assist NHL properties. In requesting the participation of KSHS, Williams pointed out that "Investigations of African American settlements in the United States are limited and excavations on Western African American settlements are even more limited." The results from this study, she explained, would help the park "in balancing our presentation of history and culture to represent a neglected 'voice' from the past and in educating people on the significance of Nicodemus."[320]

Kansas State Archeologist Robert Hoard was receptive to the idea, as was Margaret Wood, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Washburn University, which quickly signed on as an institutional partner to coordinate the field school. Other partners were KSHS, the Midwest Archeological Center, the Nicodemus Historical Society, and the park, and the project was awarded a $19,000 Challenge Cost Share Grant in March 2006; matching in-kind costs were provided by Washburn University and the Nicodemus Historical Society, with KSHS and MWAC providing technical assistance.[321] In anticipation of the grant, Washburn University, in mid-February, announced the field school to be held from May 15 to June 2, 2006.[322] This created a compressed schedule, with the result that several planning activities needed to take place concurrently. In early April, MWAC Archeologist Steven DeVore visited Nicodemus, meeting with Williams, Wood, and Bates to conduct an initial reconnaissance both within and without the NHL district with the goal of identifying potential dugout sites based on maps and oral histories with Nicodemus descendants. DeVore located several possible sites that could serve as bases for the archeological field school and recommended follow-up geophysical surveys to help to prioritize the sites. The most promising of these, as Williams informed Midwest Region Architectural Historian Dena Sanford, was the Thomas Johnson dugout located at the Henry Williams property approximately 1.5 miles north of Nicodemus, with two potential dugout sites; the property was then owned by Veryl Switzer. Henry Williams, whose mother was pregnant during the journey from Kentucky to Nicodemus, was the first child born in Nicodemus, and his house, built in 1920, is still extant. The team investigated three other potential dugout sites close to each other on the southeast side of Nicodemus and visited the backyard of School District No. 1, the site of another potential dugout.[323] In mid-April 2006, MWAC Archeologists Steve DeVore and Jay Sturdevant conducted a detailed geophysical survey of the Thomas Johnson dugout site on the Henry Williams farm and the backyard of School District No. 1 using a mix of magnetic, resistance, ground penetrating radar survey techniques. The archeologists surveyed approximately 0.3 acres at the Henry Williams farm and approximately 0.8 acres at School District No. 1. According to a report of the geophysical investigations, the survey "resulted in the identification of numerous subsurface anomalies

[320] Sherda Williams to Robert J. Hoard, State Archeologist, August 22, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS, H2623.
[321] Email, Karen Anderson to Michael Madell et al., March 15, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS, H24. See also email, Sherda Williams to John Njagi, May 24, 2006, with summary of funding and contributions; files of Nicodemus NHS, H24.
[322] Announcement of Washburn University Archaeological Field School, download from Washburn University website dated February 14, 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS, H24.
[323] Memorandum, Steven DeVore to Manager, MWAC, April 10, 2006; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4. See also email, Sherda Williams to Dena Sanford et al., April 9, 2006; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 7.

including the dugouts and an artifact midden at the Johnson dugout location and dugouts, outhouses (privies), disturbed areas, and an artifact midden associated with the District No. 1. school grounds."[324]

Immediately after DeVore identified these sites and before any further geophysical surveys could take place, Superintendent Williams contacted the owners of the properties where the dugout sites were located, seeking permission to allow the archeological field school students and leaders to work there. Williams was successful, and, in mid-May, the workshop began with Wood and eight Washburn University students. Fortunately, Williams received permission to conduct work at the Henry Williams site (Figures 29 and 30). The park's newsletter, issued during the course of the field school, invited Nicodemus residents to take part and either visit or volunteer. The students identified two dugout sites, one of which was identified as the house, and the other, a smaller dugout further up the slope, was identified as the cellar. The students were able to partially excavate the house dugout during the term of the field school, identifying a finished stone wall with the remains of plaster on the interior side.[325] Stairs had been dug into the slope along the outside wall, and artifacts recovered during excavation confirmed the site's domestic use. Artifacts including table ceramics, decorative glass, buttons, sewing implements, and kitchen utensils. Nearly 1,700 artifacts were recovered during the field school. These were catalogued by Washburn University students under the guidance of Dr. Wood. The field school resulted in a display about the work at the 2006 Homecoming celebration, a report prepared by Dr. Wood, and multiple papers presented at regional archeological conferences.[326]

Planning for a second phase of work at the dugout sites was already underway by the time of the field school in 2006. This second phase in the summer of 2007 was to have two components: a second field school led by Washburn University, followed by a larger project under the auspices of the Kansas Archeological Training Program (KATP), a partnership between the Kansas State Historical Society and the Kansas Anthropological Association. The Washburn University field school would focus on a potential dugout site on the grounds of School District No. 1., while KATP would continue work at the Williams dugout sites. Williams, in coordination with the Kansas State Historical Society, began recruiting in late summer of 2006 for a Principal Investigator to lead KATP and, in January 2007, selected Dr. Flordeliz Bugarin.[327] Bugarin received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Florida in 2002, and was then an Assistant Professor in the African Studies Department of Howard University. The park again collaborated with the Kansas State Historical Society on a successful application for a Challenge Cost Share Grant, and the American Legion post gave permission for the Washburn University project on the schoolhouse grounds.

The Washburn University field school occurred during the last three weeks of May 2007, and the students focused their efforts on a potential dugout site that MWAC archeologists had identified near the schoolhouse in 2006. Their excavations proved negative, but the students

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[324] "Geophysical Investigations of Two Dugout Locations Associated with Nicodemus National Historic Site, Graham County, Kansas," letter report from Steven L. DeVore, Midwest Archeological Center, January 2007; quotation on p. 14.
[325] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, August 2006.
[326] "FY 2006 Challenge Cost Share Program, Project Completion Form," undated (c. September 2006); files of Nicodemus NHS, H24.
[327] Email, Robert Hoard to Sherda Williams et al., January 8, 2007; files of Nicodemus NHS, H24.

Figure 29. Participants in the 2006 archeological field school

Figure 30. Preparing for work at the dugout site during the 2006 archeological field school.

gained experience with excavations of a trash dump and several privies. Work by KATP began in early June and continued for two weeks. It combined field investigations of the Johnson site with public talks and discussions nearly every evening featuring a wide variety of topics about the history of the region and of Nicodemus, artifact conservation, historic landscapes, the nature of historical archeology, and the role of the military in the region. Student members of several local schools and civic groups volunteered for the work, and nearly 150 volunteers took part. The project resulted in more extensive excavations of the house and the cellar at the Williams site, together with an associated trash midden, and the participants were, therefore, able to determine the outline of the house. The artifacts recovered from the site were processed by volunteers before being shipped to the Howard University Department of Anthropology for analysis by Dr. Bugarin's students, resulting in several follow-up conference papers. The project gained a great

deal of public attention through the calls for volunteers to take part with KATP, and the park considered the work a success, given its relationship to the Nicodemus community. As the report for the second Challenge Cost Share Grant noted, "Many of the people in Nicodemus descend from Thomas Johnson or his grandson, Henry Williams, Sr. A number of these descendants came to visit the site to learn more about archeology and witness our discoveries."[328]

In the spring of 2012, MWAC archeologists returned to Nicodemus to conduct a baseline inventory of potential archeological resources on the grounds of the five buildings that constitute the park. With an eye toward planning for potential future construction activities that would have impacts on archeological resources, the survey involved the use of ground-penetrating radar for all five buildings and supplemental subsurface investigations on the grounds of the AME Church. The investigations, which took place from May 14 to June 1, revealed the presence of archeological deposits as well as building locations and buried utility lines at all five properties and led MWAC to assert that buried archeological resources at all five are eligible for the NRHP for their potential to yield information on the history of Nicodemus. In particular, the investigations showed that the AME Church, Township Hall, and School District No. 1 lots have a high potential for additional structural foundations.[329]

Historic Resources Study

In 2001, as work was progressing on the GMP and the two initial planning studies—Historic Structures Report and Cultural Landscape Report—Midwest Region Historian Jill O'Bright began work on the park's Historic Resources Study (HRS). An HRS is a substantial reference document, the purpose of which is to present the historical and cultural context of a park and its cultural resources based on extensive research into primary and secondary sources, including written materials and, where appropriate, oral histories. The material presented in the HRS can provide the basis for the park's interpretive program, park planning reports, as well as being a substantial historical monograph on its own. O'Bright's initial research informed many of her searching comments on the GMP, as discussed in Chapter 3. It is unclear how much research O'Bright was able to conduct in 2001-2002, as the park's correspondence contains no additional references to the HRS.[330] Finally, in 2008, however, the HRS was funded, and, in October, the Regional Office contracted with Historic Research Associates/Gray and Pape (HRA) to restart the project. In announcing the start of work in the park's newsletter in late 2008, Superintendent Weaver solicited input from Nicodemus' residents and descendants by outlining the complications that the HRA team would have to address. The goal, he announced, was:

> to ensure that we're telling not only the appropriate depth of the story but the breadth as well. In other words, do we tell the story not only of Nicodemus, but of the life of its citizens before they came here? Should we incorporate the stories of

[328] "Project Report, Challenge Cost Share Program," undated (c. January 2008); files of Nicodemus NHS.
[329] Steven L. DeVore, Albert M. LeBeau III, Amada D. Renner, and Cynthia J. Wiley, *Geophysical Inventory and Archeological Investigations at the Nicodemus National Historic Site, Graham County, Kansas* (Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska, Technical Report 141), 2018. The potential future activities included construction of a disability access ramp at the AME Church, rehabilitation of the AME Church including reconstruction of the north wall, and foundation replacement at School District No. 1 and Township Hall.
[330] Progress on the HRS stalled when Midwest Region Historian Jill O'Bright resigned her federal position to pursue endeavors in the private sector.

those that moved here and subsequently left for Denver, Topeka, or the state of California? Should we tell the story of how Nicodemus related to surrounding communities over the years?[331]

Historic Research Associates submitted its initial draft of the HRS for review in the late summer of 2009. Unfortunately, this early draft failed to convey the depth, breadth, and complexity of the Nicodemus story as Weaver described. Midwest Region Senior Historian Donald Stevens expressed his disappointment in the lack of depth in the discussion of the context surrounding the emigration of the original settlers to Nicodemus.[332] In her review, Angela Bates was considerably more detailed in her comments. While pointing to shortcomings about specific topics such as the relations with Native Americans, the relationship between Nicodemus and the Exoduster movement, and the origins and continuation of the Emancipation/Homecoming celebration, Bates focused primarily on more general, conceptual issues. In particular, she was concerned by the lack of attention paid to the understanding of family in regard to Nicodemus, particularly, and African American history generally. After decrying the lack of any analysis in the HRS as to why Nicodemus survived when so many other African American communities in the post-Civil War era failed, she argued that family was an important part of the reason. After mentioning the destruction and reshaping of African American families during the Civil War, she postulated, "How the 'family' and 'extended family village' reshaped itself to create and shape this unique western town cannot be ignored." The understanding among Nicodemus' descendants, forged in the interlocking family networks that existed in the town from the earliest years of settlement, "is what makes Nicodemus unique and speaks to its survival, setting it apart from other emigrant towns established during this period."[333]

After receiving the review comments, the HRA team conducted extensive additional research, particularly in the historiography of the post-Civil War era regarding African Americans and westward expansion and submitted a thoroughly revised draft HRS in December 2010.[334] The second and final round of comments and revisions were completed quickly, and the Regional Office accepted the final HRS in July 2011. This final document was the first comprehensive history of Nicodemus since the 1983 HABS report, and though it, perhaps, lacked the sense of close familiarity with the community that LaBarbara Wigfall had developed during her lengthy stays with Nicodemus' farmers and residents, the HRS more fully engaged the array of pertinent scholarly literature than the earlier study. The HRA team, consisting of several historians and an architectural historian, structured the HRS around the intersection of two significant historical themes: the struggles of southern African Americans in the aftermath of the Civil War as they sought to define the meaning of their new freedom and secure a new place within the broader American political, economic, and cultural setting, and the westward migration of Americans of both races from the eastern states into the Great Plains. In the Introduction to the HRS, the authors directly addressed the question posed by Angela Bates of why Nicodemus survived when so few of the approximately one hundred African American

[331] *Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, November 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[332] Email, Don Stevens to Heather Miller et al., March 24, 2010, with summary of phone call; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also email, Don Stevens to Heather Miller et al, March 26, 2009, regarding the proposed submittal date for the draft HRS in August 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS
[333] Angela Bates, Comments on Historic Resource Study, undated but likely in April 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[334] Heather Lee Miller to Donald Stevens, December 3, 2010, transmittal letter for revised draft HRS; files of Nicodemus NHS.

towns established on the Great Plains from the nineteenth into the twentieth century failed. After citing the example of another town settled by African Americans in Langton, Oklahoma, which survived as a result of the establishment by outside philanthropists of the Colored Agricultural and Normal School, now Langston University, the authors drew extensively from the insights provided by Bates in her comments on the first draft of the HRS. The high value placed on family and church relationships, the authors argued, contributed to a commitment to the community. Extended family networks, they continued, also echoing the conclusions of the CLR a decade earlier, helped to sustain Nicodemus "mainly by returning to homecoming events that became part of the long tradition of Emancipation Day celebrations." It was these "emotional and social ties to the town, even from a distance," that helped to ensure the establishment of Nicodemus NHS in 1996.[335]

The HRS was organized into two unevenly-sized sections, with seven chapters of historical narrative, and a final chapter on the architectural history of the town. The first section is organized chronologically, starting with an extensive background on the earliest human habitation in the region, the forced removal of American Indians during the nineteenth century, and the earliest interactions between American Indians and the Nicodemus settlers. After providing the context for African Americans in the South after the Civil War and the impetus to emigrate to the Great Plains, the HRS provides a chronological history of Nicodemus from the late 1870s to the present, its public institutions, churches, community groups, and commercial establishments, agriculture, social life, and its pattern of decline and revival throughout the twentieth century. Through these chapters, and amid the details of everyday life, the HRS presents a story of struggle and survival, from the origins of the settlement and the conditions that propelled the community members from Kentucky toward Kansas, through the initial difficulties of getting a foothold in the new setting to its early boom years. As the HRS explains, Nicodemus had its own unique origins and unfolding that distinguished it from other similar communities, as summarized in Chapter 1 of this report, but it was also part of the larger story of outmigration of African Americans from the South after the Civil War, as the promises of Reconstruction waned.

Like other communities settled on the Great Plains in the 1870s and 1880s, Nicodemus went through a modest boom period that spurred construction of substantial buildings and establishment of businesses and civic institutions. Like many other communities, as well, Nicodemus suffered gravely when it was bypassed by the railroad and then faced severe droughts in the 1890s and later, in the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years of the 1930s. Unlike the hundreds of other small communities throughout the Great Plains that were abandoned through the twentieth century, however, Nicodemus is distinctive by its survival, even seeing a revival of population from fewer than twenty at mid-century to nearly one hundred by the 1970s, when the HUD-sponsored Nicodemus Villa apartments allowed retirees to return to their home town. The architectural history portion of the HRS also observes that nearly half of the buildings within the town center were relocated there during the 1970s. Although these buildings were moved primarily to provide housing for visits by family members rather than as permanent housing, it was a sign of the town's endurance. Discussing the survival of Nicodemus, and the occasional resurgence in population, the HRS again followed the lead of Bates in her comments on an

[335] *Historic Resources Study: Nicodemus National Historic Site*, prepared for Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, approved by Regional Director Michael Reynolds, July 14, 2011.

earlier draft of the HRS. Despite falling to only sixteen residents in 1950, the authors observed, "the remaining residents were able to draw on their strong family relationships, religious involvement, and organizational affiliations to keep the town alive when so many other Great Plains communities failed altogether."[336]

National Historic Landmark Nomination

The first research project to identify the historical significance of Nicodemus was conducted in 1974 by Marcia Greenlee for the original National Register of Historic Places nomination. Greenlee was the Project Director for the Afro American Bicentennial Corporation, which was the precursor to the Afro American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development. This nomination, which also served as the basis for the designation of Nicodemus as a National Historic Landmark in 1976, presented an outline history of the town and, though it conflates the origins of Nicodemus with the Exoduster movement of the late 1870s and 1880s, met the standards of the time and was a valuable first step that gave NPS a role in protection of the town's historic resources. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, as park and Regional staff and contractors were preparing the GMP, HSR, and CLR, the inadequacy of the original NRHP nomination became clear. The research that LaBarbara Wigfall and her team completed for the 1983 HABS study showed the potential for uncovering the greater depth and breadth of the story of Nicodemus, and subsequent archival research and oral histories created a stronger foundation for understanding the town's significance. An important shift in conceiving of the town of Nicodemus came with the CLR, which was completed in 2002 and approved in early 2003. In this document, as discussed earlier in Chapter 4, the BVH team first outlined the justification for designating the town a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP):

> a rural community of predominantly African-American friends, neighbors, and relatives, many of whom are descended from those who founded the townsite, or were early residents, and which continues to reflect beliefs and practices that have evolved with the community since its inception.[337]

Following the wave of initial studies from 1998 to 2003, the park initiated work on the HRS, discussed earlier in this chapter, and the Long Range Interpretive Plan, both of which were complete by 2011. As Midwest Region Historian Dena Sanford recalled, she and her colleagues had long hoped to contract for a revised NHL nomination that could incorporate the vast amount of new research conducted since 1974 and the insights from the CLR regarding the potential status of Nicodemus as a TCP. Finally, in 2011, the Regional Office contracted with Paula S. Reed and Associates, based in Maryland, to prepare the revised nomination. Like the HRS, Sanford instructed the contractors to not only conduct extensive research into the history of Nicodemus but also to explore whether the designation of Nicodemus as a TCP could be justified. This justification, Sanford explained, required that the significance of the town be located not just in the past, as a historic district or archeological site, but as continuity from the past to the present.

[336] Ibid., 123.
[337] *Cultural Landscape Report*, 10.

The contractors, Paula Reed and Edie Wallace, conducted extensive research and visited Nicodemus and, by 2014, had produced a draft NHL nomination that incorporated a landscape analysis and a discussion of potential archeological resources. In early 2015, prior to submitting the NHL nomination to the NPS Washington Office for review and concurrence, Sanford distributed the draft document to outside scholars for review, including to Antoinette Jackson, who led the oral history and ethnography study of Nicodemus in 2009-2011. In writing to these scholars, Sanford observed that the amended document incorporated new research "that reveals the integrally intertwined history, material resources, and cultural traditions that are the essence of Nicodemus." She requested input specifically as to whether the authors had made an adequate justification for Nicodemus, first, as a TCP, and second, as a nationally significant TCP.[338] These scholars gave generally favorable reviews with useful feedback and, in one case, additional text to add to the revised nomination.[339]

Reed and Wallace incorporated the comments and produced a revised draft for Sanford's review in 2016, which Sanford forwarded to the NRHP and NHL Programs staff at the Washington Office. The nomination has remained under review since then, because NPS staff in the Regional and Washington offices have disagreed as to the validity of the argument that Nicodemus is a TCP. Although the contract with Paula S. Reed and Associates ended in 2016, Sanford has continued with the project, adding additional justification statements for the TCP.[340] As of the writing of this Administrative History, the revised NHL nomination remains under review. A proposal has been made to alter the boundary so that the entire township would not be included and to incorporate the results of another study being conducted on the history of African Americans who took advantage of the Homestead Act. There is, however, no proposed date for a newly revised NHL amendment.[341]

As a result of the extensive research at Nicodemus starting in the 1970s and continuing to the present and with the amendment to the NHL nomination and incorporating archival research, oral history interviews, and archeological field work into the efforts, NPS, in partnership with the Nicodemus Historical Society, has developed an exceptional foundation for understanding the history of Nicodemus and its significance. The results of this research are immensely valuable for their own sake, as they reveal important aspects of American history that have been forgotten or ignored. In addition to its intrinsic value, however, this research, the compilation and curation of which has resulted from a collaboration between NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society, will continue to inform and enrich the park's interpretive program. The checkered history of how NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society developed and implemented the park's interpretation is the subject of the next chapter.

[338] Identical letters from Dena Sanford to Valerie Grim, Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, Paul R. Mullins, Christopher C. Fennell, Matthew C. Whitaker, and Antoinette Jackson, all dated January 28, 2015, are located in files of Nicodemus NHS, H34.
[339] Dena Sanford, oral history interview.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Sanford, personal communication to the author, December 19, 2022.

Chapter 7: Interpretation

Nicodemus provides NPS with an opportunity to tell several nationally significant stories, the interlocking nature of which is unique within the National Park System: the struggles of African Americans to claim the freedom and equality promised them after the Civil War and Reconstruction, the westward migration and American settlement of the Great Plains in the late nineteenth century, and the environmental and economic challenges that these settlers faced on the Great Plains in the twentieth century. Moreover, the story of Nicodemus itself is stirring and inspirational: the traditional association of an extended, family-based community network with this place in the high plains of west Kansas, the continuity of this community through adversity over more than a century, and the annual pilgrimage of the members of this community back to the place of their forebears to reestablish their connections with each other and with the place. In a sign of recognition of the importance and vitality of these stories, NPS hired interpretive staff as the park's first employees. Despite this recognition of the importance of telling these stories, however, NPS never elevated that story-telling function institutionally beyond the level of a Park Ranger to having a dedicated, full-time Chief of Interpretation. This reluctance to expand the park's organizational structure to include a senior-level staff person for the park's principal function—interpreting the history of this community in this place—draws from several sources both within NPS and in its relations with the community, including the remote location of the site and the attendant difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff, the ambivalence of many in the community regarding an active and expanded presence by NPS, and, as some allege, elements of racism that have kept Nicodemus NHS in its status as a mentored park and provided a disincentive to see the park expand beyond its relatively small footprint.

As discussed in Chapter 3, all newly-established units of the National Park System typically take several years to begin full operations, a delay due most often to the need for planning studies. In Nicodemus, the delays were caused also by other factors. First, there was a disinclination on the part of the Regional Office to have the new park "blow up into a big project," preferring instead to "keep the development small and not let the thing get out of hand," as Fort Larned Superintendent Linderer recalled.[342] At the same time, Regional Office staff clearly recognized the unique and unprecedented nature of Nicodemus NHS as part of an ongoing, if small, community, and were acutely aware of the potential to overwhelm that community. Caution and deliberation were priorities, particularly in developing the GMP.

The GMP, when it was completed and approved in 2003, placed a special emphasis on interpretation. After noting that "the historical significance of the national historic site is embedded less in the physical resources and more in the perseverance and continuity of a community," the GMP defined as its preferred alternative a "joint stewardship," actively collaborating with the community on a range of issues including protecting the buildings, supporting new developments, and providing interpretation and visitor services. The GMP contained few specific programmatic recommendations regarding interpretation aside from seeking to minimize disruption of the town and cultural landscape and acknowledging the possibility that community members might wish to provide the interpretive services themselves; in this case, NPS would provide only training for interpreters and assistance with developing

[342] Steve Linderer and Felix Revello, oral history interview.

programs. Such decisions regarding the operation of an interpretive program at Nicodemus NHS, however, would be determined through the preparation of a Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP), which NPS would develop in consultation with the community.

Initial Interpretation: Staff and Services

The LRIP, however, as will be discussed later in this chapter, was a long time in the making. In the meantime, the park gradually added basic interpretive services and programs, using Township Hall as a visitor contact station. Fort Larned NHS, located more than one hundred miles south of Nicodemus, initially provided basic services and oversight for Nicodemus NHS, efforts which were led primarily by Superintendent Steve Linderer and Chief Ranger Felix Revello. Revello, while supporting Linderer in all of the cultural resources aspects of the new park, was also particularly interested in establishing an interpretive program, and recalled that "I was just very concerned and throwing myself into this because something needed to be done fast. And my boss realized something needed to be done fast, and we worked together to get these things done."[343]

In keeping with the remote base of operations, the initial interpretive program was primarily passive in nature. In early 1997, the park received a license to operate a Traveler's Information Station for Nicodemus, a low-powered, non-commercial radio station that allowed the broadcast of the Nicodemus story to potential visitors and other driving past on U.S. Highway 24. As Linderer recalled, "I wanted to get that up right away." In discussion with Angela Bates, Linderer learned that she knew the famous film actor, Danny Glover. Linderer hired Glover to read a script that Bates wrote and Linderer and Revello edited. Rather than the finished recording, however, the park received the unedited tape. As Linderer recalled, "it was full of expletives and breaks. I mean, it was an absolute mess. That's the way actors do the things. They do it, and then they go back and redo it, and then editors come through and put it together. And what we got was the raw tape." Fortunately, the park was able have the recording edited in Hays, Kansas, and began broadcasting the interpretive message on the Traveler's Information Station in 1997.[344]

While the interpretive message being broadcast was an important first step, it was not a full substitute for in-person interpretation. Other than the Travelers Information Station broadcast, NPS had no interpretive presence in Nicodemus throughout 1997. During this period of quiescence, however, the Nicodemus Historical Society continued their interpretive program that predated the arrival of NPS. Angela Bates relocated to Nicodemus in 1990, after recently organizing the Historical Society while living in Denver and set up an office in the Priscilla Arts Club building next door to Township Hall, where she began to develop a collections and an interpretation program. As she recalled in 2007, "I met with visitors and discussed the history of Nicodemus and accommodated them with town site and township tours. This was the first attempt to formally interpret the history and accommodate visitors." During this period, as discussed in Chapter 2, Bates also coordinated with the Kansas State Department of Education to begin developing a curriculum for Kansas African American history, which several school

[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid.

districts purchased and implemented. In 1993, the Nicodemus Historical Society was given the Ola Wilson House at the south end of the town site on 5th Street for use as a museum, operating on an as-needed basis and by appointment until 2005, when it began to be open on a regular basis.[345] In 1992 and 1993, the Nicodemus Historical Society also constructed wooden wayside interpretive signs for four of the five buildings that constitute the park.[346]

In early 1998, Linderer and Revello negotiated with the Nicodemus Township Board to allow NPS to lease Township Hall for use as a temporary visitor contact station. The two had visited several other buildings elsewhere in town but not within the townsite; they failed to find any that could be reasonably adapted to use as a visitor center, even on a temporary basis. As Linderer recalled, "There was no place else in town, really, that we could bring visitors into. No place. That was about the only place that was suitable to go into operation right away." The plan was to use Township Hall primarily during the summer months, when it would be in use every day, while having it open less frequently during the rest of the year, declining to only one or two days per month in the winter. Under the terms of the lease, NPS agreed to provide basic maintenance of the building's interior and exterior, but not to provide major repairs. The National Park Service would also relocate any exhibits and office furniture when the town needed use of the building, such as for weddings and for the Homecoming celebrations, and would provide portable toilets on the grounds of Township Hall for NPS visitor use.[347]

Revello also teamed with Fort Larned Park Ranger Gia Lane to develop a plan for a series of twelve interpretive panels for display at Nicodemus NHS. Linderer recalled that he and Revello "sort of by-passed Region, because they want to do studies, and we just wanted something done so that we could open up the place and have visitors. And there was nothing in – there was nothing in the Township Hall. You walk in there, and there's nothing there."[348] Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Thomas Richter, in his recollections, clarified that much of the work to complete interpretive exhibits for Township Hall was completed by a member of his staff, Roberta Wendel, in association with Michael Lancome at the Harpers Ferry Center with input from Angela Bates and other Nicodemus residents.[349] These exhibits, which were intended to be temporary and provisional, have proved successful and enduring, despite later identification of some inaccurate information and materials that some considered offensive, and remain in place in Township Hall, which, as of the writing of this administrative history, continues to serve as the park's Visitor Center.

Both Linderer and Revello recognized the importance of interpretation, however, and, in keeping with the interpretive thrust of the park's initial management program, the first two staff designated specifically for the park were interpreters. Fort Larned NHS Park Ranger Reginald (Reggie) Miller came to Fort Larned as student trainee. He had previously served in the U.S.

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[345] Angela Bates, Review Comments on Nicodemus National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan, September 2007; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 9.
[346] Email, Steve Linderer to Bess Sherman and Sändra Washington, containing a response to a questionnaire from the National Park Foundation regarding the status of the park and its interpretation and visitor services, September 26, 1997; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[347] Steven R. Linderer to James Bates, March 23, 1998, with an attached General Services Administration Request for Space Form and justification; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 2.
[348] Linderer and Revello, oral history interview.
[349] Thomas P. Richter, oral history interview, September 4, 2020.

Army as a soldier in the 10th Cavalry Regiment, which was first created in 1866 as one of the original Buffalo Soldier regiments for African Americans. Murray was, therefore, familiar with the Buffalo Soldiers and worked extensively with their interpretation while at Fort Larned. Murray was detailed to Nicodemus while still a student trainee as an interpreter and as a liaison with the town. After the park secured a lease on Township Hall, Murray began working full-time in June 1999 as the park's first full-time staff member, serving as a Ranger though remaining on the Fort Larned NHS staff.[350] The conditions when Murray entered on duty as Nicodemus NHS were spartan. As he recalled, not only was he the only permanent staff at the park, the accommodations were limited. With space for only a makeshift office and visitor contact station in Township Hall, Murray recalled that "all we had, when I started working there, was the desktop printer, a laptop, and a telephone. And that's all that was in the Visitor Center at the time," with a fold-out table for a desk.[351]

Working under the direction of Linderer and Revello, Reggie Murray took on multiple responsibilities including developing a walking tour for visitors, conducting interpretive in-person outreach programs for local schools and initial attempts at distance learning programs for schools in Omaha, coordinating with Angela Bates when visitors wanted to see the Nicodemus Historical Society exhibits in their building next door to Township Hall, and coordinating the work and activities of volunteer student groups such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, AmeriCorps, and Sons of the American Revolution. Murray also organized the park's first Junior Ranger program and served as the local coordinator for the Western National Parks Association's bookstore sales, which also came to include the sale of locally-made products. During his tenure at Nicodemus, Murray found housing at the Villa, the housing development built by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and managed by the Nicodemus Housing Authority, but his wife and family remained at their house in Junction City, Kansas, nearly three hours east of Nicodemus, where Murray returned every weekend.[352] Murray was also joined by LueCreasea Holmes (now Horne), a sixth-generation Nicodemus descendant, then in college, who was hired as a seasonal interpreter following high school and served during the summers while she was in college. As a student, Horne received training in interpretation at Fort Larned, and, like Murray, frequently served alone in Township Hall.[353]

In the fall of 2001, Holmes accepted a permanent position as an interpreter at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Missouri. The following spring, in April 2002, Site Manager Dennis Carruth hired Phyllis Howard as a Park Guide. Howard had served as a volunteer at Bent's Old Fort NHS in southeastern Colorado in 1994, and had worked there as a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) employee since 1998 while earning her bachelor's degree in history from the University of Southern Colorado at Pueblo. Given her experience as an interpreter and familiarity with living history activities, Carruth announced in an email to Fort Larned NHS staff, Howard would allow Nicodemus to attempt "to increase our outreach endeavors."[354] Carruth also hoped that, by hiring Howard as a permanent employee to replace

[350] As discussed in Chapter 8, Nicodemus resident Robert Brogdon was hired before Miller as a maintenance worker but was a part-time seasonal employee for several years.
[351] Miller, oral history interview.
[352] Reginal Murray, oral history interview, October 19, 2020.
[353] LueCreasea Horne, oral history interview, October 29, 2020.
[354] Email, Dennis Carruth to FOLS (all employees), April 15, 2002; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4.

Holmes, who had worked on a seasonal basis, he could eliminate some of the shortcomings of the park's interpretation program. His plan, according to his email announcing Howard's employment and in a funding request prepared by Fort Larned staff at the same time, was to move the park toward being open on a year-round basis. The funding request outlined in stark terms the situation that the park faced. In addition to lacking the personnel resources needed to maintain the park's facilities, including the AME Church and the aspects of Township Hall that the lease required, the park also could not meet "personal interpretive needs." Visitor satisfaction was low, at 81% in contrast to the Service-wide goal of 95%, and the park had regular interpretation staff only during the summer. "Too many visitors," the funding request stated, "do not receive guided tours or orientation. Park facilities are not available for tours, especially school tours, in the spring and fall." The funding request included an additional 0.6 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff increase for interpretation and an additional 1.4 FTE staff increase for maintenance. Both requests were granted, and the park's funding was increased correspondingly for FY 2003, which allowed Carruth to hire Phyllis Howard on a permanent basis.[355]

The park's interpretation staff level remained at two—Reggie Miller and Phyllis Howard—for more than three years. In late 2004, Superintendent Williams, who had entered on duty a year before, addressed the challenges of leading this small interpretive team. In an email to HFC Interpretive Planner Katherine Brock, Williams acknowledged that she was "feeling very inadequate in providing guidance to our interpreters" because she had so little experience herself in interpretation. Miller and Howard had been largely unsupervised prior to and after her arrival as Superintendent, she noted, and she was trying to instill in them the importance of using both formal and informal visitor interactions, in person and in writing, to convey the historical significance of the site. The site had received low marks on earlier surveys for how well visitors understood the significance of the site, and, in response, she was "trying to force conversations on how to improve how we communicate significance. . .and am meeting quite a bit of resistance." Although Miller and Howard were good at communicating, she averred, "there has to be accurate content and focus on those important significance statements and interpretative themes behind that passion and I've noticed some sloppiness with the historical facts."[356] An important step occurred in 2005 when the Southeast Nebraska Distance Learning Consortium donated a distance learning station to the park. Park Guide Howard began working with this station to reach school groups locally and nationwide, though the park's use of the distance learning technology remained limited for several years in the absence of lesson plans and curriculum guides. In late 2005, Park Ranger Miller accepted a lateral transfer to serve as Park Ranger at William Howard Taft NHS, Ohio. Superintendent Williams was then facing a budget shortfall and hired Michelle Huff as a Park Guide, a lower-graded position, in 2006, to work with Park Ranger Howard (Figure 31).

[355] Ibid., see also Operations Formulation System Request Detail Sheets, Maintain Facilities at New Park and Provide Interpretive Programs at New Park, last modified June 6, 2002, both marked as funded; files of Nicodemus NHS.

[356] Email, Sherda Williams to Katherine Brock, December 3, 2004; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.

ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE "TRAVELING TRUNK" made available to the Nicodemus National Historic Site by the Kansas Historical Society were being displayed on a table in the NHS's headquarters in the Nicodemus Township when the above picture was taken on Saturday morning, March 24. Rangers Phyllis Howard, left, and Michelle Huff, right, are shown with Hill City residents Joann Lindley and Judy Desbien during their visit to the eastern Graham County attraction.

Figure 31. Newspaper photograph showing Park Ranger Phyllis Howard, left, and Park Guide Michelle Huff, right, with materials for the park's traveling trunk exhibit, March 2007. Clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.

Long Range Interpretive Plan: First Attempt

In early 2006, Reggie Miller accepted a lateral transfer to William Howard Taft NHS, Ohio, leaving Phyllis Howard as the sole interpreter for the park. In the wake of Miller's departure, the park converted the park ranger position to a park guide in the face of budget constraints. By that time, however, the park was well into the process of developing a Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) which Williams hoped would help to provide a more substantial foundation for guiding and developing the park's interpretive staff. In 2003, Fort Larned NHS Chief Ranger Felix Revello submitted a funding request for the LRIP on behalf of Nicodemus NHS. In part through the intercession of Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Tom Richter, the funding was approved in early 2004, and the Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) was selected to lead the project (Figure 32).[357] As Richter observed at the time, however, the HFC had recently lost several staff planners, causing delays in their projects. Finally, in the late summer of 2004, HFC Chief of Interpretive Planning Sam Vaughn announced that a new planner on staff, Katherine Brock, would lead the development of the LRIP.[358]

[357] Emails among Felix Revello, Sherda Williams, Steve Linderer, and Tom Richter, January 12, 2004; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[358] Emails between Sherda Williams and Tom Richter, August 18, 2004; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.

Figure 32. Regional Chief of Interpretation Tom Richter, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Initial planning and development of the LRIP proceeded steadily through late 2004 and 2005. In early November 2004, Superintendent Williams announced to the Nicodemus community that the park was embarking on the LRIP process and invited input from the town's residents and descendants. A month later, Williams outlined to Brock the basic needs of the park regarding interpretation, including a focus on distance learning and the use of the internet, while also working closely with the community members and local concessioners. The guiding principle for the park's interpretation program, she told Brock, was to ensure that any proposed physical developments to support interpretation must not interfere with the community remaining an active, living place. However good the planning and the technology, she urged Brock, it must remain low-key so as not to intrude on the town's character. "Our services," she concluded, "should be available but not the main show."[359] With this goal in mind, Williams and Brock, with the support of Tom Richter, worked through the winter of 2005 to plan for a public scoping meeting in April. The attendees included Nicodemus and Fort Larned NHS staff, Richter, Angela Bates representing the Nicodemus Historical Society, members of the Nicodemus Town Board, the Mayor of Stockton, Kansas, and Don Rowlinson, Site Manager of the nearby Cottonwood Ranch State Historic Site. The purpose of the meeting, held in the new movie theater building in Hill City, was to solicit ideas as to the most important themes that the park's interpretation should convey and the range of methods by which those themes could be conveyed.[360] A second public meeting was held in late July, during the 2005 Homecoming celebration, and a third public meeting convened in Denver, Colorado, in late October 2005. Finally, a three-day public meeting was held in late November 2005, to begin the process of developing recommended strategies based on the themes and possible methods raised during the three previous public meetings. The list of attendees at this final meeting was expanded to

[359] Email, Sherda Williams to Katherine Brock, December 3, 2004; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.
[360] Invitation letter to Alvena Alexander et al., April 1, 2005; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.

include additional descendants, Nicodemus residents, and representatives of the Kansas Black Farmers Association and the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance.

Unfortunately, progress on the LRIP stalled after this final public meeting in November 2005, as Brock was overwhelmed with other projects. In the face of continued delays, Richter, in July 2006, asked for an update on the document's status, asserting that the LRIP was becoming an embarrassment for NPS, as "Nicodemus consistently has received slow work from outside specialists with other planning projects." In response, Vaughn could only agree that Brock was trying to handle multiple writing assignments given to her by HFC, observing that "We probably load planners with too many projects."[361] Finally, in early 2007, Brock was able to deliver a draft LRIP for the team. NPS staff provided a review of this initial document, and Brock prepared a second draft for review by the full LRIP team in August 2007.[362] This team review draft featured an introductory section containing an overview of the park's facilities and the town's history before presenting information on the park's visitor experience. In addition to summarizing the results of a Visitor Survey project in 2005, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, the LRIP listed fourteen visitor experience goals, including making an emotional and intellectual connection to the place; being inspired; interacting with the town's resources, NPS staff, and residents; experiencing the relationship between the park and the community; and experiencing the park's interpretation at the schoolhouse and the St. Francis Hotel.[363]

Much of the rest of the LRIP, however, presented the multiple challenges, shortcomings, and limitations facing the park's current interpretive program. In addition to the fundamental, existential issue of the ambivalence of Nicodemus' residents to the presence of the National Park Service, the LRIP identified several particular issues including the lack of readily available historic imagery, the unsafe nature of four of the properties that constitute the park, the lack of interpretation of anything other than the five properties or the history of the community after the original settlement, the lack of a distance learning program or engagement with local schools, and the absence of outreach to African American heritage tourism outlets. The facilities for visitor engagement was particularly lacking. The LRIP described its shortcomings: Township Hall had limited electrical service, handicapped accessibility was poor, the outdoor portable toilets were only barely accessible, there was little directional signage, the Travelers Information System broadcast was out of date, and there was minimal space within the town to develop any new facilities. In addition, the exhibits in Township Hall, prepared by HFC, were adequate, if out of date, but were cumbersome for removal and set-up when the town needed use of the Township Hall interior and also did not address the interpretive themes and significance statements incorporated in the GMP. Finally, the park had only an interim site brochure, the walking tour guide included only the basic information presented on the Nicodemus Historical Society's wayside exhibits from 1992-1993, and the three video programs available to visitors were focused exclusively on the annual Homecoming celebration of which two were approximately twenty years old with outdated information about the town.

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[361] Emails between Tom Richter and Sam Vaughn, July 12, 2006; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.

[362] General Park Comments, presumably by Superintendent Sherda Williams, May 24, 2007; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9. A copy of this first draft LRIP was not located during the current research.

[363] *Long-Range Interpretive Plan, Nicodemus National Historic Site*, Team Draft, 2007; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.

The most important part of the LRIP was the recommendations, most of which emerged from the final public meeting in November 2005. Two fundamental concepts underlay the LRIP's recommendations: relations between the town and NPS, and the park's remote location. Addressing both required a balance between developing onsite programming and expanding the park's outreach through expanding distance learning activities and internet outreach. By increasing these outreach activities and maintaining a strong partnership with the residents and descendants of Nicodemus, "the park hopes that the remote nature of the site will no longer be a major reason that people cannot explore its history."[364] Recognizing that a new visitor center, as envisioned in the GMP, was still several years away at best, the LRIP encouraged NPS to collaborate further with the Town Board regarding Township Hall, finding ways to increase the building's accessibility and upgrade the visitor contact equipment. According to the LRIP, park staff needed to develop modern wayside exhibits with both orientation and interpretation panels, produce a new film for visitor orientation and interpretation to present in Township Hall, and create new and modern brochures and walking tour guides. The LRIP observed that staff limitations had prohibited development of educational programming and, thus, strongly recommended that the park's budget be augmented to fund additional educational and interpretive staff that could develop curriculum-based programs while also expanding and strengthening its network of partners and volunteers.

In September 2007, Angela Bates submitted a thorough and deeply critical review of the draft LRIP. After providing an extensive summary of her activities on behalf of interpretation at Nicodemus since the early 1990s, Bates addressed specific points in the document. Nearly all her comments, aside from correcting historical and other inaccuracies, revolved around the lack of consultation between NPS and Nicodemus residents, specifically the Nicodemus Historical Society. NPS staff, she argued, lacked the understanding of African American history generally and the history and culture of Nicodemus in particular to provide an adequate interpretation of the town to visitors, and park staff had not accepted the training that she had offered. "My comments in general regarding interpretive programs and educational programs," she summarized, "is that we specifically provide interpretation of our own Nicodemus African American experience, and this be done with a cooperative agreement, and through the Nicodemus Historical Society and others recommended by us." Park staff, she argued, should receive training from the Nicodemus Historical Society, and Nicodemus residents should take the lead on providing educational and outreach programs. In her summary paragraph in review of the draft LRIP, Bates concluded that "one can't help but to give an overall rating of 'F' for failure, of the National Park Service of its treatment and interpretation at Nicodemus National Historic Site since its designation nearly twelve years ago." The National Park Service, she claimed, had made only "a half hearted attempt to get Nicodemus up and running;" staffing was limited to inexperienced interpreters and site managers, which has "set Nicodemus National Historic Site and the management of it up for failure." She found praise for the current Superintendent, Sherda Williams, who had shown a sincere interest in learning about the town and its culture but argued that "NPS needs to look closer at how Nicodemus has been dealt with throughout the last twelve years and make a commitment to change its cookie cutter approach to this unique historic site." She finished her critique on a more hopeful note, seeing the park as an exciting and unique opportunity for NPS "to do something unique and cutting edge." With the

[364] Ibid., 49.

community interpreting its own history with the support of NPS, she said, "it can be the proving ground for African American interpretation within the National Park System."[365]

According to informal comments made to Superintendent Mark Weaver, fewer than ten NPS staff members received a copy of the team draft of the LRIP, and, perhaps, two of them actually read the document.[366] This likely was due to what Richter identified as the severely inadequate nature of the draft document, which caused further strains between NPS and Nicodemus residents. In August 2008, a year after the initial draft LRIP was released for review, Richter wrote to Mark Weaver, congratulating Weaver on his appointment as the new Superintendent for Nicodemus NHS. Richter hoped to re-start work on the LRIP, though, by that time Katherine Brock was no longer associated with the project; as Richter observed, "It seems very important that we take care in the selection of the HFC planner for this assignment especially in view of the unfortunate results with the last planner." The delay in providing the team with a draft LRIP, between the final team meeting in late 2005 and the team draft in August 2007, Richter observed, "certainly added to the feeling of ill will within the Nicodemus community."[367] In discussion with Weaver in September 2008, Richter opined further that the 2007 draft of the LRIP "was so inadequate that it jeopardized the standing of [Superintendent] Sherda [Williams] with partners and with the Regional Director."[368]

Visitor Studies and Completing the Long-Range Interpretive Plan

Work on the LRIP finally resumed in the fall of 2008, under the leadership of Richter and Weaver, who began productive discussions with Angela Bates. To serve as the LRIP team leader, HFC selected Interpretive Planner Toni Dufficy, a twenty-three-year veteran of NPS who had recently worked as a Lead Training Instructor in the Mather Training Center at HFC. The new LRIP team developed a workshop schedule for March 2009. Through late fall and early winter, Dufficy began compiling and summarizing the comments from previous workshops into a draft executive summary of the LRIP, which served as the basis for the workshop and was planned to help Nicodemus residents learn more about the LRIP process and its intended uses. The executive summary, which Dufficy completed in January 2009, presented the current state of the park's interpretive program and its grave limitations. Dufficy's executive summary drew upon the earlier planning efforts for the LRIP together with formal and informal visitor studies conducted from early in the park's history.

Beginning in 1999, Nicodemus NHS took part in the annual Visitor Survey Card Data Report, a standardized survey created to assist NPS in assessing operations of parks to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA). This brief survey sought responses from a random selection of visitors to only a few questions, notably visitor satisfaction

[365] Angela Bates, Review Comments on Nicodemus National Historic Site Long Range Interpretive Plan, September 2007; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 9.
[366] Email, Mark Weaver to Toni Dufficy, September 30, 2008; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 9.
[367] Email, Tom Richter to Mark Weaver, August 10, 2008; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 9.
[368] Email, Tom Richter to Mark Weaver, September 24, 2008; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 9.

with the park and visitor understanding and appreciation of the mission and purpose of the park. The park gradually improved its visitor satisfaction status from only 72 percent in 1999, though satisfaction rates rose above 85 percent only once through 2004. As annual reports from the early 2000s indicated, however, the small number of respondents did not allow a statistically accurate response. As planning for the first round of the LRIP took place from 2003 to 2005, the park undertook a more substantial visitation study in the summer of 2005. The University of Idaho Park Studies Unit conducted the survey from July 23 to September 13, 2005, timed to include the Homecoming celebration for that year. The surveyors distributed 302 questionnaires during that period and received 208 responses. The questionnaires asked for detailed information regarding size of the visiting group, the ages and home locations of the visitors, reasons for visiting, and how the visitors learned about the park. Regarding the visits themselves, the questionnaires asked about what services or facilities were used and their quality, the type and usefulness of staff interactions, and overall impressions of the experience of visiting the park. Most of the visitors were part of small family groups; nearly half of the respondents were between forty-six and sixty-five years of age; nearly two-thirds of the visitors were white; and nearly half were residents of Kansas. Nearly all visitors reported spending time in the visitor center looking at the exhibits and that interactions with NPS staff were good or very good, and the quality of the exhibits and the park history brochure was well-received. Less successful were the self-guided walking tours, the visitor center video, and the bookstore, while infrastructure issues such as signage, parking, and, especially, the toilet facilities were approved by barely over 50 percent of the visitors.[369]

When visitors entered the visitor center, they were offered a fifteen-to-thirty-minute orientation talk and the chance to view the twelve exhibit panels and watch three five-minute television excerpts, all from the early 1990s. The park's two interpretive staff, who, together, provided in-person interpretive services every day of the year except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day, provided tours and interpretive programs to individuals and small groups on an as-requested basis. but tours and programs for larger groups were by reservation only. The park also had two traveling exhibit cases, a park brochure, a walking tour brochure, and a Junior Ranger program. The Travelers Information System broadcast, featuring Danny Glover, had stopped functioning in 2008 and was not replaced. In addition, the Nicodemus Livery Company, owned by Angela Bates, provided horse-drawn carriage tours of the town site and sponsored special events in addition to the annual Homecoming celebration and Christmas tree trimming party, which were community-driven events.[370]

Duffcy briefly addressed the results of the 2005 visitor survey in her executive summary, noting primarily the types of groups that visited, and went on to address the challenges that faced the park as it planned for interpretation in the next five to ten years. The remote nature of the site together with the limited interpretive offerings had a severe impact on the park's visitation and the nature of the visitor experience, she observed. The executive summary noted that annual visitor surveys consistently showed that barely 60 percent of visitors indicated that they

[369] University of Idaho Park Studies Unit, *Nicodemus National Historic Site Visitor Study, Summer 2005* (Visitor Services Project Report 173, May 2006); Electronic Technical Information Center
[370] Nicodemus National Historic Site, Long-Range Interpretive Plan—Part I: Foundations, Executive Summary/Abstract, accompanied by cover letter from Superintendent Mark Weaver, February 24, 2009; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, catalog 20, box 9.

understood why Nicodemus is of national significance. Moreover, in 2007, the park changed its method of counting visitors. The park originally counted the cars that stopped in the rest area between US Highway 24 and Township Hall, which, in 2005, was extrapolated to yield a visitation of 28,065. In 2007, the park began counting only visitors who entered the visitor center, which yielded a visitation in 2008 of 2,434. Clearly, the park needed to do better, and a renewed LRIP would be an important step toward improvement. In a cover letter to the executive summary that invited participation to the LRIP workshop in late March 2009, Superintendent Mark Weaver announced that the workshop would explore a mix of programs, services, and facilities "that are necessary to communicate the park's stories to the visitors." The workshop would not, however, focus only on NPS services. Instead, according to Weaver, "it will also include current and potential park partners to ensure a holistic interpretive strategy that is respectful of and engaging with the Nicodemus community and surroundings."[371]

The LRIP workshop was held at the Township Hall from March 10 through March 12, 2009, and was attended by fifteen descendants and community members, seven representatives of local and state organizations, and ten NPS personnel. It was a productive workshop, according to Superintendent Weaver, "where we identified not only the stories that are currently being told, but those stories that still need to be told or told better." With a focus on the visitor's experience, break-out teams identified different stories that could be told within different time frames for visitors who were just passing through as well as those who would spend the better part of a day and assigned priorities to the different stories. Finally, Weaver noted, "we began to explore who in the broader Nicodemus community is most interested or best able to tell the stories," though the workshop ended before this discussion could be concluded.[372]

Dufficy then compiled all these responses and completed the LRIP in September 2009. The document incorporated much of the executive summary from earlier that year, including the grave challenges and limitations facing the park's interpretive program. In summarizing the park's interpretive program at the time, the LRIP started with defining the five interpretive themes, those "core messages that every visitor should have the opportunity to experience," that included the five pillars of Nicodemus (family/home, church, school, business, and traditions of mutual assistance that evolved into local government); the move toward civil rights; the struggle for community; tradition, culture, and community; and still connected Nicodemus as a living, continuously occupied community. Noting the lack of interpretive staff, the inadequate signage directing visitors to and within Nicodemus, and the limitations of creating exhibits in Township Hall, the document also emphasized the need to increase communication with the several partner groups as way to define the roles of each and to supplement the work done by NPS. The LRIP identified an ambitious set of recommendations, together with short- and long-term timetables for their completion. These recommendations included expanding the geographic scope beyond the original five buildings to include the entire township, dugout sites, and cemeteries; fostering greater communication among descendants, residents, and other regional and state-wide organizations, with a unified mailing list, a stronger internet presence, and better brochures; and upgrading and improving a wide range of interpretive media including waysides, exhibits, publications, videos, and digital media for access on mobile devices. The participants in the LRIP workshops also placed a strong emphasis on an improved and broadened range of personal

[371] Ibid., quotations from Weaver's cover letter.
[372] *Flowering of Nicodemus* newsletter, March 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS.

interpretation, encouraging experimentation and creativity. This could encompass a range of tours beyond the five original buildings, including the original settlers' final journey from Ellis to Nicodemus, visits to farms in Nicodemus, and links to other nearby historic places as well as adding new curriculum-based educational programs and expanded distance learning to the interpretive offerings. Finally, the LRIP recommended an expanded interpretive staff for the park, particularly a Chief of Interpretation who could oversee implementation of these recommendations in partnership with the community.[373]

Staff Changes and Interpretive Partnerships

In all, the LRIP exuded new hope for the park born of a revitalized collegial approach between NPS staff and a variety of Nicodemus community members near and far. It was accompanied by plans for an annual implementation planning workshop which, as Superintendent Weaver announced, would help to put these hopeful recommendations into practice.[374] This new collaboration began to bear fruit in late 2010 and early 2011 with the development of a new walking tour brochure, the first revision since the original version in 2000, and funding to create an additional video to supplement the existing inadequate videos. This new video would serve as an interim improvement until a new orientation film, "comparable to those shown at other National Park Visitor Centers," could be produced. The park also established a Liaison Team, "designed to serve as the first line of communication between the park and the Nicodemus Community," consisting of community members representing different organizations, and Park Ranger Michelle Huff announced plans to offer Volunteers in Parks opportunities in the summer of 2011.[375] Also in the summer of 2011, park staff, in collaboration with community volunteers, completed a thorough revision of the Junior Ranger booklets and held an additional interpretive planning workshop to identify a list of priorities for FY 2012. Park Ranger Phyllis Howard began work on a Special Events calendar for calendar year 2012. Finally, the park received funding for FY 2012 to begin planning for a comprehensive wayside panel system.[376]

This burst of progress and optimism showed signs of faltering in the summer of 2012, when Superintendent Weaver accepted a transfer to serve as Superintendent of North Country National Scenic Trail, a multi-state park with its headquarters in Michigan. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, Weaver was the first independent Superintendent for Nicodemus NHS, reporting directly to the Regional Director rather than to Fort Larned NHS. With Weaver's transfer, however, the Regional Director asked Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent David Smith to take on responsibility for Nicodemus and appointed Brown v. Board of Education NHS Chief of Interpretation David Schafer to serve on a four-month temporary duty as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS. In late 2012, Schafer announced that Angela Wetz would enter on duty as Superintendent in early 2013.[377] Wetz, who would continue to report to Superintendent Smith at

[373] *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, Harpers Ferry Center, September 2009.
[374] In the November 2009 edition of *Flowering of Nicodemus*, Weaver issued an invitation for the first workshop in late January 2010.
[375] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, March 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[376] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, November 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[377] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, December 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS.

Brown v. Board of Education NHS, had worked as a Park Ranger and Natural Resource Specialist for the Bureau of Land Management before entering on duty in 2010 as Chief of Resource Management at Devils Tower National Monument, Wyoming.

Superintendent Wetz sought to regain the momentum established by Weaver and made several important gains. These included securing a Ticket to Ride grant from the National Park Foundation, which provided funds to school districts in nearby communities, including Hill City, Hays, Ellis, and others that allowed them to bring students to Nicodemus. As she recalled of her time in Nicodemus, "when I first came there, there was no school children coming to Nicodemus." The program was quickly successful, and school children from throughout the region visited the park in the spring of 2014 and 2015. The grant also reimbursed the Nicodemus Historical Society for providing living history activities for the students. Additionally, Wetz gained support to add a new, permanent, full-time staff position, transitioning Park Guide Jonathan Winskie, who transferred to Nicodemus from Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, Georgia, before Wetz entered on duty, to serve as Education Technician to support the park's educational outreach program and help Park Rangers Phyllis Howard and Michelle Huff with the park's overall interpretive program.[378]

Wetz also began planning for a mobile ranger station through which the park could provide interpretation outside the visitor contact center in Township Hall. She recalled that another park, Missouri National Recreational River, South Dakota and Nebraska, had recently developed a mobile ranger station, and thought a similar effort at Nicodemus NHS could allow the park "to take the story of Nicodemus on the road to different African American events, to different Kansas events."[379] Wetz acquired a trailer, eight feet wide and twenty feet long, and coordinated with Regional Chief of Interpretation Richter to modify it so that it could be brought to different regional events. Regional Interpretive Planner Roberta Wendell, who had worked with Felix Revello to design the original interpretive panel exhibits for the visitor center, also created the design for the trailer's wrap that identified it as an NPS mobile ranger station. The Regional Contracts office contracted with Reflection Signs and Graphics in Westminster, Colorado, to produce the wrap, and the work was completed in late 2015. Although the trailer has proved useful during the annual Homecoming celebration, when NPS removes its interpretive materials and the WNPA bookstore from Township Hall, its use as a traveling exhibit is less clear. In 2020, for example, Richter observed that "I couldn't tell you if it ever – if anything ever happened" with the park's mobile ranger station.[380]

In late 2015, after less than three years at Nicodemus NHS, Wetz accepted a lateral transfer to serve as Superintendent of Fossil Butte National Monument, Wyoming. Wetz' departure was one of several staff transfers from Nicodemus NHS in 2015 that again halted the momentum of the park's interpretive program. In October 2012, on the eve of Wetz' arrival, the park had employed three interpretive staff members: two permanent full-time Park Rangers and one temporary Park Guide. By 2013, the temporary Park Guide was promoted to a full-time

[378] Angela Wetz, oral history interview.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Thomas Richter, oral history interview. For the limited information available about the trailer's wrap, see emails between Patrice L. Pittman (Regional Contract Specialist) and Ashleigh M. Vanek (Reflection Signs and Graphics), September 22-23, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.

Education Specialist, and, when Wetz transferred in late 2015, the park had retained these three full-time interpretive staff. Unfortunately, Park Ranger Michelle Huff retired in late 2015, and although Education Specialist Jonathan Winskie continued to support Nicodemus while duty-stationed at Brown v. Board of Education NHS, only Park Ranger Phyllis Howard remained to staff the visitor contact station at Nicodemus NHS. In the summer of 2016, Sherda Williams, by then Superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education NHS with responsibility for Nicodemus NHS, sought unsuccessfully to have William Pope, who had served as the temporary Park Guide in 2012, return to the park; in his reply to Williams, Pope explained that Nicodemus NHS "is my favorite NPS unit," and he remained friends with Howard and members of the Nicodemus community, "but [I] believe this is not a good work situation as it is currently structured."[381]

The sudden lack of NPS staff in Nicodemus in late 2015 and early 2016 was a grave cause for concern for both NPS and the Nicodemus residents. As Angela Bates recalled, the summer of 2015, before Wetz transferred to another park, was a particularly chaotic and frustrating period exemplified by the number of NPS staff members who transferred away from Nicodemus NHS. Wetz, she recalled, did not seem as invested in the community as both of her predecessors had been, and the community could sense the unease: "So, I was feeling very, very frustrated, and then everybody in the community was saying, 'The Park Service is pulling out of here. I told you they were. They don't care about us.' This was the climate in the community."[382] In June 2016, Nicodemus Township Board President Thomas Wellington wrote of the Board's unease with the current situation to Superintendent Williams. The recent Memorial Day weekend, he informed Williams,

> was a perfect example of how we need to desperately have more control of interpreting our history here. The VC [Visitor Center in Township Hall] was closed Sunday and Monday, and this was one of our busiest holiday weekends during the year. . . We accommodated when we could, those who we could take to the [Nicodemus Historical Society] museum."

Particularly with planning under way for the park's twentieth anniversary, he argued, "We cannot afford to have the VC closed on Sundays and miss people who have driven hours to get here."[383]

Local Operation of the Visitor Center

The collaborative nature of the relationship between NPS and the community that had grown since 2010 over the park's interpretive program, however, combined with Sherda Williams again having responsibility for the site as Superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education NHS, fostered a solution between the Nicodemus Historical Society and NPS. In 2011, in the wake of the 2010 revision to the HSR that identified a pressing need for stabilization efforts at Township Hall as discussed in Chapter 4, NPS and the Nicodemus Township executed a cooperative agreement that allowed NPS to provide up to $60,000 to the Township for the necessary repairs. The cooperative agreement, executed in late August 2011, was for a one-year

[381] Emails between Sherda Williams and William Pope June 24-26, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[382] Angela Bates, oral history interview.
[383] Thomas Wellington to Sherda Williams, June 1, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.

term renewable in one-year increments for a total of five years.[384] With the sudden departure of most NPS staff from Nicodemus NHS in late 2015, Williams and Angela Bates led negotiations to modify the existing cooperative agreement to allow the Nicodemus Historical Society to provide basic interpretive services at the park. Bates recalled a conversation with Williams in which Williams admitted that there were no available staff for interpretation aside from Park Ranger Howard:

> I had always said, "Why don't you let us help tell the story?" And so, at that point, Sherda said, "Maybe what we should do is let you guys help run the Visitor Center." I'm like, "Okay." So, she says, "We can start out by one – give you money for one park ranger that can supervise park rangers – to work with the park ranger." And that happened.[385]

In response to a query from the office of Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), a native of Plainville, Kansas near Nicodemus, Associate Regional Director Christine Powell reported in March 2016 that Williams and Bates had been conducting discussions about a cooperative agreement to provide "opportunities for the [Nicodemus Historical] Society to take a greater role in the interpretation/visitor education at the site." Given the positive nature of the discussions and the importance of the cooperative agreement to the functioning of the park, Powell and Deputy Regional Director Patty Trap organized a meeting with Bates for later that spring. In handwritten notes about a telephone meeting with Powell in March, Superintendent Williams observed that the meeting in May was a "good time to stop beating around the bush."[386] With the end of the existing cooperative agreement in the summer of 2016, Bates recalled, "Sherda [Williams] modified the agreement, and they hired a community interpreter. That worked perfect. It was the ideal situation. Absolutely what I thought we should be doing."[387]

In late 2016, Superintendent Williams provided a summary of the year's activities to the Regional Office and noted that, following the late summer execution of the modified cooperative agreement, Tina Conway, a Nicodemus descendant and daughter of Pauline Bates-Jackson, had been selected to serve as a part-time Community Interpreter with training provided by Williams (Figure 33).[388] Conway remained on duty, working with Park Ranger Phyllis Howard, through the spring of 2017, when the Nicodemus Historical Society hired former Seasonal Interpreter LueCreasea Horne to serve as Community Interpreter. Conway continued to serve for several weeks, providing a transition period for Horne (Figure 34).[389] By this time Williams had recalled Jonathan Winskie to be duty stationed at Brown v. Board of Education NHS headquarters office

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[384] Cooperative Agreement Between the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Nicodemus National Historic Site and Nicodemus Township, Kansas, executed August 23, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS. The cooperative agreement was revised to provide up to $344,760 for stabilization work, executed on February 17, 2012; files of Nicodemus NHS. A handwritten note on the 2011 cooperative agreement suggests that the agreement was extended on September 30, 2013.

[385] Ibid.

[386] Email, Christine Powell to Judd Gardner, March 22, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS. The paper print of the email contains Superintendent Williams' handwritten notes of the telephone meeting with Powell.

[387] Angela Bates, oral history interview.

[388] Emails between Christine Powell and Sherda Williams, December 4, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also Nicodemus Historical Society Newsletter, Winter 2018; files of Nicodemus NHS.

[389] LueCreasea Horne, telephone communication with the author, January 30, 2023.

Figure 33. Park Ranger Phyllis Howard, left, and Community Interpreter Tina Conway, right, in the Township Hall.

Figure 34. Park Ranger LueCreasea Horne at Township Hall, 2021.

in Topeka while continuing to serve as Education Specialist for Nicodemus NHS.[390] In late 2016, also, Williams proposed that Brown v. Board of Education Chief of Interpretation Enimini Ekong be selected to serve concurrently as the Superintendent for Nicodemus.[391] Winskie and Ekong took part in planning efforts with Williams in late 2016, meeting with Bates in Nicodemus to expand the cooperative agreement.[392] These discussions continued into 2017, with a meeting in Nicodemus between NPS staff and Nicodemus Historical Society members in early March, followed by a wide-ranging conference call to discuss financial and operational requirements and procedures. The goal of these meetings, as Sherda Williams described it, "is to review what a more robust partnership will mean for both parties."[393]

The result of these meetings was the execution of a new cooperative agreement in September 2017. The cooperative agreement outlined the organizational requirements that the Nicodemus Historical Society must meet to comply with federal regulations, including finances and corporate governance, together with the communications protocols for both entities and the requirements for interpretive services. Under the terms of the cooperative agreement, the Nicodemus NHS Superintendent would serve as an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Nicodemus Historical Society board of directors. Additionally, NPS would provide regular maintenance for the Visitor Center in Township Hall and the other four buildings that constitute the park and would provide all marketing and promotional materials. The National Park Service would also continue to provide educational outreach, distance learning, and teacher workshop opportunities, maintain the park's website, and provide technical assistance and training for interpretation. The Nicodemus Historical Society would staff and operate the Visitor Center in accordance with an agreed-upon schedule and would seek review and approval by NPS of fund-raising events. This cooperative agreement was established with a five-year term, from September 15, 2017, to September 30, 2022, with funding for the first year of the agreement not to exceed $99,981.19; funding for subsequent years would be determined on an annual basis.[394]

With funding in place through the cooperative agreement, the Nicodemus Historical Society was able to hire additional staff and, by late 2017, had two Community Interpreters and a Media Assistant. The Community Interpreters were Nicodemus descendants who received training in the history of the town and in procedures for the Visitor Center. As Bates explained in a year-end summary for 2017, "I want them as descendants to be able to draw not only from the general history of Nicodemus, but also be able to integrate some of their personal and family related experiences to various aspects of the history." By late 2017, Bates announced that the Nicodemus Historical Society found that it needed to expand to three full-time Community Interpreters to accommodate the park's visitors and provide a thorough experience, a need that they expected "will increase as we move into our busy season starting in April." In order to

[390] Winskie prepared a 2016-2016 Educational Outreach Strategy for Nicodemus NHS, updated August 22, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[391] See email, Christine Powell to Cam Sholly [Midwest Regional Director] et al., December 19, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[392] Emails between Williams, Bates, and others, November 1-2, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[393] Email, Sherda Williams to Angela Bates et al, February 23, 2017; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also in-person and conference call meeting minutes by LueCreasea Horne, March 30, 2017; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[394] Cooperative Agreement P17AC01217 between United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service and Nicodemus Historical Society, Inc., executed by Thomas Wellington, President, Nicodemus Historical Society Board of Directors, and Julie Hendricks, NPS Agreements Officer, September 18, 2017; files of Nicodemus NHS.

accommodate this need within the existing funding through the cooperative agreement, Bates proposed to eliminate the Media Assistant position and divert those funds to a new interpreter.[395] In addition to these positive aspects, though, the Nicodemus Historical Society was already experiencing the challenges of working with NPS bureaucracy. In early 2018, the Nicodemus Historical Society's semi-annual progress report pointed out that they were operating the Visitor Center "with no computers, limited resources and in a holding pattern until such time equipment, furniture, etc. could be inventoried and disbursed." By early 2018, however, the Nicodemus Historical Society had finally made arrangements for telephone and internet services but observed that "The transition has been to hurry up and wait. NPS has its rules, processes, and systems that work for them, however, they are very stifling to an outside working partner like us."[396]

Later in the spring of 2018, the Nicodemus Historical Society raised several concerns and reservations about the cooperative agreement. These concerns included the need to pay their interpretive staff minimum wage with no benefits, the absence of visible NPS programming in Nicodemus, an excess of rules and regulations pertaining to the development of special events, restrictions on the use of Township Hall, the lack of involvement by the park's Superintendent, Enimini Ekong, and the rapid turnover of NPS staff.[397] A meeting between Nicodemus Historical Society and NPS staff members in early June did little to allay these concerns and, in early 2019, the Nicodemus Historical Society informed Superintendent Ekong that the Board of Directors had voted not to sign the modification to the cooperative agreement for FY 2020. The Historical Society's list of reasons was, by then, familiar: the cooperative agreement "ties our hands as an organization and is very restrictive to our involvement with collaborating our history with programs and exhibits." During the period of the cooperative agreement from September 2017 to February 2019, moreover, "there has not been sufficient planning, execution, or follow through to determine progress, or success with this agreement." Similarly, although they heard of programming work being conducted by NPS staff at Brown v. Board of Education NHS on behalf of Nicodemus NHS, "we have not actually heard or seen what those programs are. . .to have no programs at Nicodemus is ineffective and unrealistic to the visitors who travel for hours and sometimes days." With its concern for visitors, the Historical Society argued that "the National Park Service needs to return to Nicodemus National Historic Site and have a presence and be responsible in representing itself." Despite getting many compliments from visitors, "the high standards that they expect from a National Park is not reflected in the facility nor at the historic sites (5 historic buildings). This is a negative reflection that is assumed by us."[398]

As a result of these concerns, the Nicodemus Historical Society formally requested in the summer of 2019 that the cooperative agreement be terminated. At a meeting in September 2019, Nicodemus Historical Society members agreed to work with NPS as it transitioned back to providing staff at the park. As part of this transition, the Nicodemus Historical Society urged

[395] Nicodemus Historical Society, Request for Minor Change in Personnel, Cooperative Agreement P17AC01217, undated but attached to emails among Holly Griesemer, Katherine Borschel, and Sherda Williams, December 22-28, 2017; files of Nicodemus NHS. According to the emails, the request to shift funds within the cooperative agreement was approved.
[396] Semi-Annual Progress Report, Nicodemus Historical Society, undated (c. April 2018), files of Nicodemus NHS.
[397] Memorandum, Nicodemus Historical Society to National Park Service, Cam Sholly et al., May 25, 2018; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[398] Thomas Wellington, II to Enimini Ekong, February 15, 2019; files of Nicodemus NHS.

NPS to continue planning for a new Visitor Center and to consider hiring Nicodemus descendants whenever possible "to improve community relations and ensure that agency staff are passionate about the site and its history."[399] Transition planning took place throughout 2019 and 2020, and resulted in the hiring of Superintendent Frank Torres, who entered on duty in September 2020. In January 2021, former Nicodemus Historical Society Community Interpreter LueCreasea Horne entered on duty as Education Specialist at Nicodemus NHS.[400]

Wayside Exhibits

While the Nicodemus Historical Society took over responsibility for most of the in-person interpretation at the park beginning in 2016, NPS continued to work on a series of wayside exhibits to provide passive interpretation for visitors to the town. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Nicodemus Historical Society had designed and built a series of wayside markers for four buildings in the town in 1992 and 1993, and they remained as the only information available to visitors who were not inclined, or not able, to see the exhibits in the visitor contact center in Township Hall. The LRIP, completed in 2009, identified a new set of wayside exhibits as one of the park's priorities, and Superintendent Mark Weaver initiated planning for them in the fall of 2010. Weaver envisioned the process in three stages for the funding and approval process: identifying parcels of land where the signs could be placed, designing the wayside signs, and fabricating and installing the new signs. Weaver engaged Harpers Ferry Center to develop a cost proposal for the design and fabrication stages of the project in October 2010.[401] Planning for the project at the park and Regional level continued into 2011, when Weaver submitted a funding request for the first stage to develop a formal proposal to identify not just the locations but the themes for up to thirty informative and interpretive wayside exhibit panels.[402] As was Weaver's custom, he invited the participation of the Nicodemus Historical Society, which assisted in the development of themes and agreed to produce a series of site bulletins. In order to take part formally in the preparation of this proposal, the Nicodemus Historical Society entered into a cooperative agreement with NPS separate from the agreement regarding work on Township Hall. As the background section of the cooperative agreement put it, "The [Nicodemus Historical] Society is uniquely qualified to be involved in this project due to many years of collecting photographs, stories, artifacts and objects pertaining to Nicodemus. It has a vested interest in ensuring that the story of Nicodemus be told through the eyes of those that live there." The cooperative agreement, which provided up to $28,185 in funding to the Historical Society, was executed in early 2012.[403]

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[399] Agenda and notes, Cooperative Agreement Assessment Meeting, September 17, 2019; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[400] LueCreasea Horne, telephone communication with the author, January 30, 2023. Additional information on the managerial changes that were taking place at the same time, and which incorporated the transition from the cooperative agreement back to NPS staff, is discussed in Chapter 8.
[401] Emails among Mark Weaver, Bill Hunt, Geoffrey Burt, and Theora McVay, October 15-19, 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[402] Project Identification Form, Develop Wayside Exhibit Proposal to Improve Visitor Understanding, updated April 28, 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[403] Cooperative Agreement between United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Nicodemus National Historic Site and Nicodemus Historical Society, executed by Thomas Wellington and Tonya Bradley, date not identified; files of Nicodemus NHS.

With this cooperative agreement in place, Weaver and Angela Bates met regularly in 2012 to determine themes and potential locations in the town site and throughout the township, identifying far more than the proposed thirty exhibit locations. Given the extensive scale of the project, work continued throughout 2012, and NPS in December 2012 agreed to extend the cooperative agreement through December 2013. By this time, Weaver had transferred to his new assignment in Michigan, and Acting Superintendent David Schafer took the reins until Superintendent Angela Wetz entered on duty in early 2013. Angela Bates provided a draft waysides proposal on behalf of the Nicodemus Historical Society in January 2013, and review of the proposed sites and exhibits continued throughout 2014 with a community presentation in the fall.[404] In the summer of 2013, Superintendent Wetz announced that funding for the design phase had been awarded, and, in early 2015, the park submitted a funding request for the completion of the project, still identified as a maximum of thirty exhibits spread throughout the town, with eight exhibits in a first phase of installation within the town site and twenty-two exhibits in the surrounding area in a second phase.[405] The first phase of work was later reduced to five wayside exhibits, one at each of the buildings that constitute the park, but Angela Bates and the Nicodemus Historical Society pursued grant funds to support more waysides throughout the town.[406]

Midwest Region Landscape Architect Ian Shanklin and Midwest Region Media Specialist Roberta Wendel led the waysides project on behalf of the park and, in the summer of 2015, coordinated with the Regional Contracting Office to solicit a proposal for the work from Kenneth A. Hahn Architects in association with Big Muddy Workshop, both in Omaha, Nebraska, with a contract awarded in December 2015. The team submitted their initial site plans for the waysides in April 2016.[407] At the same time, the Regional Land Resources Division began work to secure the right of way easements on the small pieces of land where the wayside exhibits would be located. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 regarding the five buildings that constitute the park, questions of land ownership and the transfer of even less-than-fee ownership in Nicodemus are particularly thorny and challenging due to the multiple ownership of each parcel of land. Fort Larned NHS Facilities Manager William Chapman, serving on temporary duty as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS in late 2015, first coordinated with the Regional Lands Office to request a donation of rights of way easements from Graham County, the presumed owner of the highway rights of way in the town site (Figure 35).[408] In May 2016, the Graham County Commissioners voted to donate the right of way easements to NPS, but, with the transition in NPS staffing at the site, the paperwork that documented the donation was not forwarded to the Regional Land Resources Division until early 2017 (Figure 36).

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[404] Angela Bates to Dave Schafer, January 9, 2013, files of Nicodemus NHS; Nicodemus Historical Society, "Review Comments on Wayside Plan (Roadside Accessibility," December 1, 2014, files of Nicodemus NHS; Planning, Environment and Public Comment Form, Wayside Exhibit and Site Accessibility to Improve Visitor Understanding at Nicodemus NHS, undated, c. June 2016, files of Nicodemus NHS.
[405] Project Identification Forms, Plan, Design, Fabricate, and Install Wayside Exhibits to Improve Visitor Understanding, updated March 6, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also *Flowering of Nicodemus*, July 2013.
[406] Email, Sherda Williams to Jana [Irby, Graham County Clerk], February 17, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[407] Kenneth Hahn Architects, Design Development Submittal, Nicodemus National Historic Site Accessibility Improvements and Wayside Exhibits Installation, April 26, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[408] Draft letter, William Chapman to Tony Potter (Graham County Attorney), November 30, 2015, files of Nicodemus NHS; Draft Easement Grant, Graham County to National Park Service, attached to Memorandum, Chapman to MWRO Chief, Land Resources Division, January 15, 2016, files of Nicodemus NHS.

Figure 35. Fort Larned NHS Facilities Manager William Chapman, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

The project again lay fallow until early 2018, when Superintendent Williams requested additional assistance from the Land Resources Division to complete a Phase I Environmental Assessment required before NPS could accept the donation. Unfortunately, the Phase I survey indicated that a Phase II assessment would be required due to the presence of gas stations on or near the proposed easements in the past. As late as the fall of 2020, NPS still had not completed the Phase II Environmental Assessment because it was not clear who among the multiple landowners could give permission to enter the properties to conduct the assessment. The National Park Service also had not received the donation of right of way easements from Graham County, due to the same unclear title issues. After trying for several years to locate a title search company that would assist with clearing the titles within federal guidelines that were often cumbersome, the Regional Office, in the summer of 2020, contracted with a firm in Miami, Florida, for the work. As Regional Chief of Land Resources Daniel Betts explained,

> the government has contracting rules and regulations that – I mean, a normal person could get things done a lot differently. . . .our acquisition process is different than what title companies normally see, really. I mean, we have higher requirements…different standards that we have to comply with to meet Department of Justice requirements, and things like that. So, our work is a little different than what title companies typically run into.[409]

By this time, however, the park and the Regional Office were not inclined to wait any longer for right of way easements for the wayside exhibits. Acting Deputy Regional Director Clara Wooden explained that she coordinated with Regional facilities staff about finding a way to install the exhibits in a non-permanent way that did not require ground disturbance and, therefore, would not require an easement to install. Wooden recalled the attempts to find solutions:

[409] Daniel Betts, oral history interview, September 22 and October 1, 2020.

we ended up trying to tie them to poles and stuff. So, when I went out and saw that, that was not acceptable. So, we got our facilities office on it and said, "You know, here's a design of what we can do to stabilize these without actually disturbing the ground." And that's what we've done.[410]

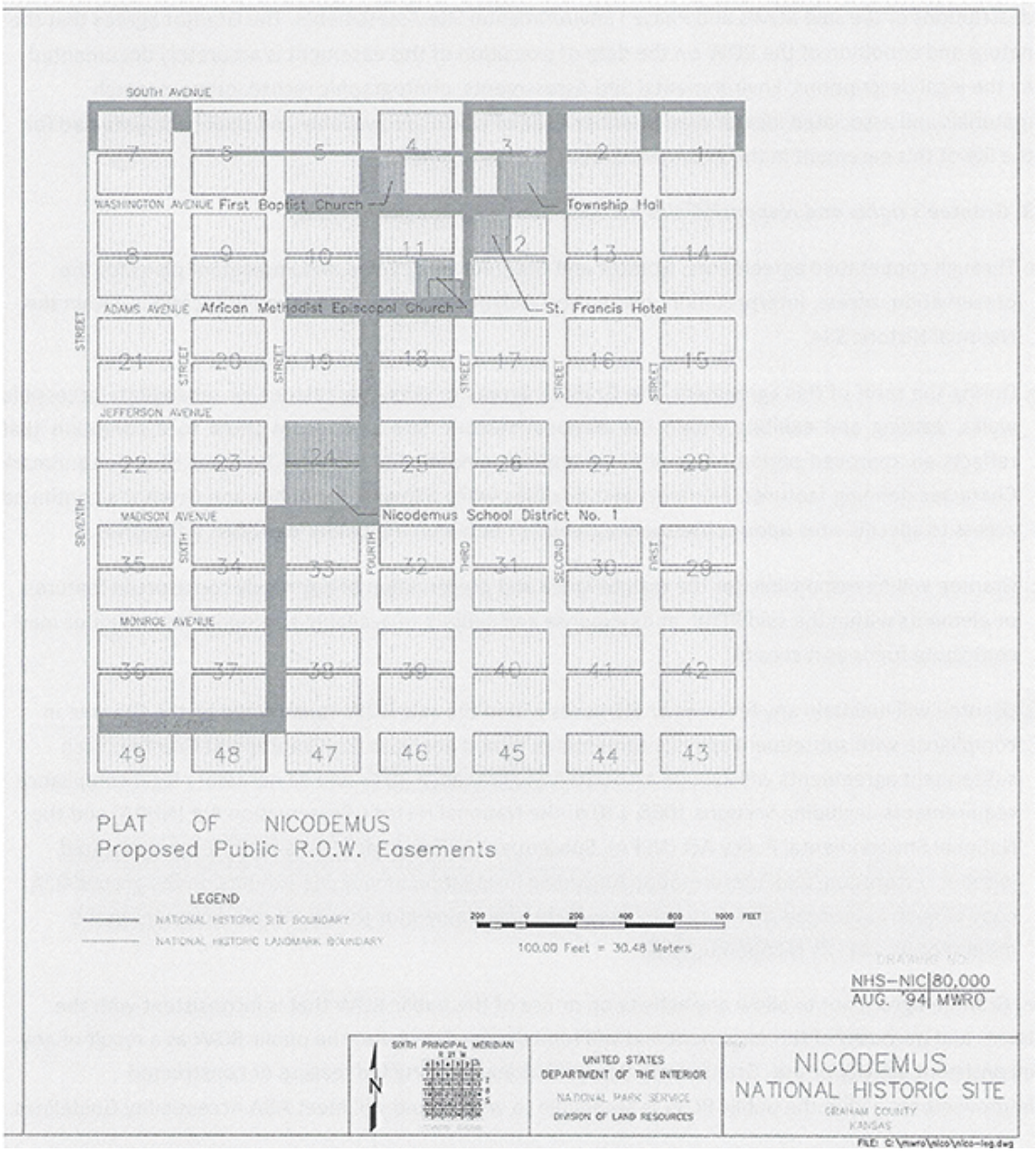

Figure 36. Proposed rights of way easements to be donated by Graham County for the wayside exhibits. Files of Nicodemus NHS.

The wayside program as completed in 2019 included seven exhibits, each individually mounted in an angled, two-legged metal support (Figure 37). This metal support, however, rather

[410] Clara Wooden, oral history interview, September 4, 2020.

than being anchored in the ground, is bolted to a raised wooden base consisting of planks laid side by side.[411] A group of three panels is located on the grounds of Township Hall facing Washington Street: one about the historical development of the commercial business district in Nicodemus, a second about Township Hall itself, and a third about the Priscilla Arts Club, located in the former schoolhouse next door to Township Hall. Two exhibits are located at the St. Francis Hotel, one about the history of the building as the former St Francis Hotel and the second a repeat of the information regarding commercial development of Nicodemus. Two additional wayside exhibits are located, one at each location, at the AME Church and the First Baptist Church. No exhibit was placed at the schoolhouse because the owners of the building, the Nicodemus Post of the American Legion, remain unwilling to convey a grounds or façade easement to NPS for such placement.

Figure 37. Wayside exhibits at Township Hall, left, and St. Francis Hotel, right, 2021. Photographs by the author.

AME Church Restoration and Visitor Center

The implementation of modern wayside exhibits is one of two major developments in the interpretive program at Nicodemus NHS that was completed by the time this administrative history was written. As described in this chapter, the challenges to establishing a viable and consistent interpretative management strategy, as with the overall management at the park, have been many, including the shortage and transitory nature of NPS staff, the lack of a Chief of Interpretation, the remote nature of the park which severely limits the number of visitors, and the disinclination on the part of the Regional Office to devote more funds and staff to the park. Perhaps the most fundamental hinderance, however, has been the fact that NPS owns only one of the five buildings that constitute the park and has limited authority to conduct more than basic stabilization at the other four. The one building that NPS owns, the AME Church, has recently been restored as discussed in Chapter 4 and is the second of the two major improvements in the park's interpretive program. Opened in the summer of 2022, the interior of the church has been restored to its mid-century appearance and is fully accessible to visitors who can gain a sense of the scale and the spirituality of the space. In addition, two interpretive panels are placed on either

[411] William Chapman noted that the use of temporary wooden bases to which the posts could be attached was his recommendation; telephone communication with the author, February 2, 2023.

side of the pulpit with information on the role of the AME Church generally in the westward migration of African Americans after the Civil War and on the history of the AME Church in Nicodemus in particular (Figure 38).

Figure 38. Interpretive panels in the restored AME Church, 2021. Photographs by the author.

The completion of the wayside exhibits and the AME Church restoration from 2019 to 2022 fulfills two of the important proposals in the GMP and in the LRIP. The GMP defined management zones in the park that corresponded to the intended visitor experience and identified the AME Church as a spiritual zone where visitors could contemplate the broader and deeper nature of the migration of Nicodemus' original settlers, the conditions that drove them, and the faith that sustained them. The LRIP, meanwhile, proposed a program of wayside exhibits that could provide additional information about the town and its history that would be available to visitors at all times. These two important developments, however, do not fully overcome the lack of permanent space dedicated to interpretation. All planning efforts at Nicodemus, from the GMP beginning the late 1990s to the Mission-Critical Assessment and Operations Plan completed in 2011, have included recommendations for a new visitor center for the park that could provide both administrative and interpretive space. The use of Township Hall as a visitor contact center beginning in 1998 was intended to be temporary, and, though the lease payments have been of great benefit to the town, many of the residents have long resented the limitations and constraints imposed on the town that result from the NPS lease and which have served as a point of conflict for many years.

In addition to funding priorities, the biggest challenge to providing a new visitor center at Nicodemus NHS has been finding a location. Nearly all land in the town, aside from the lots containing the AME Church, the schoolhouse, the First Baptist Church, the Villas complex, and lots owned by the Township Board, has been continuously owned by descendants of the original settlers. Many of these lots have remained within families for generations, with title often held by multiple heirs. Not only are residents typically loathe to convey lands away from descendants, particularly to the federal government, but, in cases where a sale of property was considered, the

difficulties in identifying a clear title to a lot and defining its boundaries have proved insurmountable. As Angela Bates recalled,

> The community did not – in the early years, did not want the Park Service Visitor Center on the town site. They did not. And this is – and I've held onto that perspective, probably for too long, but they did not. And the reason was, this one hundred and sixty-one acres was owned by the people. They did not want the federal government – and the fear was, the government's going to come in and exercise eminent domain. That was the fear. They did not want the Park Service to have a Visitor Center here.[412]

In more recent years, however, particularly as frustrations continue over the temporary and intrusive nature of the existing NPS visitor contact center in Township Hall, attitudes regarding a new visitor center within the town have begun to change.

During her term as Superintendent, Sherda Williams initiated a funding request for a new visitor center, which, in 2010, during Superintendent Weaver's tenure resulted in a Scope of Services for a facility site study.[413] The intended goal of this study, conducted from 2010 to 2011, was to identify potential sites that could be acquired and developed for use as a visitor center. Superintendent Weaver announced the study in the summer of 2010, to be conducted by Andrews and Anderson Architect. In his announcement, Weaver attempted to allay fears of government intervention by assuring that it was a voluntary process:

> The Park has asked all property owners within or adjacent to the Historic Landmark District if they would like to participate in the first evaluative phase to identify the best site for a new Visitor Center. No strings attached. A paid consultant will compare the properties, and if determined suitable, the property owner(s) will be asked if they would like to continue the process. Again, there is no compulsion to participate. The Park will work only with willing property sellers. And the property owners can decline at any time.[414]

By late 2010, the site selection study had yielded six properties as potential sites for a new visitor center, with an environmental analysis and value analysis to be conducted within the next year.[415] Among these were sites adjacent to the Villas, the senior residential apartments which the Nicodemus Housing Authority operated on behalf of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).[416] The study document was completed in the summer of 2011, and an internal park planning report described what was envisioned as an extensive public review process that included mailing postcards to hundreds of residents and descendants, a three-day open house at Township Hall, and an invitation to meet privately with the Superintendent. The park's internal review of the report and recommendations took place in the fall of 2011, with a

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[412] Angela Bates, oral history interview.
[413] Scope of Services, Nicodemus National Historic Site: Visitor Center, Administrative, and Maintenance Facility Study, Design Services for Predesign and Schematic Design, undated [2010]; files of Nicodemus NHS, 2010 VC Site Selection Contract file.
[414] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, July 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also Request for Quotation addressed to Andrews Anderson Architect, August 5, 2010, and Purchase Request Modification, for a total cost of $119,888.06; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[415] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, November 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[416] See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the origins of the Villas complex.

thirty-day public comment period in the winter of 2012 including two public meetings in February.[417]

The park received only one comment during the public review period, and planning continued into the summer of 2012, when Superintendent Weaver transferred from the park, but the issue lay dormant throughout much of the subsequent tenure of Superintendent Wetz. In February 2015, however, the Nicodemus Housing Authority, which operated the Villas housing complex on behalf of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and from whom the park leased space for offices and maintenance storage, approached Superintendent Wetz about the possibility of NPS acquiring the Villas complex. The Nicodemus Housing Authority had been charged by HUD with mismanaging the complex since 2011, which meant that the NPS lease for administrative and maintenance space would end on September 30, 2015. The management implications of this sudden turn of events will be discussed in Chapter 8, but, in addition to creating the need and opportunity for the park to plan for a time of great transition, when nearly the entire park staff either resigned or transferred to other parks, it also spurred NPS staff to revisit the question of using the Villas as the new visitor center. Superintendent Wetz prepared a summary of the situation in early April 2015 and observed that "Previous superintendents have agreed that the Villas are one of the best alternatives for administrative buildings and visitors center," noting that private property owners in Nicodemus are generally unwilling to sell to the federal government.[418] In late May 2015, however, the idea of building a new visitor center adjacent to the Villas was quashed when the Nicodemus Historical Society hand-delivered a letter to Wetz announcing their strong objection to the possibility that NPS might accept the donation of the Villas complex. The opposition to the donation was based on the ambivalence of the community to federal land ownership in the town and on the anticipated need for low-income housing in Nicodemus. The Historical Society insisted that any new visitor center be built outside of the Historic Landmark district.[419]

Although all eight board members of the Historical Society signed the letter, private discussions with individual members indicated some disagreement within the Historical Society regarding the possibility of a visitor center in the town. In the spring of 2015, in the wake of correspondence from HUD and from the Nicodemus Historical Society, park and Regional officials prepared a report outlining a number of possibilities for the park, generally, and for the visitor center, in particular. The report discussed the advantages and disadvantages of several options including seeking to acquire the Villas property from HUD, leasing the Villas site from the Township Board, going through the General Services Administration (GSA) to rent space for a visitor contact station in one of the surrounding communities, acquiring one of the properties within the Town of Nicodemus identified in the 2012 site selection study, repurposing the AME Church for use as a visitor center, forming a partnership with the Nicodemus Historical Society that would largely remove NPS' presence from Nicodemus, acquire a site within the town site by purchase or donation, and dissolve the NPS presence in Nicodemus except for basic resource

[417] Strategy for July 22 2011, Nicodemus Site Selection Study 95%, unsigned summary, files of Nicodemus NHS; *Flowering of Nicodemus*, July 2011 and March 2012, files of Nicodemus NHS.
[418] Angela Wetz, Lease Issue with Admin Offices and Potential for Future Visitor Center, April 3, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[419] Nicodemus Historical Society Board to Nicodemus Historic Site [sic], May 23, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.

protection and maintenance.[420] This report served only to outline the alternatives and made no recommendations, but the inclusion of such radical alternatives as dissolving the NPS presence in Nicodemus spoke to depth of concern and uncertainty that NPS faced.

In late 2015, in a letter from Angela Bates inviting Regional Director Cameron Sholly to speak at the park's twentieth anniversary event in 2016, the Nicodemus Historical Society repeated its intention that the park not build a new visitor center within the National Historic Landmark district. Bates presented three principal reasons for this opposition: it had not been the intent of those Nicodemus residents who promoted the enabling legislation in the 1990s that any land be sold to the federal government aside from, possibly, the five buildings that constitute the park; the sense of autonomy that is central to the community's culture and identity that comes from owning the land; and a fear that the federal government would exercise eminent domain and deprive Nicodemus residents of their homes and land.[421] This position began to shift, however, over the next several years when the Historical Society operated the park's visitor center in the Township Hall under a cooperative agreement. After growing disillusion throughout 2018, as discussed earlier in this chapter, NPS agreed to the Historical Society's request in April 2019 that the cooperative agreement be terminated in October 2019. The park, under Superintendent Enimini Ekong and his supervisor, Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams, began planning the transition back to full management and operation of the park, a process that was completed in September 2020, when Superintendent Frank Torres entered on duty as the permanent Superintendent.

This agreement to resume standard operations from 2019 into 2020 also revived discussions of a new visitor center and revealed divisions among Nicodemus residents regarding its location. As early as 2015, when the Nicodemus Historical Society urged NPS not to locate a new visitor center within the town, the park's alternative analysis report on the pending termination of the lease at the Villas reported that "The Nicodemus Township Board has identified several lots that they would be willing to donate," including sites adjacent to the roadside park behind Township Hall and another undefined lot "right on the edge of the townsite and possibly in the township."[422] Initially, the preferred lot was located in the southeastern part of the town, several blocks south of Township Hall off of Second Street. National Park Service staff, however, determined that this location was too far from Highway 24 to be a viable and accessible location.[423]

In late 2020, the Township Board agreed to sell a one-acre lot located near the southwest corner of the town site for use as a visitor center. The lot is located immediately northwest of the schoolhouse and south of the water tower and had never been built upon (Figure 39). The Township Board was not inclined to donate the land, however, and preferred to sell it to the NPS; the enabling legislation, however, forbids NPS from purchasing land from public entities, requiring that public lands must be donated. The Trust for Public Land, (TPL), which had assisted the park with the acquisition of the AME Church in 1998, again agreed to help the park

[420] "Nicodemus National Historic Site, Where Do We Go From Here? Analysis and Alternatives;" revised draft, June 23, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[421] Angela Bates to Cameron H. Sholly, December 30, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[422] "Nicodemus National Historic Site, Where Do We Go From Here?" page 9.
[423] LueCreasea Horne, telephone communication with the author, January 30, 2023.

Figure 39. Map showing the location of the future administrative facility.

with the purchase of the land from the Township Board. The Trust for Public Land secured a donation of funds from the National Park Foundation and Sony Pictures Entertainment, whose executive vice president, Keith Weaver, serves on the TPL Board of Directors. With a multifaceted agreement among the Township Board, TPL, and NPS to acquire the land for use as a new NPS visitor center, NPS conducted a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment in 2021, followed by a Phase II assessment in April 2022.[424] The Phase II assessment recommended that no additional environmental work was required, and the Regional Office moved forward to accept the donation of land from TPL, which was completed in October 2022. As part of TPL's announcement of the donation of land, Nicodemus Historical Society founder Angela Bates attested to its significance:

> Nicodemus is a national icon that testifies to the vision and tenacity of newly emancipated African Americans. These former enslaved people had a vision and made it a reality with sheer determination and a strong belief in God…Nicodemus

[424] DCR Services and Construction, Inc., *Phase II Environmental Site Assessment Report, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Kansas* (report prepared for The Trust for Public Land, April 26, 2022); files of Nicodemus NHS.

is a powerful story of people fighting for a place within a country that they helped build. Let us all celebrate this great American story.[425]

[425] "Trust for Public Land, Township of Nicodemus, and National Park Service Expand Nicodemus National Historic Site," October 6, 2022, on Trust for Public Land website: https://www.tpl.org/media-room/trust-for-public-land-township-of-nicodemus-and-national-park-service-expand-nicodemus-national-historic-site (viewed January 13, 2023).

Chapter 8: Management

With the exception of a brief period from late 2008 to the summer of 2012, Nicodemus NHS has been under the management of other parks in the Midwest Region. Initially managed entirely by Fort Larned NHS, Nicodemus NHS gained its first Site Manager in early 2001, and Superintendents have been on site for most of the period since 2004. As a mentored park, designed as a place for new superintendents and other staff to gain experience, Nicodemus NHS has seen a high degree of turnover. With few exceptions, NPS personnel have only rarely remained more than three years, with two deleterious results. First, continuity in programming and development is harder to achieve when the frequently arriving new staff members need time to get up to speed, particularly in this distinctive and remote park. Second, the residents of Nicodemus, who were ambivalent regarding the presence of the federal government in their small and close-knit community from the beginning, regularly had reason to distrust NPS' intentions and sincerity. As discussed throughout the earlier chapters of this administrative history, the particular situation at Nicodemus, in which NPS is managing a historic site within the context of a small but living community with a compelling history of survival, dense family networks, and traditions of independence, has presented manifold challenges to NPS. These challenges, together with a steady turnover of staff, have combined to establish a pattern of slow progress at Nicodemus NHS, though recent advances offer hope for the future.

Initial Management: Fort Larned NHS

Immediately after Nicodemus NHS was established in November 1996, the Midwest Regional Director asked Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Steve Linderer to take on its management. Linderer had visited Nicodemus several years before while conducting surveys of National Historic Landmark properties in Kansas and was aware of the threatened conditions of several of the buildings in the NHL District there. Linderer recalled being informed of his new charge:

> I got a call from the Regional Director one day and said, "It looks like Nicodemus was going to be a new unit of the National Park System. Would you be willing to take over the site and administer it, as ancillary duties to Fort Larned?" And I agreed to that. And there was really nothing more definite said about what I was supposed to do.

Aside from the standard steps of initiating the planning processes of developing a General Management Plan for the new park and, hopefully, stabilizing the buildings, Linderer recalled receiving only one directive from the Regional Director: "The only specific instructions that I recall was that he told me that he didn't want Nicodemus to blow up into a big project. He saw it being more as a District of Fort Larned. And keep the development small and not let the thing get out of hand."[426]

[426] Steve Linderer and Felix Revello, oral history interview.

Linderer, working in concert with Fort Larned NHS Chief of Interpretation Felix Revello, made significant strides in the new park's initial development while holding to the Regional Director's suggestion to "not let things get out of hand." Of the five buildings that constitute the park, one, the AME Church, was in such poor condition that a catastrophic collapse was imminent. Linderer quickly made arrangements for a preservation crew from the Southwest System Support Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico. to conduct emergency stabilization work in December 1996 while coordinating with the Midwest Regional Curator to take on a short-notice salvage operation of the church's interior. With the building safe from collapse in early 1997, Linderer then worked with Midwest Region Park Planner Sändra Washington and the Regional Lands Office, with support from the Trust for Public Lands, to acquire the AME Church by donation from the family trust that owned the building. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, this was a convoluted and drawn-out process involving tax liens and an unclear title that manifested the challenges the park would face when contemplating acquiring even a less-than-fee interest in properties in Nicodemus, which continues even to the present.

Linderer and Revello also made strides regarding a nascent interpretation program at Nicodemus. The most important of these was negotiating a lease in 1998 with the Nicodemus Township Board for use of Township Hall for a visitor contact station. The Township Board and NPS both assumed that this would be a temporary solution to the lack of a space for NPS to operate in Nicodemus, but it has remained in place for more than a quarter century. In 1998 also, Revello, recognizing the need to have some interpretive materials for visitors to see in the new visitor contact station, coordinated with Regional Chief of Interpretation Tom Richter for a series of free-standing panel exhibits to provide a basic history of Nicodemus. Though they have been the subject of criticism from Nicodemus residents and from NPS staff for some historical inaccuracies and perceived offensive historical materials, the exhibit panels have served to provide a starting point for visitors to the site since installation. The two also coordinated with Angel Bates to create a recorded message about the history of Nicodemus, which featured a section by the actor Danny Glover, for local broadcast on the Travelers Information System, a low-power radio system that allowed drivers on U.S. Route 24 near Nicodemus to learn about the area through which they were passing.

While the park remained under the direct management of Fort Larned NHS, NPS also secured funding for and began work on the key planning documents that would shape how the park would be managed and operated: the General Management Plan, the Cultural Landscape Report, and the Historic Structures Report. The General Management Plan was begun quickly in 1997, less than year after the park was established, and, though it took several years longer than expected, it was completed with a Record of Decision in September 2003. The Cultural Landscape Report and Historic Structures Report were both designed to provide additional information for the General Management Plan and were completed more quickly, the Historic Structures Report in October 2002 and the Cultural Landscape Report in January 2003. Together, these three comprehensive planning documents were the result of intense discussions and debates regarding how to understand and define the historical significance of Nicodemus as a unique entity within the National Park System and what resources contributed to that significance and provided a strong basis for future planning and development.

In recognition of the importance of interpretation to the new site, Linderer also made sure that the first staff for the site were interpreters. Reginald Miller, a veteran of the U.S. Army's 10th Cavalry Regiment, which was created in 1866 as one of the Buffalo Soldiers regiments for African Americans, was a student trainee at Fort Larned in the mid-1990s when he was asked to take part in the early discussions about interpretation at Nicodemus. Miller at first made occasional trips to Nicodemus, but Linderer soon appointed him to Nicodemus NHS as a Park Guide, though he initially remained on staff at Fort Larned. Miller was soon joined by Nicodemus resident and descendant LueCreasea Horne, a student at Fort Hays State University, who worked at the park as a seasonal interpreter during her summers home from college. By 2000, Linderer had also hired Robert Brogdon, a Nicodemus resident and Commander of the local American Legion Post which owned the schoolhouse, as the park's first maintenance worker. These three were the only on-site staff for several years, with Fort Larned NHS providing administrative leadership and support.

Largely because the park was being administered remotely through Fort Larned NHS, little budget information is available for the park's first years. Superintendent Linderer recalled that funding in these earliest years was not a significant problem:

> we had plenty of money in the early days. . . because that was a new park, and we got some funding, and we were sharing stuff back and forth between the two parks. I mean, there was never enough money, like, to fix the buildings, but we couldn't, anyway, because we didn't have the plans done. But funds – but budget was not a constricting factor in the early years. I mean, we would buy the exhibits and do anything like that we wanted to do – buy a mower. It was not a constraint.[427]

In April 1999, a newspaper account reported that the park had received $300,000, presumably for FY 2000, "to develop park facilities. . .The money will be spent on resource preservation and visitor center services."[428]

Site Manager Dennis Carruth

Through the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, all units of the National Park System completed a strategic plan designed to keep the park in compliance with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), a component of the promise of President Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore to "reinvent government." This law was passed during the enthusiasm with new management systems being used throughout the private sector that emphasized measuring performance against specific goals and standards established by the specific business entity. To comply with GPRA, each park was required to develop a five-year plan that outlined the park's mission, established short- and long-term goals, and defined the standards by which performance would be measured. Superintendent Linderer completed the five-year strategic plan for Nicodemus in the summer of 2000, which was implemented in

[427] Ibid.
[428] "$300,000 Earmarked to Help Nicodemus," *Wichita Eagle*, April 22, 1999; clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.

calendar year 2001.[429] In late November 2000, Linderer noted to Sändra Washington that, since he and his staff had recently completed the GPRA-mandated Strategic Plan, "I expect to hire the site manager within the next two weeks or so."[430]

True to his word, Superintendent Linderer hired the first Site Manager for Nicodemus NHS in early 2001. Dennis L. Carruth had made his career in the southwest, primarily in New Mexico, serving as Site Manager of Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and as Resource Management Specialist at Carlsbad Caverns. At the time of his appointment at Nicodemus NHS, Carruth was serving as Chief Ranger of Capulin Volcano National Monument, New Mexico. Carruth entered on duty at Nicodemus on March 25, 2001 (Figure 40). Carruth began leading the park at a time when all three initial planning documents were nearing completion, affording him limited opportunities to shape the direction of any of them. In his one review of the draft GMP, however, he noted the lack of public involvement in the process In July 2001, he printed the park's first newsletter. In it, Carruth reviewed the nature and purposes of a GMP and how it would fit into the development of Nicodemus NHS, giving a strong visual emphasis to the fact that any acquisition of property would be with consent of the landowner, and invited anyone to contact him.[431]

Few records were located during the present research that indicate Carruth's involvement with the development of the park, and these are limited primarily to comments on the GMP. This accords with recollections of others who were involved in the park's early management.[432] Superintendent Linderer, for example, recalled that Carruth "wanted to use Nicodemus as a stepping-stone to advance his career. And that is not unusual. . . he was there to gain the experience, and that was a beginning superintendency."[433] Sherda Williams, who succeeded Carruth and who was active at Nicodemus during her tenure and, recalled that he left few records and that "he didn't leave me any kind of notes about what he felt like priorities were or anything like that, so… to a certain extent, I didn't – I was a little bit blind on what he actually had been doing." Williams also recalled that "there was concern that Dennis was keeping himself too separate from the community."[434] Angela Bates seconded this recollection, observing that

> it was very interesting, because nobody remembers Dennis Carruth. . . they [the Nicodemus community] don't even remember. He was in here, quiet, nnn, nnn. Didn't interact at all with the community. So, I'm saying, people don't remember him. And then he was gone.[435]

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[429] The original Strategic Plan for Nicodemus NHS was not located during the present research. The only hint as to its content is in a review of the draft document by Rev. Chester A. and Melvina M. Williams (October 21, 2000), who claimed that its provisions for employment, apparently designed to be race-blind, would have the effect of denying persons of color the chance for employment; the Williams' preferred that employees be residents or descendants of Nicodemus' settlers, or be American Indians; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.

[430] Email, Steve Linderer to Sändra Washington, November 27, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.

[431] Email, Carruth to Sändra Washington, June 13, 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12. The newsletter is identified as Issue No., 1, July 2001; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 6.

[432] Carruth declined to take part in an oral history interview for this project.

[433] Steve Linderer and Felix Revello, oral history interview.

[434] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

[435] Angela Bates, oral history interview.

Figure 40. L-R: Site Manager Dennis Carruth, left, with Ruth (Jones) Dobson, James Rudolph Bates (seated), Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Steve Linderer (standing center), and Fort Larned NHS Chief Ranger Felix Revello, right, February 2003. Clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.

Only one reference to the park's budget during Carruth's tenure was located. It showed the park's base allocation in FY 2002 as $227,223.[436] Costs for staff are the largest part of most park's budgets, and one of Carruth's most important legacies was hiring Phyllis Howard as Park Guide, replacing former seasonal staff member LueCreasea Horne, who accepted a permanent position with Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Missouri. Howard, who was then serving at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Colorado as a SCEP employee while finishing her bachelor's degree in history from University of Southern Colorado, Pueblo, entered on duty on April 15, 2002.[437] Howard served as Park Guide and Park Ranger at Nicodemus NHS until her retirement in 2020. Shortly after Howard's arrival, Park Ranger Reggie Miller was added to the Nicodemus NHS staff on a permanent full-time basis as well, transferring from Fort Larned NHS. By early 2003, the park's staff had grown to five permanent members: Superintendent Carruth, Park Rangers Phyllis Howard and Reginald Miller, Maintenance Worker Robert Brogdon, and Administrative Technician Sharyl Cyphers, who was duty stationed at Fort Larned.[438]

The other important legacy from Carruth's tenure as Site Manager was securing administrative office space at the Villas, the small residential complex in Nicodemus built with

[436] Nicodemus NHS Budget Projection Report, showing allocations from FY 2002 to FY 2007, prepared on January 31, 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[437] Email, Dennis Carruth to FOLS employees, April 15, 2002; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 4.
[438] Nicodemus FMSS Information, January 8, 2003; files of Nicodemus NHS.

funds from HUD and managed by the Nicodemus Housing Authority (Figure 41). When the park was being managed remotely from Fort Larned NHS, the park's two original staff members—Reginald Miller and LueCresea Horne—were able to use Township Hall, which NPS began leasing in 1998. By late 1999, however, Linderer began making plans to find a separate office space but had no luck. With the impending addition of a Site Manager in late 2000, Linderer noted that "the [Nicodemus] Buffalo Soldiers now want to have their parties in the Hall (they lost the use of the Art Center), so it is not going to be a good place for an office."[439] In 1998, the park began renting a garage space at the Villas from the Nicodemus Housing Authority to store maintenance equipment, and, in 2001, the park extended their lease to include a residential unit for use as administrative offices.[440] It is unknown if Carruth took part in negotiations for the office space lease at the Villas or if it was completed in the two months prior to his arrival. The office lease remained in place until September 2015, when, as will be discussed later in this chapter, HUD terminated its association with the Nicodemus Housing Authority.

Figure 41. The Nicodemus Villa residential complex, 2021. Photograph by the author.

During his tenure, Carruth also provided on-site supervision for the completion of the second phase of stabilization at the AME Church, conducted by a team from Ulysses S. Grant NHS. He coordinated with the trustees of the First Baptist Church regarding permissions and initial planning for stabilization work completed in 2005. He also served as an onsite coordinator for completion of studies for the HSR and CLR as the BVH team sought information on work that had previously been completed. More comprehensive stabilization work, however, fell to his successor to oversee.

[439] Email, Steve Linderer to Sändra Washington, November 27, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12. See also email, Linderer to Don Smyth [MWRO], September 28, 1999; Email, Steve Linderer to Sändra Washington, November 27, 2000; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.

[440] Spreadsheet, Estimated NPS Involvement at Nicodemus National Historic Site, no date (c. 2006); files of Nicodemus NHS.

Superintendent Sherda Williams

In February 2003, after less than two years at Nicodemus NHS, Dennis Carruth accepted a transfer to Aztec Ruins National Monument, New Mexico, where he entered on duty as Superintendent. Fort Larned NHS Chief Ranger Felix Revello then served as Acting Superintendent until December 2003. In early October 2003, Regional Landscape Architect Sherda Williams accepted the offer from Steve Linderer to serve as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS, an upgrade from the Site Manager position held by Carruth and entered on duty on December 29, 2003 (Figure 42).[441] By this time. the HSR and CLR, with which Williams had been extensively involved, were completed, and a Record of Decision for the GMP had been recently issued. Although Carruth had left relatively few notes or records, Williams was already extremely knowledgeable about Nicodemus and its residents from her work with the HSR and the CLR. She also solicited advice from Sändra Washington, who helped her explore ways of becoming part of the community. She had heard of Carruth's reluctance to engage extensively with the residents of Nicodemus and sought to go about things differently. As she recalled,

> so, I had to make the decision, how embedded am I going to become in the community? So, I knew that I would be criticized, probably, regardless of what I did, but, since there had been criticism of Dennis for not being as engaged enough in the community, I decided to attend church in Nicodemus, which I had to run by the ethics people to know if I could do that.[442]

Williams became an active part of the community, joining the First Baptist Church in Nicodemus and instituting a monthly coffee hour at Township Hall in August 2004. Her willingness to engage the community was recognized at the time and after she left. As Angela Bates recalled, "Everybody remembers Sherda. . . I remember when Sherda was here. And then Sherda was here for a few years, and then – people – the people loved her."[443] In addition to the monthly coffee hours, Williams also began producing a quarterly park newsletter in 2004 which was distributed locally and mailed to hundreds of descendants, local libraries and schools, and national and state politicians.[444]

In addition to establishing a closer relationship with the residents and descendants of Nicodemus, Williams set as one of her principal goals to begin planning for a number of long-term projects, including stabilization and restoration projects for the five buildings, the Long-Range Interpretive Plan, with the visitor use study in 2005 to support it, and an oral history project in 2006. Major accomplishments for the buildings during her tenure were the extensive stabilization project at the First Baptist Church, which was completed in the summer of 2008, a partial stabilization project for the interior of the schoolhouse, and multiple smaller projects at Township Hall, including a new septic system, water heaters for the restrooms, and replacing dead or dying Siberian elms with new American elm trees on the grounds. Another important resource management concern was the proliferation of oil wells throughout Graham County and

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[441] "Nicodemus National Historic Site Welcomes New Superintendent," *Hill City Times*, January 14, 2004, clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS. See also emails among Felix Revello, Sherda Williams, et al., October 6, 2003; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 2.
[442] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.
[443] Angela Bates, oral history interview.
[444] Nicodemus National Historic Site, Annual Narrative Report of the Superintendent, Fiscal Year 2004; NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

Figure 42. Superintendent Sherda Williams, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

the surrounding areas beginning in 2004. Williams was a vocal advocate of protecting the National Historic Landmark historic district, contacting NPS resource management specialists to support her briefing statement on the topic in January 2005.[445] The challenges to reducing impacts from the encroachment of oil wells were exacerbated by the light hand of federal and state permits; as Williams recalled, "the state has some requirements, but it's pretty free-for-all out in western Kansas."[446] In the case of oil wells, however, the challenges that NPS faced in acquiring properties in Nicodemus turned to their favor. As Williams reported to Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Kevin McMurry in April 2005, in addition to such regulatory hoops as the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office could establish, the well drilling companies were running into practical difficulties:

> they are having a lot of trouble getting clear title to lots, due to the complex family trust situations (i.e., there are cases where there are no recorded deed transfers to other family members of the Trust upon the death of one member, so that interest goes to the deceased's estate, which pulls in more beneficiaries, etc.).[447]

Although the surrounding landscape is dotted with small oil wells, Williams' efforts were successful to the extent that none is in the immediate viewshed of the National Historic Landmark district.

Together with Park Rangers Phyllis Howard and Reggie Miller, and in coordination with members of the Nicodemus community, Williams embarked on a strong series of programs, events, and educational initiatives. In addition to sponsoring speakers for the annual Homecoming celebrations, Williams arranged for visits by Kansas Governor Kathleen Sibelius

[445] Briefing Statement, Oil Development, Nicodemus National Historic Site, January 18, 2005; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 12.
[446] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.
[447] Email, Sherda Williams to Kevin McMurry et al., April 22, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS, L2427.

in February 2005, and by NPS Director Fran Mainella in February 2006, and organized off-site programs for civic and social groups and other parks. As discussed in Chapter 7, the park received a donation in 2005 of a distance learning station, and Park Ranger Howard began developing programs for it with support from educational staff at Homestead National Monument, Nebraska. Among the more unique programs during Williams' tenure was the recreation of a historic baseball game in September 2004, which was developed and largely led by Park Ranger Reggie Miller. The one-day event featured little league games in the morning followed in the afternoon by a game between teams representing two teams active in the late nineteenth century, the Western Cyclones Baseball Club of Nicodemus and the Reveille Club of Hill City. The highlight of the event was the participation of John J. "Buck" O'Neil, legendary baseball player with the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro Baseball League and a long-time successful scout for the Chicago Cubs and Kansas City Royals in Major League Baseball (Figure 43). A Nicodemus descendant drove O'Neil from Kansas City to Nicodemus, where he spent the day, giving a talk to approximately 350 visitors before throwing out the first pitch of the game.[448] The next year, Miller arranged for a second historic baseball game, this time featuring a vintage baseball team from Grand Island, Nebraska, which also led baseball workshops for children in nearby Stockton and Plainville.[449]

Figure 43. Sherda Williams and Buck O'Neil, 2004. Files of Nicodemus NHS.

Superintendent Williams also coordinated with the Nicodemus Historical Society regarding the park's interpretive program. In 2004, the Historical Society approached Williams about the possibility of a cooperative agreement that would focus on a joint approach to

[448] Sherda Williams, oral history interview. See also "Nicodemus Contest to Remember Early Games," *Hill City Times*, August 11, 2004; clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.
[449] Nicodemus National Historic Site, Annual Narrative Report of the Superintendent, Fiscal Year 2005; NPS Electronic Technical Information Center.

interpretation in line with the GMP's concept of joint stewardship. After laying fallow for a year or more, this request was revived as a result of the frustration felt by Angela Bates and other residents after the first draft of the LRIP, which NPS acknowledged was not up to par. It was at that point, Williams recalled,

> that she started pushing more and more the idea of having their descendants involved in the interpretation. And we did – let's see – I had the draft of a Cooperative Agreement finished for the Historical Society to start working with them more on projects and interpretive work but not necessarily having one of their staff into the Visitor Center.[450]

Williams transferred from Nicodemus NHS in 2008, before the cooperative agreement was executed. Under its terms, NPS would provide funding for the Historical Society through a series of Task Agreements and would exercise management and oversight of the programs, identified in the cooperative agreement as "substantial involvement." In return, the Historical Society would develop four sets of programs, which, during the course of negotiations, had evolved to a greater emphasis on research than on joint interpretation. These programs, according to the final agreement, were developing an oral history program, using both audio and video recording, of interviews with descendants and others and creating an archive of the results, continuing to conduct historical and genealogical research, and increasing accessibility of the Historical Society's museum collection, together with developing educational programs. The agreement, which was initiated during Superintendent Williams' tenure, was executed in September 2009 by her successor, Superintendent Mark Weaver.[451]

The park's base budget allocation remained relatively stable throughout Williams' tenure from FY 2004 to FY 2008, fluctuating between $339, 831 and $349,316, the high point being FY 2007. From this budget, the park regularly transferred funds to Fort Larned NHS to cover costs for administrative and maintenance support. In FY 2005, the base budget of $369,000 was supplemented by $156,000 for stabilization of the First Baptist Church, with another $15,000 for emergency biohazard cleanup of the interior, $6,050 for additional stabilization of the AME Church, $5,000 for stabilization of one of the walls of the schoolhouse, and $10,610 for the replacement of Township Hall's septic system.[452]

There were few staff changes at Nicodemus NHS under Superintendent Williams. In April 2004, Nicodemus NHS Administrative Assistant Sharyl Cyphers was hired as Fort Larned NHS Administrative Officer; the position remained vacant until October 2005, when Betsy Crawford-Gore was hired, though she, too, was duty-stationed at Fort Larned NHS. In 2004, also, Robert Brogdon, the park's first Maintenance Worker, was reclassified from temporary part time to permanent part time. The park's interpretive program received a blow in late 2005 when Park Ranger Reggie Miller, the first NPS staff member on site at Nicodemus, accepted a lateral transfer to serve as Park Ranger at William Howard Taft NHS, Ohio, effective January 8, 2006.[453] Due to budget shortfalls, Williams was unable to hire a replacement for Miller. Instead,

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[450] Sherda Williams, oral history interview.
[451] Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and Nicodemus Historical Society, Agreement No. H6345-09-0012, executed September 3, 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[452] Nicodemus National Historic Site, Annual Narrative Report of the Superintendent, Fiscal Year 2005.
[453] Email, Sherda Williams to Dave Given, December 9, 2005; files of Nicodemus NHS.

she coordinated with Fort Larned NHS Administrative Officer Sharyl Cyphers to reclassify the position as a Museum Guide, GS-4. In the fall of 2006, Williams hired Michelle Huff as the new Park Guide. Huff had worked for NPS since 2001, first, as a seasonal employee and, more recently, as a permanent Park Guide at Pipe Spring National Monument, Arizona.[454] A year later, in November 2007, Administrative Technician Betsy Crawford-Gore was promoted to the position of Administrative Officer for Fort Larned NHS, replacing Sharyl Cyphers.[455] Finally in February 2008, Williams announced that she had accepted a transfer to serve as Superintendent of James A. Garfield NHS, Ohio, effective March 30, 2008.[456]

Superintendent Mark Weaver

The Regional Director selected Mark Weaver to serve on temporary duty as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS in the spring of 2008 (Figure 44). Weaver, like Sherda Williams a landscape architect by training, had served for the past ten years as one of the two Wisconsin state representatives for the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RCTA). This multi-state program staffed by NPS supports communities and public land managers by providing professionals in various disciplines to assist those who are developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, wildlife habitats, or outdoor recreation areas. Weaver explained that his position with RCTA involved "community engagement. That's a significant portion of the job." He had been investigating superintendent roles and alerted Deputy Regional Director Dave Given of his interest, who recommended him for temporary duty at Nicodemus. While serving on temporary duty, Weaver continued to report to Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Kevin McMurry in a mentoring relationship that Weaver described politely as "less than desirable." Within months of his arrival, however, the park was uncoupled from Fort Larned NHS, and the Nicodemus NHS Superintendent position began reporting directly to the Regional Director. Weaver successfully applied for the newly-independent Superintendent position in the summer of 2008, entered on duty on September 2, 2008. In late August, his wife and two children relocated from Wisconsin to Hill City, Kansas.[457]

Weaver set as his primary goal to win the trust of the Nicodemus residents and descendants, continuing with the monthly coffee hours at Township Hall and conducting outreach when possible. One of his first and most pressing tasks, as described earlier in Chapter 7, was to re-start the long-delayed Long-Range Interpretive Plan. Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Tom Richter contacted Weaver immediately upon hearing that Weaver had been selected as the new Superintendent in August 2008 and explained some of the background for the LRIP and the difficulties that the park, the region, and the community had experienced.[458] Weaver continued to assist Richter and HFC Planner Toni Dufficy, who took over as the lead for the LRIP, through late 2008 and into 2009, including helping to facilitate the

[454] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, November 2006; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[455] Ibid., November 2007.
[456] Ibid., February 2008.
[457] Mark Weaver, oral history interview.
[458] Emails between Mark Weaver and Tom Richter, August 10-11, 2008; Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20, box 9.

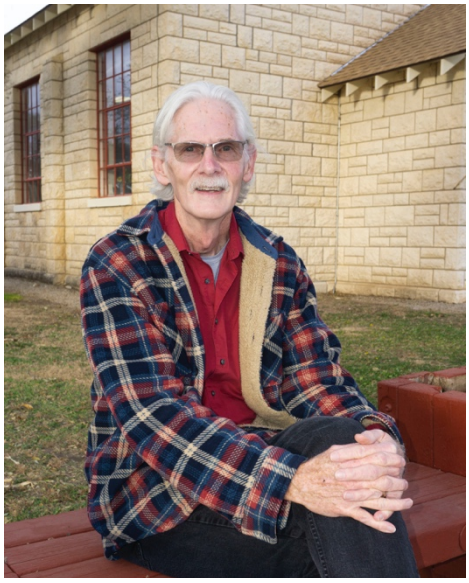

Figure 44. Superintendent Mark Weaver, at Township Hall, 2021. Photograph by the author.

important public workshop in March 2009 that led the way to the final, approved LRIP in September 2009.

Developing a staff was also a challenging task for Weaver. When he arrived, the park had two interpreters—Park Ranger Phyllis Howard and Park Guide Michelle Huff—and a part-time Maintenance Worker, Robert Brogdon. With the park reporting directly to the Regional Director rather than to the Superintendent of Fort Larned NHS, the park no longer had automatic access to administrative support. In late 2008, Weaver interviewed candidates for a permanent full time administrative assistant position to be duty stationed at Nicodemus and hired Annette White, who entered on duty in February 2009 (Figure 45).[459] White still required training and supervision by a senior administrative staff, though, which was initially handled by former Nicodemus NHS Administrative Officer Betsy Crawford-Gore, who, by then, had accepted a lateral transfer to Fort Larned.[460] Through the early months of 2009, as Crawford-Gore continued her assistance from Fort Larned, Weaver coordinated with Deputy Regional Director Dave Given to make an arrangement with Homestead National Monument, Nebraska for administrative support. In early July 2009, Homestead National Monument Superintendent Mark Engler proposed that his park provide full administrative and partial maintenance support to Nicodemus by establishing a term administrative assistant position that would work with both parks. The costs for this work were steep--$47,000 in FY 2010 and $48,500 in FY 2011, to come out of the baseline budget for Nicodemus NHS—but Weaver had few options. As Weaver recalled,

> I contacted Homestead National Monument and said, "Can we rent your AO [Administrative Officer]?" And they were – they were fine. They charged me, I

[459] Email, Mark Weaver to Sherda Williams, December 1, 2008; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also *Flowering of Nicodemus*, November 2009, for the announcement of White's employment and a brief biography for her.
[460] Betsy Crawford-Gore, telephone interview with the author, May 1, 2023.

felt, a lot more than they really should have, but they were looking at it as a way to get another half of an FTE and money to fill in somewhere else.[461]

Figure 45. Administrative Assistant Annette White, 2009. Files of Nicodemus NHS.

Weaver was also in need of maintenance support, having only Robert Brogdon as a permanent part-time maintenance worker though Fort Larned staff continued to provide assistance as needed. Weaver hired Sam Quakenbush as the park's first Facility Operations Specialist out of the private sector. Quakenbush entered on duty in July 2010 (Figure 46). Annette White remained on staff at Nicodemus until the summer of 2011, when she accepted a lateral transfer to Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, Wyoming. Weaver noted in the announcement of her transfer, "Annette saw us through a significant establishment and growth period for the park's administrative division, developing it as a fully functioning entity." Weaver also thanked White for her "tolerance of the bureaucracy that often creates bumps in the road to success."[462] Quakenbush departed Nicodemus NHS in November 2011 when he accepted a promotion as Supervisory Facility Operation Specialist at Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio. White was replaced as administrative assistant by Joe Randall who, like White, had no previous NPS experience; Randall entered on duty in March 2012. The park's new Facility Operations Specialist, Bill Doerrer, entered on duty in early 2012 after accepting a transfer from Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee.[463]

[461] Mark Weaver, oral history interview. See also agreements between Weaver and Engler for administrative support in FY 2010 and FY 2011, attached to email, Mark Engler to Dave Given et al., July 7, 2009; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[462] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, July 2011; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[463] Ibid, March 2012.

Figure 46. Facility Operation Specialist Sam Quakenbush, 2010. Files of Nicodemus NHS.

Weaver recalled that the budget throughout his tenure was tight, though funding was made available to hire the Administrative Assistant and Facility Operation positions, together with seasonal maintenance and interpretive staff.[464] Weaver inherited a base allocation of $346,320 in FY 2008. For FY 2009, the park's base allocation was expanded substantially to $540,723, but this was subject to diversions to Homestead National Monument and others for service rendered totaling $138,983, leaving the park with an adjusted allocation of $401,740. By early 2011, the park's budget was not expected to see any increases above the $540,723 base allocation for the next four fiscal years.[465]

The combination of his administrative inexperience, the small staff, and overseeing a park that was newly independent contributed to a challenging tenure for Superintendent Weaver. In the absence of Division Chiefs, and until hiring a Facility Operations Specialist, Weaver had direct supervision of the two interpretation staff members and the part-time maintenance worker in addition to having to prepare management and operations plans. It was often an overwhelming burden, as pointed out in the park's Operations Evaluation in the summer of 2010. Multiple staff members from the Midwest Regional Office, representing the interpretation, cultural resources, and administration fields, spent a week in Nicodemus in late June, interviewing the staff members and learning more about the park's operations and challenges. Other regional staff specialists including information management, health and safety, environmental, maintenance, and lands participated remotely. The Operations Evaluation team reported on all principal functions of the park, noting both positive and negative aspects and making numerous recommendations for improvement. The most positive features of the park revolved around the status of planning and everyday management: the buildings and grounds were well maintained, the park's standard operating procedures for handling money and for health and safety checks

[464] Mark Weaver, oral history interview.
[465] Nicodemus NHS BCP Projection Report; files of Nicodemus NHS. This brief spreadsheet shows historic allocations from FY 2004 to FY 2008, with FY 2009 as the base year with projections for FY 2010 through FY 2014. No additional information on the park's budgets during Weaver's time as Superintendent were located during the present research.

were appropriate and were being followed, records were being properly maintained and filed, and the park's cultural resources were being properly protected and documented. There were some administrative shortcomings, largely due to staff inexperience, and the evaluation included recommendations for working with Midwest Regional staff to update and correct procedures.[466]

The principal shortcomings observed by the Operations Evaluation team pertained to the park's interpretation and education program. Many of the failings were attributed to not having a Chief of Interpretation, a staff position that could take the lead on planning for interpretive and educational programming rather than providing programs on a day-to-day basis. The park had a backlog of interpretive projects, including wayside exhibits and other media, particularly an orientation video, but they could not be addressed because the two Park Rangers were occupied with providing basic visitor services and educational programming. The park's interpretive programs were informal. The orientation video provided only limited value to visitors, and the two Park Rangers were addressing only surface topics such as the early history of Nicodemus and the annual Emancipation celebration. The Rangers were not covering the full range of important themes and provided no discussion of Nicodemus as a living community, and the park's education program was conducted on an ad-hoc basis. The Operations Evaluation team supported the existing cooperative agreement with the Nicodemus Historical Society, which was developing education materials, and encouraged the park to coordinate with the Historical Society to present more educational programs. The Rangers had access to a distance-learning station, as discussed in Chapter 7, and were reaching an increasing number of students, but the curriculum was not tied to the State of Kansas education standards. Other emerging technologies, particularly the park's website, were not being used for interpretation or public information. The park's Rangers, moreover, had received no formal instruction through the NPS interpretive competency program, partly because they were not provided with the time and opportunities for training.[467]

After cataloging all of these shortcomings of the park's interpretive and educational program, the Operations Evaluation team made numerous recommendations, starting with the fundamental need for a Chief of Interpretation position in the park's organization chart. The team praised the collaborative nature of the Long-Range Interpretive Plan development in 2009 and its subsequent implementation but cautioned the park against spending too much time in planning and, instead, urged a focus on identifying a smaller number of concrete steps that park staff could take immediately to improve the interpretive program and visitor services. The team recommended that the park seek outside support from the Regional Office and from other parks for upgrades to the traveling trunk program, ways to make better use of distance learning technology and the park's website, and working with the State of Kansas for highway signs to alert travelers to the presence of Nicodemus NHS. The Operations Evaluation team also provided more specific recommendations, including developing a living history program to better interpret the early history of Nicodemus, which could be supported by building a replica sod house and gardens with crops and tools typical of the period, working with commercial heritage bus tours to stop at Nicodemus, providing driving tours of historical and cultural sites in the region, and

[466] "Nicodemus National Historic Site Operations Evaluation, June 21-25, 2010: Midwest Regional Key Indicators and Core Standards."
[467] Ibid.

developing regular formal programs and special events which would be promoted throughout the region.[468]

The Operations Evaluation report noted the recent additions to the park's staff, including a Facility Management Specialist and an Administrative Assistant. Identifying the park's necessary staffing and budget levels was also an important component of the park's Mission Critical Assessment and Operations Plan, which was being conducted simultaneously with the Operations Evaluation. This was a significant planning process that nearly every unit of the National Park System underwent during the late 2000s and early 2010s, under a variety of designations such as Core Operations and Operations Evaluation studies depending on the park's complexity and needs, all of which were derived from the original GRPA of 1993, an attempt to modernize the management of NPS. The study at Nicodemus began in August 2009 when Ulysses S. Grant NHS Superintendent Timothy Good facilitated a Critical Operations workshop at which park staff identified priorities and various staffing scenarios that would allow these priorities to be manifested. Good continued to work with park staff throughout 2010, and, in 2011, the park prepared a final report. The Mission Critical Assessment report for Nicodemus identified the local, regional, and national supporters of the park as residents and descendants and observed that only those who live in or near Nicodemus take an active interest and role in the park's management and interpretation, although a number of entities such as the Nicodemus Historical Society, the Kansas Black Farmers Association, the Nicodemus Township Board, and the churches in Nicodemus provide additional support. In its summary of the current status of the town and the park, the Mission Critical Assessment report cited the underlying tension within the community in its relationship to NPS, defined in the report as dependence versus independence, as problematic. The community was founded on the premises of independence, the essential community trait which NPS sought to preserve. However, the community's population was aging and dwindling and "has effectively seen its independence potentially replaced with a new dependence upon the National Park Service." The report succinctly summarized the implications of this conflict: "maintain independence without the capacity to act on that independence, or admit a need for dependence and virtually or actually relinquish part of the community they have held as their own for so very many years to ensure their continued presence." According to the report, it was up to the park, therefore, through its organization and approach, to support the community's preservation and "to maintain this sense of pride and ownership."[469]

After a brief discussion of the park's facilities and staff structure, the report delved into the park's purpose and needs, which was seen as building upon the GMP of nearly a decade before, particularly the emphasis on community involvement and the protection of the community's character. The mission-critical priorities for the park, according to the report, were to develop a new visitor center, restore the AME Church, stabilize the other four buildings that constitute the park, and develop an interpretation program. The past fourteen years, the report observed, "has seen the park operate below mission-critical levels and 'getting by' while other parks established at roughly the same time have made significant progress in terms of staffing increases and facilities development." To move forward and achieve the mission-critical priorities, the park would need to take several steps including maintaining the necessary

[468] Ibid.
[469] *Nicodemus National Historic Site: Mission-Critical Assessment and Operations Plan*, approved March 17, 2011, page 4.

agreements with the owners of the four properties not in federal ownership to allow for long-term preservation, create an administrative division, bring in experienced leadership for interpretation and education, and fully maintain structures and grounds within the park boundaries. These steps had implications for the park's staff structure, which was to be expanded with a Chief of Interpretation, full-time maintenance workers, and a community planner who would establish and maintain relationships with Nicodemus residents.[470]

As with many of the plans developed for Nicodemus NHS over the years, few of the priorities defined in the Mission Critical Assessment report or the Operations Evaluation report were realized, at least in the short term. Barely a year after the completion of the Mission Critical Assessment report, in the summer of 2012, Superintendent Weaver accepted a lateral transfer to serve as Superintendent of North Country National Scenic Trail, Michigan.[471] By this time, the staff of Brown v. Board of Education NHS was providing information technology services to the park, and, with Weaver's departure, the Regional Director requested that Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent David Smith take on responsibility for Nicodemus NHS as it returned to being a mentored park. Brown v. Board of Education NHS Chief of Interpretation David Schafer was then assigned as Acting Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS on temporary duty from September to December 2012. Among Schafer's achievements was to hire Will Pope as Park Guide. Pope, a native Kansan who transferred from Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina, entered on duty in the fall of 2012.[472]

Superintendent Angela Wetz

During Schafer's tenure as Acting Superintendent, the Regional Office held meetings in Nicodemus with the goal of soliciting input from the community on a new Superintendent and to explain the new relationship with Brown v. Board of Education NHS. The delegation from the Regional Office was led by Deputy Regional Director Patty Trap and included Associate Regional Director Clara Wooden, Regional Interpretive Media Specialist Robert Wendel, and David Smith.[473] In December 2012, Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent David Smith hired Angela Wetz as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS (Figure 47). Wetz, who entered on duty in January 2013, had worked as a Natural Resources Specialist with the Bureau of Land Management for several years before joining NPS as Chief of Resource Management at Devil's Tower National Monument, Wyoming, where David Smith had been her supervisor.[474]

[470] Ibid., 10-13.
[471] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, July 2012. Weaver, a Michigan native, noted that his wife's family was having a number of health problems, and relocating back to Michigan would allow him and his wife to take care of her family.
[472] *Flowering of Nicodemus*, December 2012.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Angela Wetz, oral history interview. See also Wetz' introduction in *Flowering of Nicodemus*, December 2012.

Figure 47. Superintendent Angela Wetz, 2012. Files of Nicodemus NHS.

Wetz made advances in several directions during her term as Superintendent, picking up the momentum of community engagement established by her predecessor. Mark Weaver had prepared funding requests for the new wayside exhibits, one of the recommendations of the LRIP completed in September 2009, and, in the summer of 2013, Wetz announced the park had received funds for that project. Wetz worked with the Regional Land Resources staff throughout her time as Superintendent, seeking donations of right-of-way easements from Graham County and private landowners. This included a protracted series of negotiations with the Nicodemus American Legion Post, whose commander was Nicodemus NHS Maintenance Worker Robert Brogdon, regarding donation of an easement both for the wayside exhibits and in order to complete additional stabilization work at the schoolhouse. This process was complicated by the discovery that the Township Board owned a right of way to an alley on the schoolhouse property that passed directly through the building. An additional complication was posed by Brogdon himself, who was disinclined to cooperate with NPS on the donation of an easement and, by 2015, had stopped holding meetings for the dwindling membership, forestalling any dissenting opinions. Fortunately, Wetz was more successful at securing easements that allowed necessary stabilization and repair work at the St. Francis Hotel and Township Hall and secured funding for the repairs of Township Hall.

As a follow-up to the park's Mission Critical Assessment report in 2011, Wetz coordinated with the NPS Business Management Group in 2014 to develop the park's new Business Plan. Wetz began working with her small staff to follow up on the Mission Critical Assessment report and identify the park's priorities in light of the budget constraints. Working also with an intern, Wetz recalled, she helped to create:

> a really small, like, modified business plan for Nicodemus to figure out what the current staffing was and what we could afford, long-term. That was a time when, budgets were really flat or a little bit declining, so we were trying to be really intentional about where we were putting our money while I was there. . . one thing about the business planning project that we went through that was really good for the staff there was we created a set of goals for the park for the next five years, and we based where we wanted to go with how we wanted to allocate budgets and, especially – personnel is, like, your biggest cost of the budget – how

> we wanted to align that with what our goals were. And one of the things that we really wanted to do was to emphasize the education component and outreach component.[475]

When completed in 2015, the Business Plan for Nicodemus NHS provided a summary of the park's current status with regard to visitation, staffing, and budgets as a foundation for analyzing what issues lay ahead and how to plan for them. The Business Plan explained succinctly that Nicodemus is one of the National Park System's least visited parks, with an annual visitation of approximately 3,000, based on counting those who entered the visitor center and those who attended Homecoming and other special events. The numbers of visitors had shown a gradual improvement, rising from approximately 2,500 in FY 2007 to more nearly 3,500 in FY 2010 and 2012, but the relative isolation of the park and the limited offerings hampered significant growth. The quality of the visitor experience was also shown to be lacking: the 2013 Visitor Scorecard indicated that less than 60 percent of visitors came away with an understanding of the park's significance and only 84 percent were satisfied by their visit, compared to regional averages of 88 percent and 97 percent, respectively; this was despite Nicodemus NHS having an average cost per visitor and number of interactions between staff and visitors that was considerably higher than other NPS units.[476]

Like visitation, the park's budgets had remained level and low, with significant increases in the base allocations in FY 2003 to just under $400,00, and in FY 2009, when it expanded to more than $600,000 to enhance the park's interpretive program and facilities maintenance. From its peak in FY 2010 to FY 2013, however, the park saw reductions in the base allocation, including a 6 percent cut in 2013, before rebounding to approximately $625,000 in FY 2014.[477] Wetz had entered on duty at the same time that the federal budget sequestration was being enacted in early 2013. These were automatic spending cuts resulting from failure of the Congressional Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction to produce debt reduction legislation required by the Budget Control Act of 2011. The budget growth in FY 2009 and 2010, with the stagnation that followed, were reflected in the park's staff, which, in FY 2015 remained at six full-time permanent employees and one permanent part-time employee. This included a Superintendent and Administrative Assistant in the park's Administration Division, two Park Rangers and one Education Specialist in the Interpretation and Education Division, and one full-time Facility Operations Specialist and one part-time Maintenance Worker in the park's Facilities and Maintenance Division.[478]

The results of the Business Plan in 2015 were in line with Wetz's goal as Superintendent to make gains in the park's interpretation and education program. The 2015 Business Management Plan summarized Wetz's approach and mirrored the Van Alen study results from CCNY and KU in 2012: "Because physical visitation to the site is very low, Nicodemus NHS is increasingly focused on expanding visitor services beyond park boundaries."[479] In recalling the

[475] Angela Wetz, oral history interview.
[476] *Nicodemus National Historic Site 2015 Business Plan*, produced by NPS Business Management Group, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[477] Ibid., 11-12. The document provides a bar graph for the annual base allocation each year which allows for only approximate budget figures, not the actual number.
[478] Ibid., 17-19.
[479] Ibid., 10.

park staff's approach leading up to and during the planning process, Wetz explained that "one of the things that we really wanted to do was to emphasize the education component and outreach component."[480] One of the key results of this planning effort was to reorganize the park's budget to shift an unfilled Park Guide position to an Education Specialist. As a result, Education Specialist Jonathan Winskie entered on duty in 2013 and began developing educational outreach programs and curriculum guides. The park's educational mission was augmented when Wetz, as discussed in Chapter 7, secured a grant from the National Park Foundation's Ticket to Ride program. This was a series of grants to various parks that provided funding for transportation costs for school students to visit units of the National Park System. In addition, she initiated the development of a Mobile Ranger station, a trailer that was retro-fitted to serve as a traveling interpretation center, also discussed in Chapter 7. Although the Mobile Ranger station has rarely traveled out of Nicodemus, it has proved useful during the annual Homecoming celebrations when the NPS and the WNPA move their operations out of Township Hall. The trailer allows both organizations to continue offering goods and services to visitors and the community during that week. Finally, Wetz also organized the park's first social media presence, working with community volunteers to create a page for the park on Facebook, preparing posts and photographs to be shared with Nicodemus' far-flung descendants. This medium also served as the actual Homecoming celebration venue during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and has continued to share Homecoming activities with those who are unable to attend.

Period of Transition: Nicodemus Historical Society and Brown v. Board of Education NHS

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the park began renting a unit in the Villas, the residential complex built in Nicodemus in the 1970s with funding provided by HUD and administered by the Nicodemus Housing Authority, for use as administrative offices. In the summer of 2010, under Superintendent Mark Weaver, the park began renting two adjoining units for office space as well as two garages to hold supplies and maintenance equipment.[481] As Wetz recalled, "we had two apartments. So, there were, like, four bedrooms, I guess, that were offices and then the middle part, where it would have been, like, a living room, was an office on one side for the administrative person, and then, on the other side, we had the library." This arrangement allowed the park to maintain a presence in Nicodemus, and the annual rent of $15,000 helped to provide needed funding for the Nicodemus Housing Authority, a division of the Township Board.

As early as 2011, HUD cited the Nicodemus Housing Authority for non-compliance with HUD regulations. On February 5, 2015, HUD sent a letter to the Nicodemus Housing Authority with a final notice of non-compliance with the Public Housing Authority Recovery and Sustainability Action Plan of 2013, which was designed to assist, and set standards for, troubled public housing authorities. The letter from HUD in early February 2015 provided the Nicodemus Housing Authority with three options: find a replacement for the current housing manager, request approval from HUD to sell all or part of the Villas, or request that HUD release the Nicodemus Housing Authority and manage the property without public housing assistance. The Nicodemus Housing Authority quickly contacted Superintendent Wetz regarding the possibility

[480] Angela Wetz, oral history interview.
[481] Purchase request, Rent Villa Apts. 1A1B, July 7, 2010, to take effect October 1, 2010; files of Nicodemus NHS.

that NPS would be interested in purchasing the property for its use. Upon an initial consultation with the Regional Office, Wetz was reminded that NPS is not allowed to purchase real estate from governmental entities and can accept such property only by donation. The Nicodemus Housing Authority replied to an inquiry from the Regional Office that they would be willing to donate their interest and talks between NPS and the Nicodemus Housing Authority regarding this issue continued into the early spring of 2015.[482]

Consistent with the usual complications of land issues in Nicodemus, a donation of the Villas to NPS would require approval from four entities: the Nicodemus Housing Authority, which owned the buildings; Nicodemus Township, which owned the land on which the buildings were set; HUD, which had an interest in the buildings from its financial support; and NPS.[483] Although the Regional Office preferred to keep its decision-making process internal as much as possible, the Nicodemus community was fully aware of the situation, and, in late May 2015, members of the Nicodemus Historical Society hand-delivered a letter to Superintendent Wetz urging in the strongest terms that NPS not accept the Villas as a donation from the Nicodemus Housing Authority. The letter, signed by all eight members of the Historical Society's board, argued that the community members who originally supported the park's establishment in 1996 evinced the desire "to continue to be a living community developing and evolving naturally without the government/Park Service owning any property and with a major *presence* in the Historic Landmark District." Instead, the Historical Society board argued, the continuing NPS presence "has become an increasing problem over the last 20 years," as what was planned to be a temporary occupation of Township Hall had apparently become permanent in the absence of any movement toward a visitor center. At the same time, NPS had expanded its footprint at the Villas with a second apartment, which "has also infringed upon the community and restricted the potential for resident occupancy." Rather than acquiring the Villas, the board members concluded, NPS should "continue to pursue the existing potential for building a visitor center and offices outside the boundaries of the Historic Landmark District," which would allow the community to "evolve naturally, and retain its ability to operate uninhibited by the Park Service/government and within its historical traditions."[484]

Later in the spring of 2015, NPS prepared a series of alternatives in response to the impending loss of administrative office space at the Villas and influenced, in part, by the statement from the Nicodemus Historical Society. As discussed in Chapter 7 regarding ongoing plans for a new visitor center, the draft report, which was completed in late June 2015, presented nine alternatives that included a "no-action" alternative in which NPS would continue to operate as best as it could, trying to renew the leases for both Township Hall and the Villas while looking for a new visitor center location, different possibilities for locating a new visitor center that included re-purposing the AME Church, and entering into a partnership with the Nicodemus Historical Society as a way to reduce the level of NPS activity in Nicodemus. The most drastic alternative involved effectively dissolving the NPS presence in Nicodemus, maintaining only passive interpretation such as waysides and providing basic maintenance for the five historic

[482] Angela Wetz, briefing paper prepared for Midwest Regional Director, April 3, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[483] Ibid.
[484] Nicodemus Historical Society Board to Nicodemus Historic Site, May 23, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.

buildings but reducing or removing NPS staff from the community.[485] Although the report did not make any recommendations, subsequent discussions during the early summer of 2015 resulted in the decision not to pursue acquisition of the Villas. Park staff, instead, coordinated with Sherda Williams, by then Superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education NHS, and the Regional Office regarding moving out of the two apartments in the Villas by the end of September when the lease ended. The Township Board gave permission to house the park's furniture and files temporarily in Township Hall while looking for alternative storage sites, possibilities for which included mobile storage units on the grounds of the AME Church.[486]

Questions regarding how the park would be managed without a space for an administrative office in the spring and summer of 2015 were only one part of an extraordinarily challenging year. Of even greater significance to the future of the park than the loss of office space in the Villas was the sudden departure of nearly the entire park staff. In August 2015, Angela Wetz accepted a lateral transfer to begin serving as Superintendent of Fossil Butte National Monument, Wyoming. Later in the year, the park's Facility Management Specialist William Doerrer and Administrative Officer Joe Randall transferred to other parks, and Park Guide Michelle Huff accepted an offer of early retirement in late December. This left only Park Ranger Phyllis Howard and Education Specialist Jonathan Winskie as staff members for Nicodemus NHS, while the park was being managed remotely by Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams. Howard remained at Nicodemus, but Winskie relocated to Topeka where he was duty stationed at Brown v. Board of Education NHS while remaining on staff at Nicodemus NHS.

The Regional Office and Williams had two issues facing them in late 2015. In the short term, they needed to find a way to maintain the park's interpretive program. In the long term, they needed to identify a management strategy that would take into account the lack of staff, no administrative office space, and community concerns over the continuing presence of NPS. The solution to the short-term issue, as discussed at length in Chapter 7, was to collaborate with the Nicodemus Historical Society. The park was then coordinating with the Historical Society through cooperative agreements for research assistance and to conduct maintenance and stabilization work on Township Hall. In September 2015 the park and the Historical Society revised the existing cooperative agreement for work on Township Hall to include interpretive programming, and, in the summer of 2016, the Nicodemus Historical Society and NPS executed a new cooperative agreement, under which NPS transferred funds that allowed the Nicodemus Historical Society to hire and train interpretive staff.

This solution removed the immediate problem of engaging with visitors who came to Nicodemus but left open the long-term question of the best approach to managing the site. In October 2015, Williams revised the draft planning document from April of that year that outlined the options for the park without administrative space in the Villas. In the wake of losing nearly the entire staff of Nicodemus NHS, the focus of the document turned toward operating with few, if any, NPS personnel on site. After a summary of the park's history and a background on the

[485] "Nicodemus National Historic Site, Where Do We Go From Here? Analysis and Alternatives," revised draft, June 23, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[486] Arrangements for the move are outlined briefly in emails among Diane Keith, Patty Trap, and others, September 27, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.

current situation, the document turned to a discussion of demographics and location and their combined impact on visitation and operations. According to the planning document, not only do few people visit the park, only approximately 3,000 per year, but "The trend of declining local and regional population impacts future park success by further constraining the pool of potential visitors, job candidates, volunteers, educational and other partners, and donors." The small population also impacts the park's partners, "since there are so few people to serve in political and civic organizations. Often NPS managers find themselves dealing with the same person in multiple roles." The document then outlined three management scenarios. The first of these drew from the Community Stewards option as defined in the GMP and anticipated increased reliance on the Nicodemus Historical Society and the Nicodemus community for in-person visitor contact while NPS focused on non-personal contacts such as distance education and wayside exhibits. All administrative functions would be handled by another park, either Fort Larned NHS or Brown v. Board of Education NHS, which would also complete the restoration of the AME Church and continue to pursue façade and ground easements to allow stabilization of the other four buildings. The other two management alternatives described iterations of creation of a new consolidated visitor center and administrative offices, either within or outside of the National Historic Landmark district, with the current park management remaining in place.[487]

The first of these alternatives, dubbed the collaborative management approach, served as the focal point of discussions within NPS throughout much of 2016. Williams and the Regional Office continued to receive impressions that many in Nicodemus would prefer that NPS vacate Township Hall. This, combined with the lack of NPS staff as well as office space, made a division of labor between the Nicodemus Historical Society and NPS the more feasible option. A bigger point of discussion through the summer of 2016 was whether Fort Larned NHS or Brown v. Board of Education NHS was the more appropriate park to provide management oversight to Nicodemus. By the fall of 2016, the consensus was leaning toward joint management, with Fort Larned providing management and administrative services and Brown v. Board of Education providing equipment and expertise for distance learning and overseeing and mentoring Nicodemus' educational outreach.[488]

By the end of 2016, however, Brown v. Board of Education NHS was identified as "the sister park with the most compatible mission," and Superintendent Williams regained her active role in guiding Nicodemus NHS.[489] In November 2016, Superintendent Williams met with Angela Bates, executive director of the Nicodemus Historical Society, about how the "collaborative management" approach would work through the new cooperative agreement and, in December, met with the full Historical Society to discuss collaborative programming.[490] The operation of the park throughout 2017 and into 2018 generally matched the "collaborative

[487] Nicodemus National Historic Site, Where Do We Go From Here? Analysis and Alternatives," revised draft, October 2, 2015; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[488] "Management Oversight & Enhanced Outreach Strategy, Nicodemus National Historic Site," drafts dated September 29, 2016, and October 5, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also "Proposed Management Strategy and Options for Ensuring Management Oversight for Nicodemus National Historic Site: Briefing for Midwest Regional Director," June 28, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[489] "Communications Plan 2018: Nicodemus National Historic Site Management Transition," no date; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also email summarizing the decision to base administrative functions at Brown v. Board of Education NHS, Christine Powell to Cam Sholly et al., December 19, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[490] Email, Sherda Williams to Christine Powell, December 4, 2016; files of Nicodemus NHS.

management approach" as it developed in discussions through 2016. The Nicodemus Historical Society operated the visitor center through a cooperative agreement with NPS, primarily with staff that the Nicodemus Historical Society hired. Park Ranger Phyllis Howard initially remained for a time in Nicodemus and worked with the Historical Society's Community Interpreters, but, by 2018. she had relocated to Topeka, where she and Education Specialist Jonathan Winskie were duty-stationed at Brown v. Board of Education NHS. Superintendent Williams oversaw the park's administration and provided office space for Howard and Winskie, and Fort Larned NHS Facilities Management Specialist William Chapman managed a contract for the park's general maintenance. In 2019, Park Ranger Howard retired, and Education Specialist Winskie transferred away from Brown v. Board of Education NHS.[491]

Although Williams was thoroughly familiar with Nicodemus and its particular challenges, and despite the Nicodemus Historical Society providing much of the interpretive programming for the park, the workload of managing two parks was daunting. Enimini Ekong, who entered on duty as Brown v. Board of Education NHS Chief of Interpretation and Education in May 2016, recalled that Williams, his supervisor,

> was currently juggling two sites. And it was pretty well known among the team there that she was – because of how much there was required of Nicodemus – that she, oftentimes, felt like she was the Superintendent of only Nicodemus – at least from what I was getting from the site.[492]

As he settled into his role at Brown v. Board of Education NHS, Ekong recalled that he gradually came to welcome "anything that I could take off of her plate."[493] In the fall of 2016, having joined Williams on several visits to Nicodemus including the 2016 Homecoming celebration, he approached her about the possibility of serving as Site Manager of Nicodemus NHS concurrently with his work at Brown v. Board of Education NHS. By early December, Williams had raised the possibility with Deputy Regional Director Patty Trap and Regional Chief of Staff Christine Powell. Ekong was named the Acting Superintendent in October 2017, and, in January 2018, he entered on duty as the park's Site Manager.[494]

Enimini Ekong began working to build relationships with members of the Nicodemus community, attending meetings in the town when possible. With a strong background in African American history, Ekong was eager to work with the community and find ways to continue to tell its story. In the course of his meetings, though, he found himself running into the backlog of issues between the town and NPS: "I went in with, 'Oh, my gosh! The things that we could do with this story!' and learned, after the first couple of months, that I needed to repair a twenty-five-year relationship." His passion for the town's story, he continued, "got temporarily suspended for me to, literally, work on relationship-building, figuring out what they needed, and trying to, like, work back the twenty-five-year relationship." He found himself in a position of apologizing for past inaction on the part of NPS, but, in the process of learning about the

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[491] LueCreasea Horne, telephone communication with the author, January 30. 2023.
[492] Enimini Ekong, oral history interview.
[493] Ibid.
[494] Emails between Sherda Williams and Christine Powell, December 4-5, 2016, files of Nicodemus NHS; Talking Points, Nicodemus Historical Society Cooperative Agreement/Partnership, April 26, 2019, files of Nicodemus NHS. See also oral histories with Ekong and Williams.

relationship, "I wanted to make sure that – in all fairness, that I understood. And I think that was probably the most beneficial thing that I could do, because, through that process, I started finding out how the community was, in many ways, culpable for a lot of the stagnation."[495]

Despite his efforts at connecting with the community, however, they were not universally appreciated. For Angela Bates and other leaders of the Nicodemus community, Ekong was simply another new NPS face coming from outside who likely would soon move on. The nearly four-hour drive from Topeka to Nicodemus, combined with his parallel duties as Chief of Interpretation and Education at Brown v. Board of Education, presented a barrier to his taking part in community activities on a regular basis, a fact that was noted by the community. As Bates recalled of their interactions,

> We said, 'Can you come once a month?' And he was, like, 'No.' 'Can we get you to come every other month?' 'Nnn.' And maybe he did, but not for the purposes of getting together with the community and all of that. . . .And so, there's a total disconnect with the superintendent.

Ekong had ideas for improving the park and the relationship between the town and NPS, Bates recalled, when their needs were considerably more practical:

> it was like he was starting in this position, trying to help us, and, he came down here with all these ideas, 'Well, we can do this, and do, do, do, do, do.'. . .and then, I think, I'm the type of person that, I was pushing. And I was, like, "when are we going to get computers?[496]

Bates' comment was a reference to the series of complaints about lack of support that the Nicodemus Historical Society made during the term of the cooperative agreement through which the group managed the park's visitor center. The cooperative agreement was one of the key issues that defined this period of transition and unsettlement, when NPS had only one staff member in Nicodemus and the park was being managed from afar. Chapter 7 contains a more complete discussion of the cooperative agreement and its operation regarding the park's interpretive program, but the cooperative agreement was also an important component in the decisions regarding how best to manage the site. The discussions between NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society throughout spring and summer of 2017, leading to the execution of a new cooperative agreement in September, were constantly surrounded by questions of whether and, if so, to what degree NPS would ever return to Nicodemus to fully staff the park and what would then be the nature of the relationship between NPS and the community.

Meetings and discussions between NPS and members of the community, primarily through the Nicodemus Historical Society, took place throughout 2017 and 2018. In early 2017, Superintendent Williams established the goals for a meeting with the Nicodemus Historical Society to discuss the pending cooperative agreement; these included defining what "a more robust partnership" would mean for both parties, reviewing the regulatory constraints in which NPS had to operate and their impacts on what is possible, and laying out expectations for both parties. Although reports from the Nicodemus Historical Society through 2017 were positive regarding their management of the visitor center and relationship with NPS, challenges and

[495] Enimini Ekong, oral history interview.
[496] Angela Bates, oral history interview.

concerns emerged during 2018. The particular concerns regarding the operation of the visitor center are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 and included the inability to pay the Community Interpreters anything more than minimum wage with no benefits and a lack of material support such as computers. In recalling these discussions, Ekong described a degree of misunderstanding on the part of the Historical Society, that "they just never knew the breadth and depth of the NPS's work." He continued:

> in spite of all the documentation that they had to read and sign off of, their understanding was that running the site meant that they would get the NPS budget, when the Cooperative Agreement made clear that we were taking a portion of our money to help them run the programmatic and operational aspects, nothing more, nothing less, and we were going to take care of the administrative functions. And so, upon endeavoring into the Cooperative Agreement, them realizing, "Well, hold on. This is all that we're getting? This is all that we're getting to pay our people?"[497]

By early 2019, the Nicodemus Historical Society indicated a preference that the cooperative agreement not be renewed in September. In explaining their inclination not to continue with the cooperative agreement, Nicodemus Historical Society President Thomas Wellington expressed his hope that the Historical Society and NPS can "begin collectively to craft a new approach that will better meet the needs of this living community and National Historic Site, as well as the expectations of the larger community of visitors that travel hours to visit this unit of the National Park Service."[498] In the wake of the Nicodemus Historical Society's letter in February 2019 announcing their intent, NPS staff members and Nicodemus community members began preparations to discuss ideas as to what a future relationship might look like, a recognition that the proposed collaborative approach had to be realigned. In April, the Nicodemus Township Board met, by then under the leadership of JohnElla Holmes, a Nicodemus descendant, Executive Director of the Kansas Black Farmers Association, and retired Instructor at Kansas State University, to discuss possible options and generate questions for NPS.[499] The Township Board forwarded a list of questions to determine what would happen if the Historical Society decided to terminate the cooperative agreement and calling upon the Historical Society and NPS to work together to find a new solution. Holmes, in her additional role as Township Trustee, added a note that the Township Board was disappointed "with programming, displays, signage, and the salaries of the CIs [Community Interpreters]." After nearly twenty-three years, she concluded, "the National Park Service could do better in their support in those areas." At the same time, she reaffirmed her support for Superintendents Ekong and Williams, noting that both had worked very well with the town.[500]

Holmes' comments were in preparation for an important meeting between representatives from Nicodemus, including from the township and the Historical Society, and from NPS, including Ekong, Williams, Assistant Regional Director Clara Wooden, and Regional Contract Specialist Noël Miller, on April 17, 2019 (Figure 48). The most important conclusion from this meeting was the decision on both sides to terminate the cooperative agreement and that NPS

[497] Enimini Ekong, oral history interview.
[498] Thomas Wellington, II to Enimini Ekong, Superintendent, February 15, 2019; files of Nicodemus NHS.
[499] JohnElla Holmes is also the mother of Park Ranger LueCreasea Horne.
[500] Email, JohnElla Holmes to Enimini Ekong et al., April 15, 2019; files of Nicodemus NHS.

would start planning to redevelop an on-site presence, including staffing. For its part, the Historical Society agreed to prepare a plan to continue managing the visitor center until 2020 "to allow for NPS staggered re-engagement." As a part of this plan, Wooden announced that the Regional Office would send a Regional Recruiter to the area to conduct a federal resume workshop as a way to encourage local applicants. The meeting also included discussions of a number of outstanding issues, including the delay in proceeding with the wayside exhibits, which was held up by difficulties in securing right of way easements, challenges in securing an easement that would allow repairs to the St. Francis Hotel to begin, and assistance from the Township Board with locating a willing donor within the town for a potential visitor center.[501]

Figure 48. Midwest Regional Deputy Director Clara Wooden, 2020. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

At this time, also, Ekong instituted a series of "deliverable meetings," designed to keep both NPS and the Nicodemus Historical Society on track with specific tasks during the transition period leading to full NPS operation of the site. The existing cooperating agreement was in force even though NPS and the Historical Society had agreed to work toward its termination, and Ekong worked with Regional Contract Specialist Noël Miller "to adjust the FY19 and FY20 deliverables to something achievable" by the Historical Society.[502] Ekong provided an oral history interview in September 2020, just as his successor was preparing to enter on duty. As he recalled of his final sixteen months as Nicodemus NHS Superintendent:

> as of April of 2019, I believe, we had monthly meetings with stakeholders to figure out, "What is it that we need to do by the end of fiscal year '20?" which just passed, and, "What does it look like for us to transition beyond that whenever the Park Service comes back and re-establishes its physical presence?" And so, we talked through, month by month, "Hey, did you talk to the County Commissioner?" "Hey, what are the thoughts of a Visitor Center?" "Okay, I'm

[501] Email, Enimini Ekong to Ashley Adams et al., April 17, 2019; files of Nicodemus NHS. See also "Talking Points: Nicodemus Historical Society Cooperative Agreement/Partnership, 4/26/2019," files of Nicodemus NHS. As noted in Chapter 7, NPS installed the wayside exhibits in 2019 using a non-permanent method that did not require the acquisition of right of way easements. See also Clara Wooden, oral history interview,

[502] "Nicodemus National Historic Site—Operations and Facilities Strategy—2019," files of Nicodemus NHS.

> going to talk to the Lands folks." "Hey, this is the information I got from the Lands folks. Did you-all check on this?" And so, there was that collaboration that's been maintained, and, literally, tomorrow is the one for the new year. And that will be my, kind of, ceremonial passing of the baton.[503]

Ekong, together with Superintendent Williams, also worked with colleagues in the Regional Office throughout the rest of 2019 and into 2020 to plan for a re-engagement with Nicodemus. This required extensive consultations with Regional staff regarding a budget for the site, together with hiring staff. In 2019, NPS prepared a strategy for re-engagement focused on re-establishing visitor services and on-site staff. The strategy contained five components, all of which required cooperation by Nicodemus residents:

- Clarifying the status of the park's partners, the Nicodemus Historical Society and WNPA, for the sale of items in an educational bookstore and for the use of museum objects and photographs;
- Acquiring land for use as a visitor center with office space;
- Beginning planning for construction of a visitor center once land was acquired and, simultaneously, beginning planning for possible staff housing;
- Identifying the level of staffing required, how the interpretive program will function with this new staff and with the new visitor center, what the infrastructure needs are, such as information technology and security, and what budget is needed to support them;
- Completing the current ongoing projects, including restoration of the AME Church, installation of the wayside exhibits, stabilization of the First Baptist Church, and restoration of the Fletcher/Switzer residence.[504]

By June 2019, with the planning measures under way, NPS committed to re-establishing its uniformed staff in Nicodemus by October 2020.[505] In July 2020, the Regional Office announced that Frank J. Torres had been hired to serve as the park's new Superintendent (Figure 49). Torres was then serving as Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona, and had previously served as Chief of Interpretation at San Juan National Historic Site, Puerto Rico and Supervisory Park Ranger at Oklahoma City National Memorial, Oklahoma and Coronado National Memorial, Arizona. Torres entered on duty on September 21, 2020, as the only staff member of Nicodemus NHS and reported to Superintendent Williams at Brown v. Board of Education NHS. Prior to his arrival, Township Board Trustee JohnElla Holmes arranged with Superintendent Williams to lease to NPS a "tiny home" which she had built on her property across the street to the east of Township Hall, for use as an administrative office (Figure 50).

Although Torres was the only NPS personnel on site, Nicodemus NHS Administrative Assistant Aisha Smith is duty-stationed at Brown v. Board of Education NHS in Topeka and provides administrative support for the park. Community Interpreter LueCreasea Horne continued to provide visitor contact services at Township Hall under her contract with the

[503] Enimini Ekong oral history interview.
[504] "Nicodemus National Historic Site—Operations and Facilities Strategy—2019," files of Nicodemus NHS.
[505] "Partnership (NICO Historical Society/NICO Township Board/NPS/MWR Leadership) Meeting Agenda, June 12, 2019," files of Nicodemus NHS.

Figure 49. Superintendent Frank Torres. NPS photograph.

Figure 50. "Tiny Home" adjacent to home of JohnElla Holmes, currently the administrative office for Nicodemus NHS, 2021.

Nicodemus Historical Society. One of Torres' first actions as Superintendent was to hire her as the park's Education Specialist, and she entered on duty with the National Park Service in January 2021.[506] In the summer of 2021, Torres hired Brendan Oates as Park Ranger. Oates's background was as a naturalist, working previously as an interpretive ranger at Grand Canyon National Park before transferring to Nicodemus. Oates remained at Nicodemus until August 2022. In September 2022, Horne was promoted to Park Ranger.

[506] LueCreasea Horne, telephone communication with the author, January 30, 2023.

The park's new wayside exhibits were installed on their new temporary bases by the time Torres arrived at Nicodemus. The major project Torres inherited in September 2020 was rehabilitation of the AME Church. As discussed in Chapter 4, the park received funding in 2017 for the AME Church project and hired Anderson Hallas Architects, PC for the work. Extensive discussions among Regional Office staff regarding how to reconstruct the building's north wall continued throughout late 2017 and into 2018, allowing Regional architects to coordinate with Anderson Hallas Architects on the final drawings in 2019. Work began in late 2019, continued through the COVID pandemic of 2020, and was completed in February 2021, with the restored interior with temporary interpretive panels completed that summer. This prompted an opening celebration that took place during the 2021 Homecoming celebration on Sunday, July 31. Kansas Governor Laura Kelly headlined the program, which also included officials from the Regional Office and Nicodemus residents and the donation of a $10,000 grant from the 400 Years of African American History Commission to the Nicodemus Historical Society to support the Historical Society's museum.[507] Throughout his tenure, Torres also supported the Regional Office in overseeing acquisition of land for the new visitor center after the Trust for Public Land acquired the property from the Township Board. This donation was completed in October 2022. Torres also coordinated the park's twenty-five-year anniversary commemoration on November 13, 2021, which was highlighted by a panel discussion on the park's history and future that included Angela Bates, Regional Director Herbert Frost, retired Deputy Regional Director Clara Wooden, and retired Fort Larned NHS Chief Ranger Felix Revello.[508]

In early 2022, a series of administrative shifts within the Midwest Region was precipitated by the recent retirement of two key Superintendents. On September 20, 2021, Homestead National Historical Park Superintendent Mark Engler retired, followed, on December 31, by Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams. The Superintendent of Fort Scott NHS, Kansas, Betty Boyko, who, in that capacity also oversaw Fort Larned NHS, was appointed Superintendent of Homestead National Historical Park.[509] Following Boyko's transfer, Fort Larned NHS was uncoupled from Fort Scott NHS, each of which were scheduled to have its own Superintendent. James H. Williams, formerly Curator of the South Florida Collections Management Center, was named Acting Superintendent of Brown v. Board of Education NHS in January 2022, and as Superintendent in April 2022. Upon James Williams' appointment as Acting Superintendent, Nicodemus NHS was uncoupled from Brown v. Board of Education NHS and placed under the administration of Fort Larned NHS. In May 2022, Kevin Eads, formerly Superintendent of Pea Ridge National Military Park, Arkansas, was appointed Superintendent of Fort Larned NHS and entered on duty at the end of June 2022.

On December 31, 2022, Torres retired after thirty-three years with NPS, including just over two years at Nicodemus, to return to his family in New Mexico. His retirement left the park again without a Superintendent after a short tenure, a situation to which Nicodemus' leaders have grown accustomed, though frustrated.[510] Particularly with so few staff to maintain an institutional

[507] Malcolm Carter, "Nicodemus Celebrates 143rd Homecoming with New Museum Dedication," *The Community Voice*, August 3, 2021; clipping in files of Nicodemus NHS.
[508] The author was also an invited speaker for the panel discussion.
[509] Boyko had earlier served as Homestead National Historical Park Administrative Officer.
[510] As this administrative history was being prepared for publication, Midwest Regional Director Bert Frost announced the appointment of Cassie Branstetter as Superintendent of Nicodemus NHS. Branstetter, who will enter

memory, the rapid turnover of Superintendents creates a distinct loss of continuity that falls to community members to repair, while it also signals to the community a certain lack of commitment by NPS. Although the situation is understandable—the remote and rural setting of Nicodemus, with so few communities nearby and no amenities within, combined with the very low visitation and limited visitor facilities, is a grave challenge to recruiting seasoned NPS Superintendents—it has, nevertheless, added fuel to the distrust already felt by many residents toward representatives of the federal government. In his recent recollections, however, former Nicodemus NHS Superintendent Enimini Ekong acknowledged the underlying strength of the relationship between Nicodemus residents and NPS manifested during the period of transition from 2017 to 2020:

> I have had the opportunity to know of quite a few genesis creations of our National Parks, and some of the missteps that we made with those communities, so much so that they don't want to engage with us…. They're just, like, "Just do what you've already done." Right? And the – this experiment that we did with the Nicodemus National Historic Site to, literally, steward back to the community their park, provide them with the resources and the continued guidance, holding their hand through the process only for them to find out, "The Park Service can do this better than we can," and then to invite us back, that's unheard of.[511]

Ekong's recollections also speak to the generosity of the Nicodemus Historical Society in particular, and the Nicodemus community generally, inviting NPS to their town to help tell their story. With a new visitor center apparently on the way, this generosity offers hope that a new Superintendent will manifest the renewed spirit of cooperation between NPS and the extended, historic, community of Nicodemus.

on duty in July 2023, comes to Nicodemus from her position as Lead Interpreter at Buffalo National River, Arkansas.

[511] Enimini Ekong, oral history interview.

Conclusion

As NPS and residents of Nicodemus have proclaimed repeatedly for more than two decades, the most important aspect of Nicodemus NHS is that the park is part of a living community whose roots stretch back to the 1870s when formerly enslaved persons from Kentucky and Topeka, Kansas, traveled to the high plains to create a new town. A dwindling number of descendants of these original settlers continue to live in the 161.5-acre town, and a growing number of descendants, now into the seventh and eighth generations, return there in early August of every year to celebrate their community's history and continuity. The National Park Service has been part of the community since the park was authorized in late 1996, though relations have waxed and waned as residents and NPS personnel struggled to determine just how the park can be part of the community without altering the community's fundamental nature. This ongoing challenge of living in a community with residents and with descendants scattered throughout the nation is the essential theme of this administrative history of Nicodemus NHS.

The National Park System contains hundreds of units located in towns and cities across the United States, many of them closely connected to their communities. It is hard to consider President Harry S Truman, for example, without calling to mind his home town, Independence, Missouri, location of the Harry S Truman NHS; it is nearly impossible to separate Tuskegee Institute NHS from the surrounding city of Tuskegee, Alabama; the small village of Seneca Falls, NY, site of the first organized women's rights conference, is an important part of the interpretation of the Women's Rights National Historical Park; and Lowell National Historical Park is thoroughly entwined with the City of Lowell, Massachusetts. In all these places, NPS is expected to be a good neighbor, and each situation provides its own challenges: how the park handles traffic and parking, how much support NPS should provide for planning and zoning issues regarding historic properties, the degree to which the park supports the local economy, whether and where to build a visitor center, coordination with local tourism promotion, and more. The National Park Service, therefore, has a deep well of experience of interacting with local communities throughout the nation. Even so, amid these many examples of connections between NPS and the scores of cities and towns where it manages parks large and small, Nicodemus has several characteristics which make it distinct.

One of the distinctive aspects of Nicodemus is its size. Although many hundreds of descendants are scattered throughout the nation and return there every summer, fewer than twenty residents live in the town year-round as of 2020. As noted in Chapter 8, this means that the few individuals who live there take on multiple roles in the community's governance, making relationships complicated and the decision-making process decidedly personal and informal. The miniscule population also eliminates the possibility of community infrastructure and amenities. Combined with the remote setting of Nicodemus, a dozen miles east of Hill City (population 1,394 in 2020) and twenty miles west of Stockton (population 1,380 in 2021), the town's small population has two implications for NPS: first, there is little reason for seasoned staff to want to relocate to Nicodemus NHS. In Nicodemus, they find few opportunities for housing nearby and must, necessarily, accept the relative isolation, lack of neighbors, lack of amenities such as gas stations and grocery stores, and, for staff with school-aged children, lack of a local school and playmates. Secondly, complicating this situation, any increase in staff at Nicodemus NHS has the

potential to disrupt the historical nature of the community, which remains occupied almost entirely by descendants of the original settlers.

A second aspect that makes Nicodemus distinctive among the many communities where National Park System units are located is that there is no part of Nicodemus that is not part of the story being interpreted by NPS. This is due to the small size of the town as well as its particular history; the existence of Nicodemus as a Western post-Civil War African American town and its continuity through time to the present is the vital story that NPS is interpreting through Nicodemus NHS. The National Park Service is not simply one component in a larger community with a diverse population and local economic and political issues that occasionally interact with the park. This identification of the entirety of the town of Nicodemus, with its history, traditions, residents, buildings, and landscape, creates unique challenges and opportunities for NPS and adds justification for seeing the town as a Traditional Cultural Property.

A third unique aspect of Nicodemus relative to other communities is the intense and deeply personal connection between the place—that particular parcel with its landforms, fields, and buildings—and the descendants of the original settlers, only some of whom live there. This connection between the extended community and this remote spot on the high plains of west Kansas has existed through time to the present, a tradition that started in the late 1870s, when early settlers valued the idea and the community as an aspiration but needed to find work elsewhere. The connection is manifested particularly in Homecoming, celebrated every year in August since 1887, surviving even the COVID year of 2020, when the celebration was held remotely on the internet. In addition to making the story of Nicodemus a unique and fascinating one to interpret to the visiting public, though, this connection on a deep and personal level calls forth devotion on the part of the descendants that inspires a need to have a role in telling the story, a process of sharing that many in the National Park Service find difficult to accommodate.

These unique aspects of the community of Nicodemus and its residents in relation to NPS have combined with a traditional spirit of independence, marked in particular by devotion to land ownership, to create a challenging situation within which NPS staff have attempted to manage the National Historic Site. Many of the town's residents and descendants held concerns about NPS' presence in Nicodemus since the establishment of the park in 1996, some of them justified but others contradictory and unrealistic. A common complaint among many in Nicodemus, for example, was that NPS failed to repair the buildings that constitute the park. However, the tradition of independence and the nature of property transactions in Nicodemus over generations made it impossible for NPS to acquire the legal interest in the buildings that would allow it legally to expend public funds for their repair, an example of the community desire for independence coming into conflict with a need and desire for support.

The early NPS staff who worked with the community on the GMP in the late 1990s and early 2000s were, for the most part, determined that NPS should maintain a light hand in Nicodemus, recognizing the community's interest in telling its own story. As it developed from 1997 into the early 2000s, this entailed working collaboratively with the community through an approach identified as "joint stewardship." When completed in 2003, the GMP included this approach as the preferred alternative, and subsequent Superintendents sought to find ways to implement it with varying success. These attempts have taken several forms. On an informal

basis, they included collaboration on archeological and oral history research projects; a decision not to create an NPS collection of historic manuscripts, photographs, and artifacts in deference to the collection already established by the Nicodemus Historical Society and curated at Kansas State University; and willingness to invite the active participation of Nicodemus residents in the development process for the Long-Range Interpretive Plan. There have also been formal collaborations, primarily through cooperative agreements with the Nicodemus Historical Society. The most notable of these were from 2016 to 2020, under which the Historical Society operated the park's visitor contact station, but a separate agreement allowed the Historical Society to be compensated for providing much of the content for the park's new wayside exhibits installed by the National Park Service in 2019.

These efforts at joint stewardship have had uneven results. The informal collaborations have often proved more effective than the formal cooperative agreements. The principal cooperative agreements from 2016 to 2020 involving the park's visitor center operations demonstrates the uneven nature of the relationship. The Nicodemus Historical Society provided an invaluable service to keep the park's visitor services in operation when nearly all park staff left for other opportunities within NPS or retired, but the process was fraught with difficulties and disappointments for both the Nicodemus Historical Society and NPS. These difficulties reinforced the dissenting voices within NPS regarding the joint stewardship approach. Some, such as Midwest Regional Chief of Interpretation Tom Richter and Assistant Intermountain Regional Director for Workforce Enhancement William Gwaltney, expressed concerns that, by not exerting a stronger influence, NPS leaders did a disservice to the community and failed to provide the interpretive direction that was needed to fully tell the community's story. Others, such as Midwest Region Historian Jill York O'Bright, an unnamed reviewer in the Midwest Regional Office during discussions about the GMP in the early 2000s, and former Nicodemus NHS Superintendent Enimini Ekong in his recent recollections, expressed concern about relying on the community's leadership when it's long-term sustainability is uncertain, given the aging and dwindling population.[512]

Although the story in this administrative history of Nicodemus NHS is often not a cheerful and uplifting one, describing administrative challenges and frequently uneasy relationships, there are signs of hope for the future. In the four years leading up to the finalization of this project, the park saw the accomplishment of three major advances. First, the park's new series of wayside exhibits were completed in 2019. Although they are mounted on temporary bases due to the inability to secure the needed right-of-way easements for permanent installation, they are done well and provide excellent passive interpretation for visitors at a time when opportunities for active interpretation are limited. Second, the park completed the rehabilitation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2021 and held a formal opening of the building in August of that year. The only one of the park's five buildings owned by NPS, it is also one of the town's earliest buildings and, in accordance with the GMP, serves as a spiritual

[512] Questions from Jill York O'Bright and the unnamed Regional Office reviewer of the revised draft GMP regarding the longevity of the community as it exists now are included in the discussion about the GMP in Chapter 3. In his oral history interview for this Administrative History, Ekong opined that "the challenge really is that the end of the oral history is inevitable, but there hasn't been any kind of strategic framework to insure that – beyond Angela Bates and everything that she's curating, that there is a succession plan, that there is anyone or a group of people who are adamant about preserving it."

place where visitors can enter a space of peace and contemplation in recognition of the faith that sustained many of the town's original settlers in the face of daunting obstacles. It also affords an additional interpretive space and an opportunity for visitors to experience another of the five buildings that constitute the park in addition to Township Hall, where the temporary visitor contact station for Nicodemus NHS is currently located.

Finally, in October 2022, the park accepted the donation of land within the town site to be used as a new administrative facility with a visitor contact area. The magnitude of this advance, in the context of the relationship between NPS and the community, is difficult to overstate. The challenges in acquiring land in Nicodemus, particularly by a federal agency, are among the most persistent obstacles to fully implementing the Congressional authorization of Nicodemus NHS. A combination of convoluted and unclear titles, a longstanding cultural association of land ownership with independence, and a distrust of the federal government, has hobbled even the occasionally modest efforts of NPS to develop the park. At the same time, the continuing presence of NPS in Township Hall, for what was meant as a temporary solution to the need for a visitor contact station, has been a thorn in the side of the community's residents since the lease was first signed in 1998. The successful acquisition of the one-acre parcel near School District No.1 shows the enduring strengths of the park: planning efforts begun by the Superintendent in 2010 with few hopes for accomplishment made possible swift action on the acquisition when it was made available nearly a decade later. Members of the Township Board recognized the fundamental need to cooperate with NPS despite frequent disagreements and disappointments, and public and private entities throughout the nation recognized the historical significance of Nicodemus and provided financial and logistical support to facilitate the acquisition.

There are inherent difficulties to operating a unit of the National Park System in Nicodemus: a remote location with few amenities and few visitors that makes recruiting staff willing to remain and establish continuity gravely problematic, and funding cycles that extend years and test the willingness of the park and the Regional Office to maintain the necessary focus, given this lack of continuity. These will undoubtedly remain for the foreseeable future. The process of designing, funding, and constructing the new administrative facility, and particularly its interpretive exhibits, will doubtless entail frustrations and disagreements as similar efforts have in the past. The process of acquiring the land, however, in which the residents of Nicodemus broke with precedent and conveyed land to an agency of the federal government, provides a strong sign of generosity and a spirit of cooperation. It also demonstrates that NPS and the descendants of Nicodemus's original settlers can live together in community and work toward telling this vital American story to all who visit, providing a strong foundation for hope for the future.

Bibliography

Note on Sources

This Administrative History of Nicodemus NHS relied primarily on records in the park's central files. These records were in a period of transition that lasted through the process of researching and writing this administrative history. Initial research was conducted in June 2021, principally at Brown v. Board of Education NHS in Topeka, Kansas, which had served as the mentoring park for Nicodemus NHS since 2012. Portions of these files had been incorporated into Brown v. Board of Education NHS' administrative files and were organized by standard NPS nomenclature. Records located in these files are cited in this document as "files of Nicodemus NHS," followed by the file category. Other records were located at Brown v. Board of Education NHS that had not been organized according to the standard NPS nomenclature but were, instead, simply individual folders in boxes. These records are cited in this document simply as "files of Nicodemus NHS," with no file category attribution.

A second round of research was conducted in September 2022. By this time, most of the park's administrative files had been transferred to the Independence Multi-Park Facility, a large curatorial storage facility located near Independence and managed by the curatorial staff of Harry S Truman NHS, Missouri. These files had been accessioned and cataloged by the time of the second round of research and are cited in this document as "Nicodemus NHS Collection, Acc. No. 22, Catalog no. 20," followed by the particular box number. The curatorial staff at Harry S Truman NHS, led by Chief Curator Kristen Stalling and supported by Superintendent Carol Dage, were extraordinarily helpful in making this research possible, convenient, and enjoyable.

During this second round of research, the author also visited the new administrative office of Nicodemus NHS. Former Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams, before her retirement, had gathered the files pertaining to Nicodemus NHS during her tenure at Brown v. Board of Education from 2015 to 2021 and shipped them to Nicodemus NHS Superintendent Frank Torres. Superintendent Torres graciously allowed full use of the administrative office while reviewing this remarkably valuable collection of records which documented the period of turmoil and transition from late 2015 to the arrival of Superintendent Torres in September 2020. Because they have not been cataloged, these records are identified in footnotes as "files of Nicodemus NHS." The final, and vital, chapter of this administrative history simply would not have been possible without these records, and it is impossible to overstate my gratitude to Superintendent Williams for making sure that they were shipped to Nicodemus and to Superintendent Torres for making them available to me.

In addition to the park's files, the Denver Service Center maintains records pertaining to the studies that have been conducted at the park. These files were made available to us through the Electronic Technical Information Center (eTIC).

Oral histories proved vital to the completion of this Administrative History. The current research project included conducting interviews with twenty former and current park staff members,

members of the Nicodemus community, current and former staff members with the Midwest and Intermountain Regional Offices, and others who worked with Nicodemus as a community and as a park. As discussed in the Introduction, many of these interviews were conducted remotely, either by telephone or video conferencing, due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic during the initial research phase of this project. These interviews provided an enormous amount of information and perspectives that would otherwise have been lost and have greatly enriched this Administrative History.

The following secondary sources and reports provided additional background and context for the discussion of Nicodemus NHS.

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Appendix 1: Legislation

AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Public Law 104–333
104th Congress

An Act

To provide for the administration of certain Presidio properties at minimal cost to the Federal taxpayer, and for other purposes.

Nov. 12, 1996
[H.R. 4236]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996.
16 USC 1 note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.

This Act may be cited as the "Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996".

Sec. 1. Short title and table of contents.

DIVISION I

TITLE I—THE PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO

Sec. 101. Findings.
Sec. 102. Authority and responsibility of the Secretary of the Interior.
Sec. 103. Establishment of the Presidio Trust.
Sec. 104. Duties and authorities of the Trust.
Sec. 105. Limitations on funding.
Sec. 106. General Accounting Office study.

TITLE II—BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS AND CONVEYANCES

Sec. 201. Yucca House National Monument boundary adjustment.
Sec. 202. Zion National Park boundary adjustment.
Sec. 203. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore boundary adjustment.
Sec. 204. Independence National Historical Park boundary adjustment.
Sec. 205. Craters of the Moon National Monument boundary adjustment.
Sec. 206. Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument boundary adjustment.
Sec. 207. Wupatki National Monument boundary adjustment.
Sec. 208. Walnut Canyon National Monument boundary modification.
Sec. 209. Butte County, California land conveyance.
Sec. 210. Taos Pueblo land transfer.
Sec. 211. Colonial National Historical Park.
Sec. 212. Cuprum, Idaho relief.
Sec. 213. Relinquishment of interest.
Sec. 214. Modoc National Forest.
Sec. 215. Conveyance to City of Sumpter, Oregon.
Sec. 216. Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.
Sec. 217. Alpine School District.
Sec. 218. Merced Irrigation District land exchange.
Sec. 219. Father Aull site transfer.
Sec. 220. Coastal Barrier Resources System.
Sec. 221. Conveyance to Del Norte County Unified School District.

TITLE III—EXCHANGES

Sec. 301. Targhee National Forest land exchange.
Sec. 302. Anaktuvuk Pass land exchange.
Sec. 303. Alaska Peninsula subsurface consolidation.
Sec. 304. Snowbasin Land Exchange Act.
Sec. 305. Arkansas and Oklahoma land exchange.
Sec. 306. Big Thicket National Preserve.
Sec. 307. Lost Creek land exchange.
Sec. 308. Cleveland National Forest land exchange.

Sec. 309. Sand Hollow land exchange.
Sec. 310. Bureau of Land Management authorization for fiscal years 1997 through 2002.
Sec. 311. Kenai Natives Association land exchange.

TITLE IV—RIVERS AND TRAILS

Sec. 401. Rio Puerco watershed.
Sec. 402. Old Spanish Trail.
Sec. 403. Great Western Scenic Trail.
Sec. 404. Hanford Reach Preservation.
Sec. 405. Lamprey Wild and Scenic River.
Sec. 406. West Virginia National Rivers Amendments of 1996.
Sec. 407. Technical amendment to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.
Sec. 408. Protection of North St. Vrain Creek, Colorado.

TITLE V—HISTORIC AREAS AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Sec. 501. The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail.
Sec. 502. Vancouver National Historic Reserve.
Sec. 503. Extension of Kaloko-Honokohau Advisory Commission.
Sec. 504. Amendment to Boston National Historic Park Act.
Sec. 505. Women's Rights National Historic Park.
Sec. 506. Black Patriots Memorial Extention.
Sec. 507. Historically black colleges and universities historic building restoration and preservation.
Sec. 508. Memorial to Martin Luther King, Jr.
Sec. 509. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation reauthorization.
Sec. 510. Great Falls Historic District, New Jersey.
Sec. 511. New Bedford National Historic Landmark District.
Sec. 512. Nicodemus National Historic Site.
Sec. 513. Unalaska.
Sec. 514. Japanese American Patriotism Memorial.
Sec. 515. Manzanar National Historic Site.
Sec. 516. Recognition and designation of the AIDS Memorial Grove as national memorial.

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Sec. 602. Corinth, Mississippi, Battlefield Act.
Sec. 603. Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Historic Preservation Study.
Sec. 604. American battlefield protection program.
Sec. 605. Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Parks.
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Sec. 812. Prohibition on certain transfers of national forest lands.
Sec. 813. Grand Lake Cemetery.
Sec. 814. National Park Service administrative reform.
Sec. 815. William B. Smullin Visitor Center.
Sec. 816. Calumet Ecological Park.
Sec. 817. Acquisition of certain property on Santa Cruz Island.
Sec. 818. National Park Agreements.

SEC. 512. NICODEMUS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE. 16 USC 461 note.

(a) FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.—

(1) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

(A) the town of Nicodemus, in Kansas, has national significance as the only remaining western town established by African-Americans during the Reconstruction period following the Civil War;

(B) the town of Nicodemus is symbolic of the pioneer spirit of Afican-Americans who dared to leave the only region they had been familiar with to seek personal freedom and the opportunity to develop their talents and capabilities; and

(C) the town of Nicodemus continues to be a valuable African-American community.

(2) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this section are—

(A) to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations, the remaining structures and locations that represent the history (including the settlement and growth) of the town of Nicodemus, Kansas; and

(B) to interpret the historical role of the town of Nicodemus in the Reconstruction period in the context of the experience of westward expansion in the United States.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) HISTORIC SITE.—The term "historic site" means the Nicodemus National Historic Site established by subsection (c).

(2) SECRETARY.—The term "Secretary" means the Secretary of the Interior.

(c) ESTABLISHMENT OF NICODEMUS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established the Nicodemus National Historic Site in Nicodemus, Kansas.

(2) DESCRIPTION.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The historic site shall consist of the first Baptist Church, the St. Francis Hotel, the Nicodemus School District Number 1, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Township Hall located within the approximately 161.35 acres designated as the Nicodemus National Landmark in the Township of Nicodemus, Graham County, Kansas, as registered on the National Register of Historic Places pursuant to section 101 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470a), and depicted on a map entitled "Nicodemus National Historic Site", numbered 80,000 and dated August 1994.

(B) MAP AND BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION.—The map referred to in subparagraph (A) and accompanying boundary description shall be on file and available for public inspection in the office of the Director of the National Park Service and any other office of the National Park Service that the Secretary determines to be an appropriate location for filing the map and boundary description.

(d) ADMINISTRATION OF THE HISTORIC SITE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall administer the historic site in accordance with this section and the provisions of law generally applicable to units of the National Park System, including the Act entitled "An Act to establish a National

Park Service, and for other purposes", approved August 25, 1916 (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq.), and the Act of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666, chapter 593; 16 U.S.C. 461 et seq.).

(2) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—To further the purposes of this section, the Secretary may enter into a cooperative agreement with any interested individual, public or private agency, organization, or institution.

(3) TECHNICAL AND PRESERVATION ASSISTANCE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may provide to any eligible person described in subparagraph (B) technical assistance for the preservation of historic structures of, the maintenance of the cultural landscape of, and local preservation planning for, the historic site.

(B) ELIGIBLE PERSONS.—The eligible persons described in this subparagraph are—

(i) an owner of real property within the boundary of the historic site, as described in subsection (c)(2); and

(ii) any interested individual, agency, organization, or institution that has entered into an agreement with the Secretary pursuant to paragraph (2).

(e) ACQUISITION OF REAL PROPERTY.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (2), the Secretary is authorized to acquire by donation, exchange, or purchase with funds made available by donation or appropriation, such lands or interests in lands as may be necessary to allow for the interpretation, preservation, or restoration of the First Baptist Church, the St. Francis Hotel, the Nicodemus School District Number 1, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, or the Township Hall, as described in subsection (c)(2)(A), or any combination thereof.

(2) LIMITATIONS.—

(A) ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY OWNED BY THE STATE OF KANSAS.—Real property that is owned by the State of Kansas or a political subdivision of the State of Kansas that is acquired pursuant to paragraph (1) may only be acquired by donation.

(B) CONSENT OF OWNER REQUIRED.—No real property may be acquired under this subsection without the consent of the owner of the real property.

(f) GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than the last day of the third full fiscal year beginning after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall, in consultation with the officials described in paragraph (2), prepare a general management plan for the historic site.

(2) CONSULTATION.—In preparing the general management plan, the Secretary shall consult with an appropriate official of each of the following:

(A) The Nicodemus Historical Society.

(B) The Kansas Historical Society.

(C) Appropriate political subdivisions of the State of Kansas that have jurisdiction over all or a portion of the historic site.

(3) SUBMISSION OF PLAN TO CONGRESS.—Upon the completion of the general management plan, the Secretary shall submit a copy of the plan to the Committee on Energy and

Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Resources of the House of Representatives.

(g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Department of the Interior such sums as are necessary to carry out this section.

SEC. 513. UNALASKA.

Aleutian World War II National Historic Areas Act of 1996. 16 USC 461 note.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This section may be cited as the "Aleutian World War II National Historic Areas Act of 1996".

(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to designate and preserve the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area within lands owned by the Ounalaska Corporation on the island of Amaknak, Alaska and to provide for the interpretation, for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations, of the unique and significant circumstances involving the history of the Aleut people, and the role of the Aleut people and the Aleutian Islands in the defense of the United States in World War II.

(c) BOUNDARIES.—The Aleutian World War II National Historic Area whall be comprised of areas on Amaknak Island depicted on the map entitled "Aleutian World War II National Historic Area".

(d) TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—Nothing in this section shall—

(1) authorize the conveyance of lands between the Ounalaska Corporation and the United States Department of the Interior, nor remove land or structures appurtenant to the land from the exclusive control of the Ounalaska Corporation; or

(2) provide authority for the Department of the Interior to assume the duties associated with the daily operation for the historic area or any of its facilities or structures.

(e) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary of the Interior may award grants and provide technical assistance to the Ounalaska Corporation and the City of Unalaska to assist with the planning, development, and historic preservation from any program funds authorized by law for technical assistance, land use planning or historic preservation.

SEC. 514. JAPANESE AMERICAN PATRIOTISM MEMORIAL.

40 USC 193a note, 1003 note.

(a) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this section—

(1) to assist in the effort to timely establish within the District of Columbia a national memorial to Japanese American patriotism in World War II; and

(2) to improve management of certain parcels of Federal real property located within the District of Columbia,

by the transferring jurisdiction over such parcels to the Architect of the Capitol, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Government of the District of Columbia.

(b) TRANSFERS OF JURISDICTION.—

Effective date.

(1) IN GENERAL.—Effective on the date of the enactment of this Act and notwithstanding any other provision of law, jurisdiction over the parcels of Federal real property described in paragraph (2) is transferred without additional consideration as provided by paragraph (2).

(2) SPECIFIC TRANSFERS.—

(A) TRANSFERS TO SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Jurisdiction over the following parcels is transferred to the Secretary of the Interior:

Appendix 2: Budgets

Nicodemus NHS: Budgets

Fiscal Year	Base/ONPS	Cyclical/ Donations/ One-time	Line-Item Construction	Total
1998	?			
1999	?			
2000	300,000			300,000
2001	?			
2002	277,223			
2003	353,845[513]			
2004	339,832[514]			
2005	321,356	161,270[515]		482,626
2006	341,999	10,610[516]		352,609
2007	349,316	55,963[517]		405,279
2008	346,320[518]			
2009	540,723[519]			
2010	c. 680,000	c. 110,000[520]		c. 790,000
2011	c. 670,000	c. 5,000[521]		c. 675,000
2012	c. 670,000	c. 125,000[522]		c. 795,000

[513] Only the ONPS base was identified in the 2008 summary.
[514] Only the ONPS base was identified in the 2008 summary.
[515] Fee Demo allocation for First Baptist Church stabilization
[516] Allocation for Township Hall septic system replacement.
[517] Allocation for St. Francis Hotel stabilization.
[518] Only the ONPS base was identified in the 2008 summary.
[519] Only the ONPS base was identified in the 2011 summary.
[520] Estimate based on bar chart provided in 2015 Business Management Plan.
[521] Estimate based on bar chart provided in 2015 Business Management Plan.
[522] Estimate based on bar chart provided in 2015 Business Management Plan.

Fiscal Year	Base/ONPS	Cyclical/ Donations/ One-time	Line-Item Construction	Total
2013	c. 610,000	0[523]		
2014	c. 630,000	c. 190,000[524]		c. 820,000
2015	666,532			
2016	672,579			
2017	676,119			
2018	680,444			
2019	678,904			
2020	656,437			
2021	728,965			
2022	801,791			
2023	862,171			

[523] Estimate based on bar chart provided in 2015 Business Management Plan.
[524] Estimate based on bar chart provided in 2015 Business Management Plan.

Appendix 3: Staff

Nicodemus NHS: Staffing

Note: The following list of staff who have served at Nicodemus National Historic Site represents permanent staff only and does not include seasonal staff or student employees.

Name	Dates of Service
Site Manager	
Dennis Carruth	March 25, 2001 – February 2003
Superintendents:	
Felix Revello (Acting)	February 2003 – December 2003
Sherda Williams	December 29, 2003 – March 28, 2008
Mark Weaver (Acting)	March 29, 2008 – September 2008
Mark Weaver	September 2, 2008 – July 2012
David Schafer (Acting)	September 2012 – December 2012
Angela Wetz	January 2013 – August 2015
Sherda Williams (as Brown v. Board of Education NHS Superintendent)	August 2015 – October 2017
Enimini Ekong (Acting)	October 2017 – December 2017
Enimini Ekong	January 2018 – September 2020
Frank Torres	September 21, 2020 – December 31, 2022
Cassie Branstetter	July 2023 – present
Park Rangers / Park Guides	
Reginald Miller (Fort Larned NHS Park Ranger duty-stationed at Nicodemus)	June 1999 – Spring 2002

Phyllis Howard	April 15, 2002 – 2019
Reginald Miller (Permanent)	Spring 2002 – December 2005
Michelle Huff (Park Guide)	October 2006 – December 2015
Brendan Oates	July 2021 – August 2022
LueCreasea Horne	September 2022 – Present
Daniel Cox	July 2022 – Present

Education Specialist

Jonathan Winskie	2013 – 2019 (?)
LueCreasea Horne	January 2021 – September 2022

Administrative Technician:

Sharyl Cyphers (duty-stationed at Fort Larned NHS)	2002 (?) – April 2004
Betsy Crawford-Gore (duty-stationed at Fort Larned NHS)	October 2005 – November 2007

Administrative Assistant

Annette White	February 2009 – Summer 2011
Joe Randall	March 2012 – Fall 2015
Aisha Smith (duty-stationed at Brown v. Board of Education NHS)	January 19, 2020 – Present
Administrative Officer Betsy Crawford-Gore	November 2007 - 2012

Chief of Maintenance/Facility Manager

Sam Quakenbush	July 2010 – November 2011
William Doerr	Winter 2012 – Fall 2015

Maintenance Workers

Robert Brogdon (temporary PT)	July 1997 – 2004
Robert Brogdon (permanent PT)	2004 – 2017 (?)

Appendix 4: Visitation

Nicodemus NHS: Visitation

Note: Visitation estimates for 1988 to 2006 were extrapolated from the number of cars in the Highway 24 rest area near Township Hall. Beginning in 2007, the visitation figure was based on the number of visitors entering the visitor center or participating in special events.

Year	Total
1998	1,282
1999	18,900
2000	21,691
2001	34,251
2002	31,664
2003	51,310
2004	56,803
2005	28,065
2006	21,441
2007	2,507
2008	2,434
2009	2,978
2010	3,448
2011	2,681
2012	3,505
2013	3,241
2014	3,374
2015	3,306
2016	3,352
2017	2,916
2018	2,738
2019	3,540
2020	262
2021	4,629
2022	5,307

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