



# Historic Resources Study Nicodemus National Historic Site

Prepared for

Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service  
United States Department of the Interior

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## Acknowledgments

HRA Gray and Pape historians on this project for the National Park Service wish to thank the following individuals and institutions (in no particular order) for their assistance in this project: Angela Bates at the Nicodemus Historical Society; Betty Elliott and Lowell Beecher at the Graham County (Kansas) Historical Society; Mark Weaver, Michelle Huff, Annette Thille-White, Robert Brogden, and all the staff at Nicodemus National Historic Site; Linda Clarke, Michele Curran, and Don Stevens, at the National Park Service's Midwest Regional Office; Mary Ann Thompson in the Kansas Room, Hays (Kansas) Public Library; Ellie Caroland at the Scott County (Kentucky) Historical Society; Jerry Shaw, Wichita State University; Kelly Weber, Washburn University; Deborah Dandridge, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas; Walter Echohawk, Pawnee Tribe; Robert Fields, Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma; Andrea Hunter, Osage Tribe; Sandra Massey, Sac and Fox Nation; and Gary Mitchell, Prairie Band Potawatomi. We also thank the external and internal reviewers for their invaluable comments, which have bettered the manuscript: Angela Bates, Geoffrey Burt, Michele Curran, Irene Krauthamer, Dena Sanford, Don Stevens, and Mark Weaver.

## Introduction

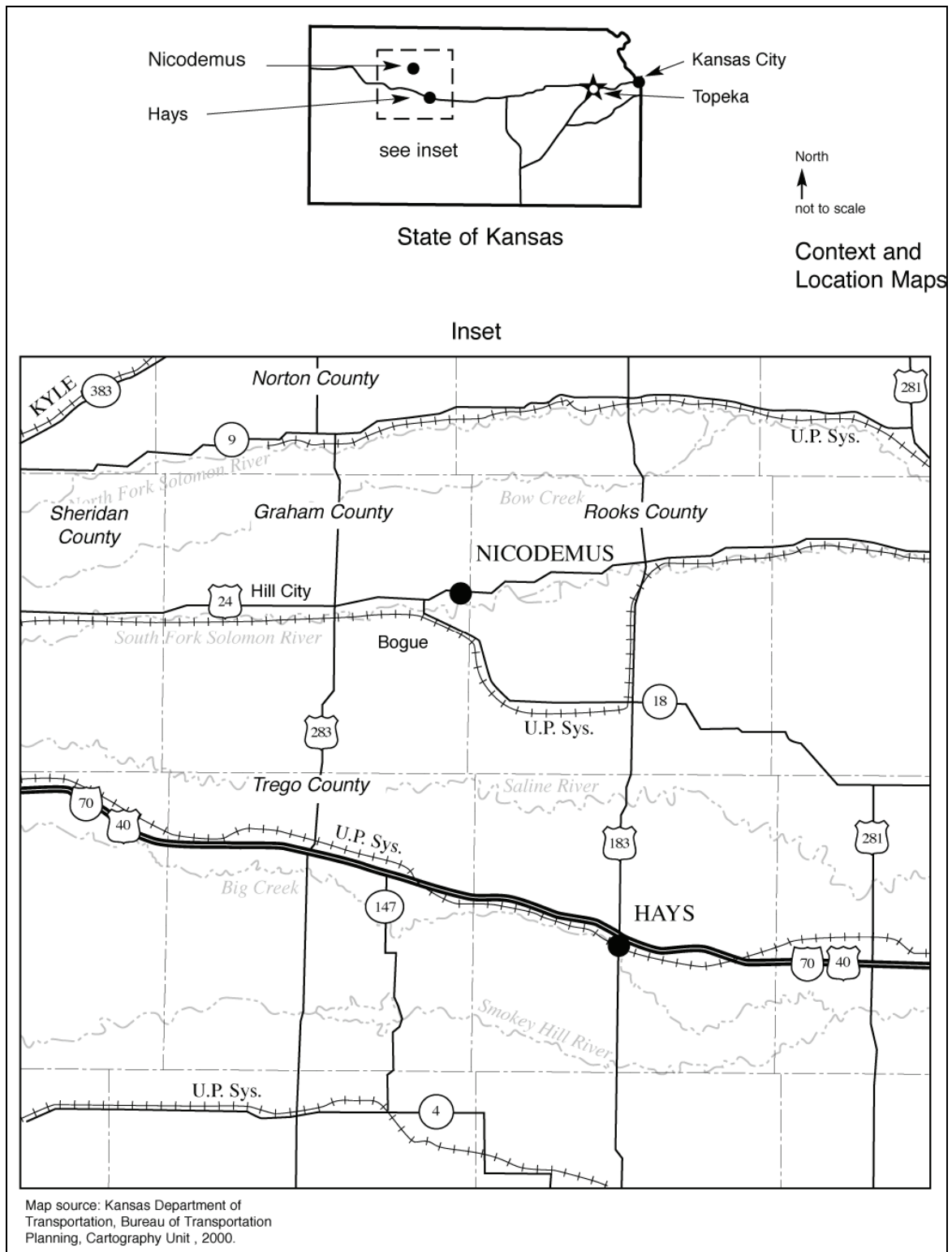
On the stark prairie lands of western Kansas, few of the homesteads and farm towns that sprang up in the mid- to late-nineteenth century managed to withstand the economic upheavals and environmental calamities of the twentieth century and survive to this day. One that did was the all-black colony of Nicodemus, Kansas. The town<sup>1</sup> of Nicodemus is located on the banks of the South Solomon River in Graham County, part of northwestern Kansas. It is located in the eastern portion of that wide and open expanse of the continent known as the Great Plains. African Americans, most of them from the state of Kentucky and fleeing the poverty, discrimination, and violence of the post-Reconstruction South, settled the town between 1877 and 1879, and maintained it as a living community through the numerous hardships and travails of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nicodemus is a nationally significant example of one of the earliest and longest lasting African American towns established after the Civil War; additionally, it is reported to have had the first school established in Graham County, Kansas, where many early county officials were African American. In recognition of the historical significance of the town, in 1996, Congress authorized the Nicodemus National Historic Site to commemorate “the pioneer spirit of African-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.”<sup>2</sup>

The story of the colonists who founded Nicodemus, built it into a viable community, and then struggled to hang on amid the rigors of life on the Great Plains, intersects two important narratives in the wide sweep of American history. The first is the long and complicated experience of southern blacks as they struggled through slavery, emancipation, post-Civil War Reconstruction, and migration within and out of the South. Second, the history of the Nicodemus colonists was part of the epic of western settlement: the peopling of the Great Plains and the rest of the arid West during the homesteading era (1860s-1910s), the exertion of all settlers to make progress or simply survive in the harsh environment of the Great Plains, and the tremendous out-migration from the rural Plains when their efforts failed. These two streams of migration—the escape from bondage and the settling of western lands—were among the largest in the history of the country and were important elements in the growth of the nation. The history of Nicodemus’s founding, settlement, and survival is an intertwining of these two significant strands of the national experience.

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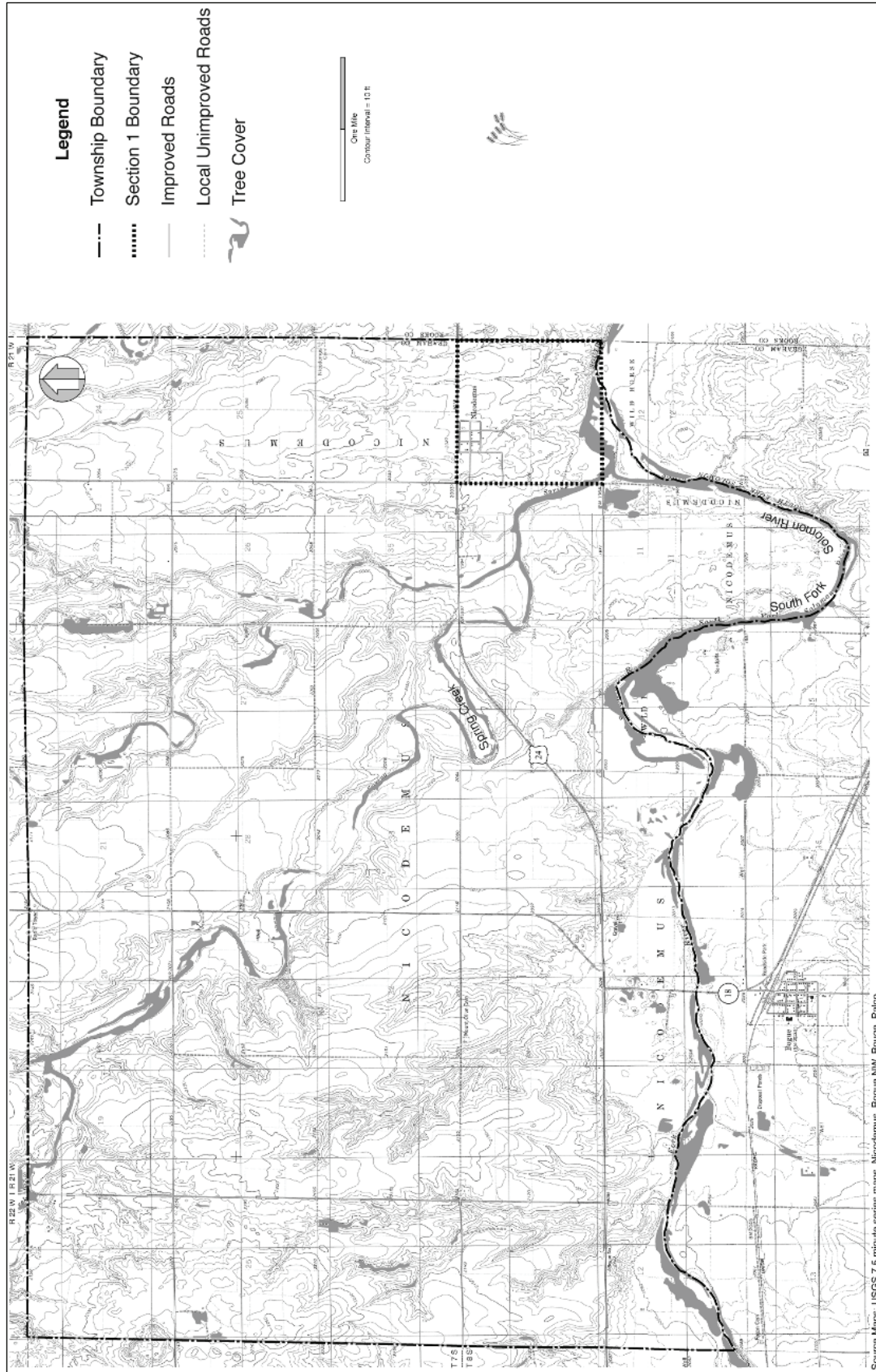
<sup>1</sup> Nicodemus is referred to throughout this report as a town, based on historical accounts, National Historic Site enabling legislation, and popular usage. Nicodemus is unincorporated due to the small number of permanent residents. In order for the reader to differentiate between the town of Nicodemus and Nicodemus Township, the authors have used this simple rule in the text: if “Nicodemus” is mentioned without specification, then it refers to the town (village) of Nicodemus, generally. When the intent is to discuss the township more specifically, the text will read either “Nicodemus Township” or “the township.”

<sup>2</sup> Nicodemus National Historic Site, Enabling Legislation, PL 104-333, November 12, 1996, 110 STAT. 4163, sec. 512, <http://www.nps.gov/nico/parkmgmt/upload/EnablingLegislation-2.pdf>.

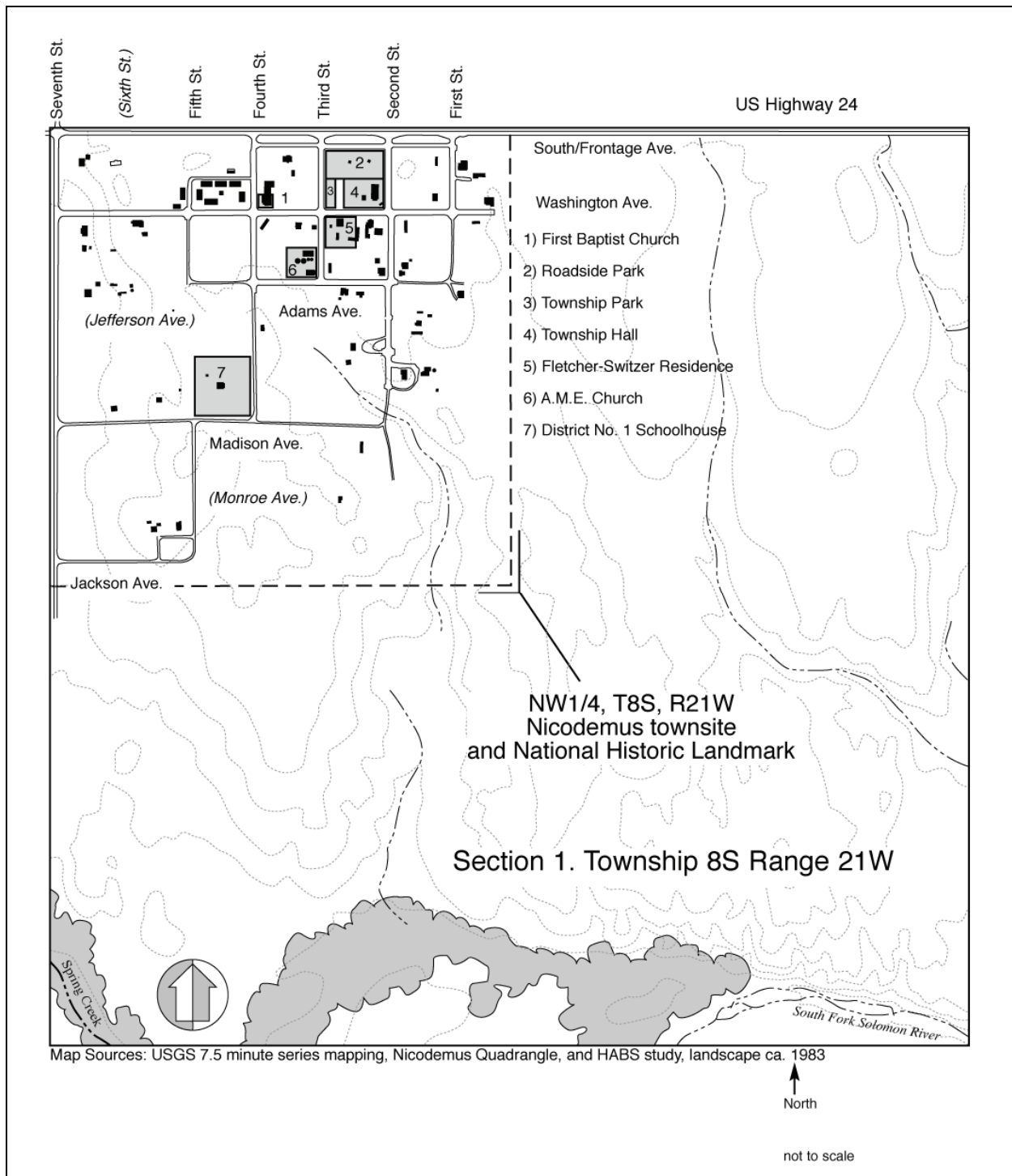


**Figure 1. Context and Location Map for Nicodemus.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).





**Figure 2. Map of Graham County, Kansas, showing the Solomon River and the location of Nicodemus within the county. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**



**Figure 3. Map of Section 1, Township 8S, Range 21 W. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**

Migration of groups of people to new lands often results in the creation of communities that “evolved according to cultural norms, historical circumstances, and environmental contingencies,” and, in the process, produces new towns and cities that were “dynamic and complex.”<sup>3</sup> Part of the complexity of Nicodemus’s history is certainly a result of cultural changes for African Americans, the historical circumstances resulting from the failure of Reconstruction in the South just as the homestead era was getting underway, and the environmental contingencies involved in attempting to squeeze a living out of the dry and sometimes inhospitable Great Plains.

The first groups of black emigrants that came to Nicodemus were little prepared for the landscape and conditions they found there. Western Kansas was a drier, starker, and windier place than anything they had encountered in the border lands or southern states from which they originated. Nicodemus is located in northwestern Kansas about twenty miles west of the 100th meridian, which generally demarks the beginning of the shortgrass prairie, a treeless, windswept region of native grasses that formed a tough groundcover of sod, which became the primary building material for most homesteaders. It is a place where summer temperatures regularly soar above 100 degrees, while winter temperatures can drop well below zero, where “drought is a constant threat to farming, and winter snows can quickly become ‘ground blizzards.’”<sup>4</sup> In *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*, historian Donald Worster describes the area of the Plains that includes Nicodemus as follows: “The Southern Plains are a vast austerity. . . . Nothing that lives finds life easy under their severe skies; the weather has a nasty habit of turning harsh and violent just when things are getting comfortable.”<sup>5</sup> Peter Miller likewise speaks to the severity of the Plains environment in his *People of the Great Plains*, in which he observes, “The history of the Plains is hardship and suffering, bankruptcy, tragedy, waste and extermination.”<sup>6</sup> Despite these conditions and difficulties, the groups of former slaves who settled Nicodemus managed to create a viable black community that prospered during the 1880s and managed to survive the roughest years of the 1890s and 1930s to remain in existence today.

The Nicodemus settlers were able to build that community despite carrying additional burdens that most white emigrants did not. The legacy of slavery, the long struggle for freedom, the emergence of Jim Crow laws, and prejudice toward the color of their skin placed the Nicodemus colonists and other black emigrants to the West somewhat apart from the majority of Plains settlers and gave African American settlers additional challenges to overcome in their new homeland. Most (but not all) of the white pioneer settlers came with more money, more education, and more preparation for what they would encounter. White settlers did not have the burden of slavery or the challenge of continuing discrimination working against them. In his history of black settlements in Kansas, historian Gary Entz observes that all black colonies had to struggle with, and many eventually succumbed to, “an insurmountable combination of variables: inexperience, racism, environment, [and] inadequate resources.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> National Park Service, “History in the National Park Service: Themes and Concepts,” NPS E-Library, [http://www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSThinking/themes\\_concepts.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSThinking/themes_concepts.htm).

<sup>4</sup> “Geography and history of Nicodemus, Kansas,” no author or publication facts included, 10, Resource Files, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, KS (hereafter NNHS).

<sup>5</sup> Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Miller, *People of the Great Plains* (Waterbury, VT: Silver Print Press, 1996), iv.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Entz, “Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairie: ‘Pap’ Singleton’s Cherokee County Colony,” *Kansas History* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 139.

Nonetheless, Nicodemus residents also shared in common with neighboring communities very much the same living and working conditions in adapting to the climatic and environmental vagaries of the Great Plains. Nineteenth-century homesteaders, regardless of skin color or geographic origin, had to adapt quickly to a very unfamiliar and unforgiving environment. They all shared the risks, profits, and debts involved in making their livelihoods from prairie farming, and experienced the elation and disappointment of the boom and bust cycles. Many settlers and towns eventually capitulated in the face of these hardships and left the region. Many others, who managed to outlast the droughts, railroad speculation, and financial crises of the late nineteenth century and then hang onto their farms after the World War I wheat boom and bust, were rewarded with more anguish for their efforts.

In the 1930s, almost all Americans felt the financial sting of the Great Depression. For Plains farmers, however, the financial crisis was the lesser of two evils they encountered. Coinciding with the Depression, the environmental disaster called the Dust Bowl made raising crops impossible and the living conditions near intolerable across the Great Plains. During the worst of the raging dust storms of 1934-1935, western Kansas, where Nicodemus farmers and town residents battled the elements, was the hardest hit area in the entire country. Dust storms made a strong and lasting impression on all the Nicodemus residents who lived through those years. As a result of the combined effects of the Depression and Dust Bowl years on the Great Plains, the rural areas of the Plains states experienced a rapid depopulation prior to and during World War II. The population of Nicodemus had shrunk to 39 by 1944, and by 1950 only 16 people lived in the community.<sup>8</sup> The few remaining residents drew on their strong family relationships, religious affiliations, and shared ancestry to keep the community alive until better times arrived.

Because of the many hardships, it was a challenge for small agricultural towns on the Great Plains, but particularly for African American communities, to simply remain “on the map.” Why did some of these towns survive when other did not? Some towns benefited because they became a hub station for several local railroads or a stop on one of the main transcontinental lines. During the Kansas railroad boom of the 1870s, virtually every town—including Nicodemus—clamored for railroad companies to include them in one of the new proposed routes. However, “relatively few of the total number of towns in the Trans-Appalachian West obtained rail lines.”<sup>9</sup> Many of the proposed routes through Kansas consisted of plans promoted by “paper railroads,” which were new companies that had investors and sold bonds but did not own a single engine or rail car. Moreover, simply obtaining a rail link was no guarantee of a community's survival. Numerous ghost towns throughout the arid West sport desiccated railroad stations and a rusted set of tracks.

Keeping a town alive was even more difficult for the roughly one hundred predominantly black towns established on the Great Plains during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nicodemus was one of the few that managed to survive. African American settlers came to the West, for the most part, carrying heavier burdens and lighter wallets than the average white homesteader. Several Nicodemus settlers arrived without any money at all, having used their small savings to pay for food and transportation during the journey west from Kentucky.

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<sup>8</sup> Ola Wilson to “Dear Madame,” May 27, 1944, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS [hereafter KSHS]; and James Oliver Horton, *Landmarks of African American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 35.



Langston City, Oklahoma, another well-known black town that managed to last into the twenty-first century, was able to remain economically viable because of an outside source of funding and organizational structure. Like Nicodemus, Langston City had failed to obtain a railroad link during a railroad-building boom. Several years later, however, Langston City became home to the Colored Agricultural and Normal School, which later became Langston University—the school became the “resource for continued prosperity” of Langston City.<sup>10</sup>

Nicodemus managed to get through the darkest of times and maintain its identity without a railroad line, educational institution, or other outside source of investment. The few residents who remained in the town by the end of World War II placed a high value on their family and church relationships, which contributed to their commitment to the community. Extended family connections and shared community spirit also prompted former Nicodemus residents and descendants to maintain some type of presence in Nicodemus, mainly by returning to homecoming events that became part of the long tradition of Emancipation Day celebrations. Their emotional and social ties to the town, even from a distance, helped spark and support interest in gaining recognition for Nicodemus as a historic site and a valuable piece of African American history. On November 12, 1996, President William Clinton signed Public Law 104-333 (110 Statute 4163), establishing Nicodemus National Historic Site.<sup>11</sup> The Nicodemus National Historic Site stands as a testament to the risk taking, perseverance, and faith of the original Nicodemus colonists and their descendants in their struggle to create and maintain a world for themselves in western Kansas.

Today, five historic buildings comprise the park’s main tangible resources, but many other structures, ruins, and buildings remain to convey a sense of the community’s former size, shape, and feel. Additionally, current residents, most of them descended from original settlers, maintain a strong sense of their family history as well as the town’s history through participation in Emancipation Day activities and other events. The enactment of the National Historic Site helps convey to residents, descendants, and visitors alike the importance of Nicodemus in the history of African American migration and settlement in the United States.

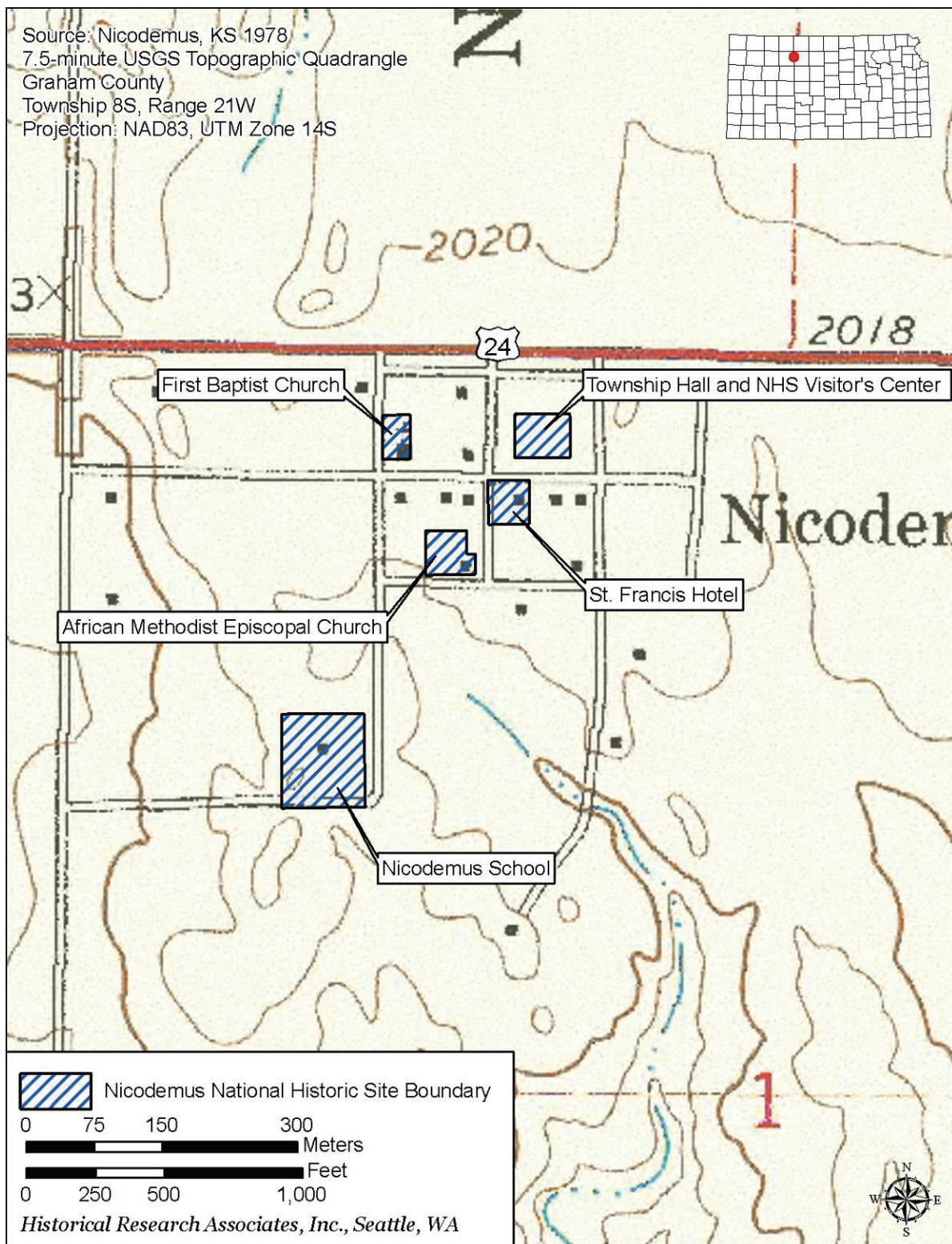
## ***Objectives and Methodology***

The following historic resource study prepared for the National Park Service provides a narrative history of Nicodemus National Historic Site within the larger historical context of post-Civil War black migration and African American settlement in the Great Plains. The document also provides park staff, historians, and the interested public with a historical framework for future preservation of the site and historical information to improve and enhance interpretation of the site and its historic resources.

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<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Nicodemus National Historic Site, PL 104-333.



**Figure 4. Overview Map of Nicodemus National Historic Site.**

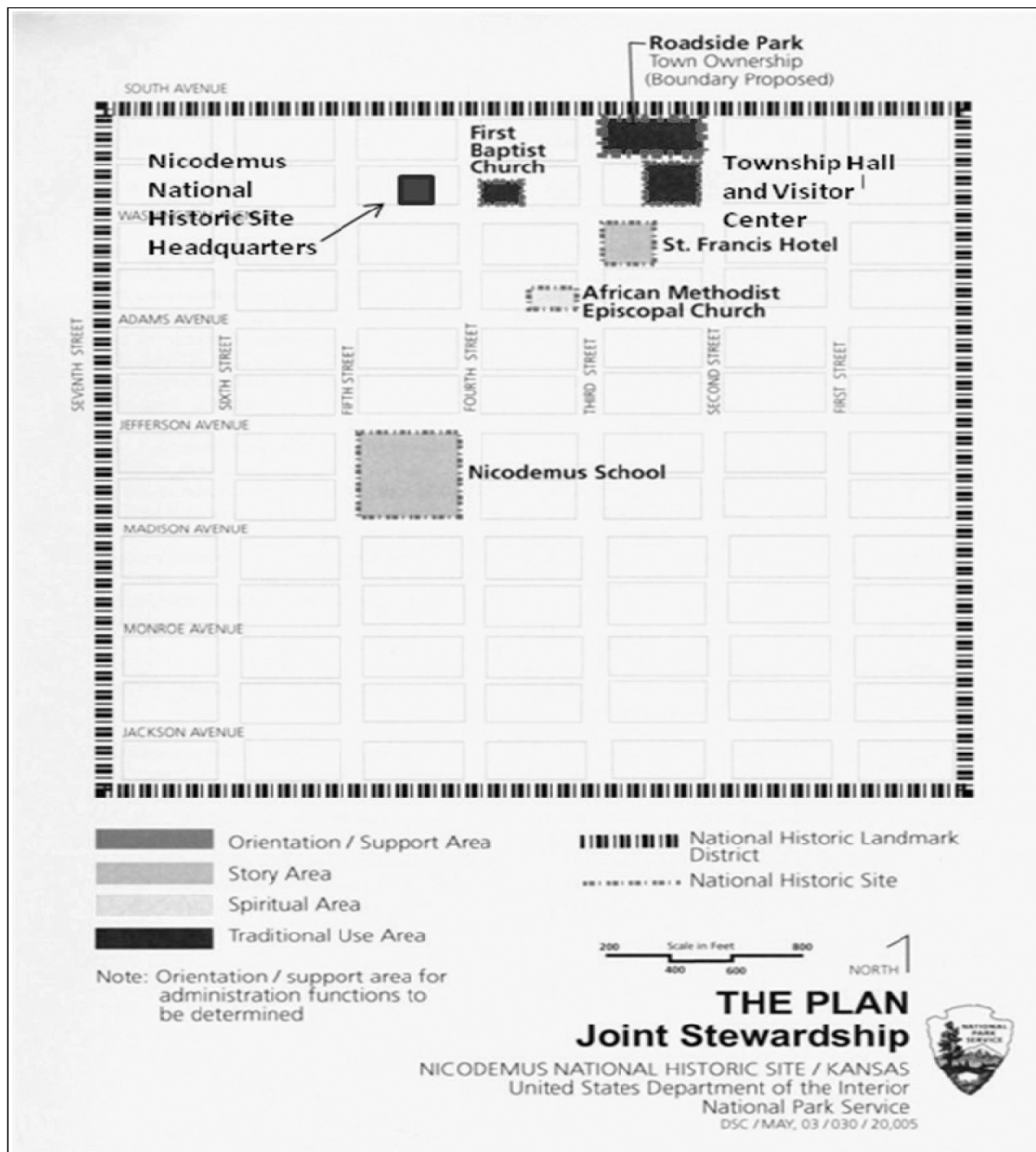


Figure 5. Location Map of Nicodemus National Historic Site. Reproduced from U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Nicodemus National Historic Site, General Management Plan, <http://www.nps.gov/nico/parkmgmt/upload/Nicodemus%20NHS%20General%20Management%20Plan1.pdf>.



In 2008 and early 2009, historians Heather Lee Miller and Dawn Vogel conducted an intensive search for primary source documents including images, letters, and diaries pertaining to Nicodemus. In addition to the document research, architectural historian Don Burden conducted an onsite inventory of all known historic-era resources within the site. Burden also conducted document research in various repositories in Kentucky and Ohio related to the early Nicodemus settlers from that region. Historian Paul Sadin joined the writing team after the initial research was completed and conducted additional research in both primary and secondary materials.

In support of the chapter on Native American prehistory, ethnography, and archeology, we contacted tribal historians and other cultural resources staff members for existing tribes who resided near or traveled through the area of Kansas in which Nicodemus is located. Tribal contacts included: Walter Echohawk (Pawnee), Robert Fields, (Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma), Andrea Hunter and Jerry Shaw (Osage Tribe), Sandra Massey (Sac and Fox Nation), and Gary Mitchell (Prairie Band Potawatomi). In some cases, we were unable to establish communication with tribal contacts; in other cases, tribal contacts had no information about their tribe's association with the people who lived in and around Nicodemus. We also examined tribal websites for more information about possible travel to, settlement in, or interactions with settlers (white or black) in north central Kansas.

In the course of our research, we visited numerous libraries, repositories, and archives. In Kansas, we conducted research at the Graham County Historical Society in Hill City; the Graham County Public Library in Hill City; the Hays Public Library in Hays; the Kansas State Historical Society, Library and Archives in Topeka; the Kansas State Library in Topeka; the Nicodemus National Historic Site in Nicodemus; the Nicodemus Historical Society in Nicodemus; and the Spencer Research Collection, University of Kansas Libraries in Lawrence. In Kentucky, we visited the Kentucky State Historical Society in Frankfort, the Kentucky State Library in Frankfort, and the Scott County Historical Society in Georgetown. In other states, we located materials related to Nicodemus at the Cincinnati Public Library; the National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska; the Seattle Public Library; the Union Pacific Railroad Museum in Council Bluffs, Iowa; and the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. Online, we examined the Library of Congress American Memory collection and Ancestry.com, and we conducted searches of Google and Google Books for images and documents.

## ***Organization of the Study***

The Historic Resources Study is divided into two parts. Section 1 consists of seven chapters that detail the history of Nicodemus, from prehistoric times through the present. Section 2 describes the historic buildings that remain in Nicodemus as of the writing of this study.

Chapter 1 explains the precontact and early contact history of tribes in the Central Plains area that would eventually become the state of Kansas. This chapter also examines oral and written stories of Nicodemus settlers' encounters with American Indians in the first years of the colony. Chapter 2 describes national and regional events that led to nonnative settlement of the vicinity of Nicodemus, including the conditions African Americans faced in antebellum and postwar Kentucky, the state from which the majority of early Nicodemus settlers originated. Chapter 3 describes the settlement of Nicodemus, which occurred in a series of waves between

1877 and 1879, and the difficulties the early settlers faced amid harsh conditions in a new land. Chapter 4 recounts events in the eleven years following the founding of Nicodemus, as the town grew from its humble beginnings. As the chapter describes, the first structures in the town were simple affairs. By 1888, however, several substantial and important buildings had been constructed of wood, limestone, or both. In addition to the more permanent and substantial architecture of the town, the settlers also established a firm economic foundation through commerce and farming and created institutions and opportunities for religion, education, and social life.

Chapter 5 explains the importance of agriculture, commerce, and the expectation of a railroad station to the early growth and subsequent decline of Nicodemus in the 1880s and 1890s. By the time of the Great Depression, addressed in Chapter 6, the town was mostly depopulated. When paired with the ecological devastation of the Dust Bowl years, Nicodemans faced daunting odds. Although Nicodemus's population continued to dwindle, some residents still lived in the town, allowing it to persist through the downturn and to be poised for an eventual resurgence. Toward the end of the 1970s, construction of the Nicodemus Villa for former residents and their descendants and the continuation of traditional celebrations such as Emancipation Day brought people and attention back to the small community. Chapter 7 examines how descendants of Nicodemus's former residents have returned to the town either permanently or for Emancipation Day events. These descendants played a role in the town's farming endeavors, social activities, and the designation of Nicodemus first as a National Historic Landmark and later as a National Historic Site.

Section 2 of the report describes the historic buildings that remain in Nicodemus and the extant buildings not included in the Nicodemus National Historic Site, which span much of the history of the community, from at least the early twentieth century to the present. Although no dugouts or sod houses remain intact within the townsite, a few early twentieth-century stone and frame structures still stand and a variety of residential and community buildings from the post-World War II era help round out the history and evolution of the town's architecture. The discussion in Section 2 addresses these stages of architectural development in Nicodemus from the earliest forms of construction to the latest.

The inventory of extant buildings found in Section 2 follows a chronological history of building methods. When possible, a summary of each structure's history is provided, although many of the dates given are approximate. Due to the nature of vernacular buildings, it is often difficult to provide accurate dates of construction. Additions and alterations to exterior elevations further complicate the dating process. Therefore, "circa" is generally used, meaning that the building was built within about five years or so of the given date.



# **Chapter 1: American Indian History in the Central Plains Region, Precontact to 1877**

## ***Introduction***

Although humans inhabited or passed through the Central Plains beginning around 10,000 years ago, archeological evidence indicates that there were no permanent settlements around Nicodemus (in contemporary Graham County, Kansas) until approximately 1,000 years ago. Archeological deposits found in the area are not easily tied to the historic-era American Indians who first settled in the Solomon River Valley, known collectively as the South Bend Pawnees, so the exact date of their arrival is not clear. Scholars believe that the Pawnees were joined thereafter by Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kiowas, Comanches, Plains Apaches, and Kansa people, who populated the region at the time of European contact. When Europeans first entered the region in the mid-1500s, the Plains tribes were already in a state of “demographic flux,” and the next two hundred and fifty or so years—often referred to as the protohistoric or ethnohistoric period—would see even more dramatic changes in the makeup of the area's tribes. In the early nineteenth century, following the United States’ acquisition and exploration of vast stretches of land such as the Louisiana Territory, a number of tribes that had once occupied territory east of the Mississippi River were relocated to “Indian Territory,” land west of the Mississippi that the federal government demarcated in the mid-1830s for just this purpose. Thus by 1854, the new Kansas and Nebraska territories, which were carved out of the larger Indian Territory, had become home to a number of emigrant tribes that were being pushed farther and farther west by non-Indian settlement. Among these were the Potawatomis, Missouri and Mississippi Sacs and Foxes, Kickapoos, Iowas, Delawares, Chippewas, and Ottawas, who settled on reservations in the eastern part of what would become the state of Kansas in 1861.

By the mid-1870s, around the time the Nicodemus settlers reached the area, the vast majority of American Indians who had once lived in or were known to have passed through north central Kansas as part of their seasonal round had been relocated to reservations in what remained of Indian Territory (whose boundaries approximate the present state of Oklahoma). In the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, although they did not frequently interact with non-Indians moving to and residing in Kansas, some American Indians remained in the area. Small numbers of Indians continued to live on one of the handful of reservations remaining in eastern Kansas. Others refused to settle on reservations and assimilated into non-Indian society. Some may have passed through western portions of the state on their way to reservations further west. Still others for a while roamed the countryside both inside and outside Indian Territory in small bands searching for food and shelter.

This chapter begins by discussing what archeologists and anthropologists understand about prehistoric human habitation of the area that would become the state of Kansas, then moves on to describe the period of early contact between Europeans and Native people in the region. This chapter then examines how, over the course of the nineteenth century, the westward territorial expansion of the newly formed United States displaced many of the original human inhabitants not only of the eastern states who were being pushed west off their ancestral homelands but also those of the Central Plains, upon whom eastern tribes encroached in the Indian Territory. The chapter ends with a discussion of the relationship between American Indians and people of African descent in Indian Territory, Kansas Territory, and the state of

Kansas before, during, and after the Civil War. The analysis assists in understanding the stories that have been passed down to the descendants of the original Nicodemus settlers and contemporary Native Americans alike, which recount American Indian encounters with African Americans in the early years of Nicodemus's settlement.



**Figure 6. South Fork of the Solomon River.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).

## ***Early Human Settlement in Kansas***

### **Human Survival within a Changing Landscape**

Evidence of human existence on the Central Plains (an area encompassing the present-day states of Nebraska and Kansas and portions of eastern Colorado, southeastern Wyoming, and western Iowa) prior to 9,500 to 12,000 BP is sparse. The Central Plains of this era were cooler and wetter than the plains of today, and patches of tallgrasses and hardwood groves, with lakes and ponds, dotted the landscape. People of the Clovis era (8,000 to 11,500 BP in the Central Plains) lived in this region, and anthropologists note that they were mobile, accomplished big-game hunters. They hunted megafauna such as mammoths, giant ground sloths, bison (*Bison antiquus*), wild horses (free-roaming horses of domesticated descent), and pronghorn, among



others. The archeological record also indicates that they made opportunistic use of fish and fruit, but firm evidence to support cultivation or food processing has not been found.<sup>1</sup>

By about 11,000 BP, however, the climate warmed and the pattern of vegetation changed. The checkered landscape of tallgrasses and forests gave way to large swaths of unbroken grasslands bordered by forests. The extinction of the megafauna likely is linked to the changes in flora and climate during this time, as well as potentially the effects of hunting. With the megafauna gone, people of the Clovis and later the Folsom cultural traditions (after about 10,500 BP) focused their subsistence activities largely on the hunting of deer, elk, and *Bison antiquus* that had survived and adapted to the changed environment. This period of hunting and gathering on the Central Plains became known as the Plains Archaic period, for which archeological evidence is more abundant on the fringes of the Central Plains, particularly in eastern Colorado. Farther east into Nebraska and Kansas, the events of the Archaic period are not as well-known.<sup>2</sup> For the next several thousand years, until about 7,000 BP, bison-hunting culture thrived on the Central Plains. At that point, the climate once again dramatically changed, altering the Central Plains environment and landscape. Some scholars believe that from about 7,000 to 4,500 BP, the plains suffered an extended drought and the area of eastern Colorado and western Kansas and Nebraska, which once enjoyed considerable rainfall and tallgrasses, became much more arid. In addition, *Bison antiquus* disappeared, replaced by the smaller modern plains bison.<sup>3</sup> During this period of drought, the peoples of the Central Plains became more migratory as a matter of survival. Some withdrew to areas farther east where rainfall was greater, while others retreated to the far western reaches of the plains, along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains and in the foothills in Colorado, thus leaving the interior plains sparsely populated.<sup>4</sup>

For a period of approximately 2,000 years after the end of the drought, the plains remained dry, although somewhat wetter than the millennia before. Eventually, the Central Plains repopulated, as evidenced by the archeological record. Those who had resided east of the Central Plains in the Mississippi and Ohio river valleys may have brought aspects of the Woodland culture back with them, as exemplified by the earth mounds they are believed to have built on the landscape on the eastern plains and as far west as the lower Republican River Valley. In addition, prehistoric inhabitants of the Central Plains had adopted bow-and-arrow technology, like the hunters of the Mississippi Valley, and likewise had also started growing crops on the

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<sup>1</sup> Jack L. Hofman, "Early Hunter-Gatherers of the Central Great Plains: Paleoindian and Mesoindian (Archaic) Cultures," in *Archeology and Paleoecology of the Central Great Plains*, ed. Jack L. Hofman, Arkansas Archeological Survey Research Series No. 48, USACERL Special Report 97/3 (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 1996), 41-100, esp. 49. For more on the physical environment and lifeways of prehistoric Plains people, see William C. Johnson and Kyeong Park, "Late Wisconsinan and Holocene Environmental History," in Hofman, *Archeology and Paleoecology of the Central Great Plains*, 3-28; and various articles in W. Raymond Wood, ed., *Archaeology on the Great Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Robert J. Hoard and William E. Banks, eds. *Kansas Archaeology* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> George C. Frison, "Hunting and Gathering Tradition: Northwestern and Central Plains," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 131, 143-44. Sites specific to Kansas include Coffey, along the Big Blue River in northeastern Kansas, and the Williamson and Snyder sites in the Kansas Flint Hills in the southeastern part of the state.

<sup>3</sup> For a general overview of Great Plains prehistory, see W. Raymond Wood, "Introduction," in Wood, *Archaeology on the Great Plains*, 4-13; and Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> Hofman, "Early Hunter-Gatherers of the Central Great Plains."

eastern Central Plains. This blending of Woodland and Plains culture is known as the Plains Woodland culture, which lasted from about 2,500 to 1,000 BP.<sup>5</sup>

Toward the end of the Plains Woodland culture, came yet another climatic change. Around 1,300 BP, a period of wet, tropical weather began, bringing about a new subsistence cycle to the peoples living in the region. This era, generally known as the Plains Village Tradition, lasted until about the 1400s.<sup>6</sup> Instead of solely relying on a nomadic lifestyle of hunting and gathering as had earlier residents of the region, these semisedentary people combined farming with hunting and gathering. By about 1000 BP, early American Indian families were farming along the Republican, Solomon, and Smoky Hill rivers and their tributaries of southern Nebraska and north central Kansas. Archeological sites providing clues to Plains Village peoples' lives are most often located on streamside terraces, hillsides, or on ridge tops along smaller streams.<sup>7</sup> The primary crop grown in the area was corn, which was supplemented by other important foodstuffs such as beans, squash, sunflowers, and pumpkins. Bison hunting, which usually took place in the summer and winter, provided the inhabitants of the area with an abundance of meat and material for clothing, shelter, tools, and weapons. These people also collected wild fruits and vegetables, seeds, roots, and tubers near villages and on hunting routes as available.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1200s, the climate pendulum swung back to a drier cycle reminiscent of the Plains Woodland period. Several severe droughts hit the Central Plains for the next two centuries, and the farmers, descendants of the Skiri Pawnees who had once resided in the upper Republican River Valley, retreated to the wetter areas of the Loup River in southeastern Nebraska. Those people, who lived south of the Skiris in the Smoky Hill and Solomon river basins, became collectively the South Band Pawnees.<sup>9</sup> For the next few hundred years, new American Indian groups from all directions emigrated to western and central Kansas, where they adapted to the arid climate of the Central Plains.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mary J. Adair, "Woodland Complexes in the Central Great Plains," in Hofman, *Archeology and Paleoecology of the Central Great Plains*, 101-22.

<sup>6</sup> Waldo R. Wedel, "Plains Village Tradition: Central," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 173.

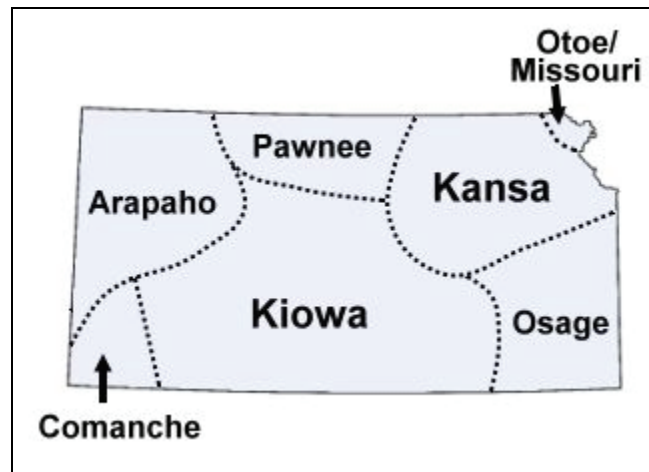
<sup>7</sup> Wedel, "Plains Village Tradition," 173-74. Archeological sites near Nicodemus are: Sweetwater on Mud Creek and a series of sites on Medicine Creek in southern Nebraska; Graham Ossuary on the Republican River near the present-day border of Nebraska and Kansas; Glen Elder and Minneapolis sites on the Solomon River in north central Kansas; and the Pottorff site on the Smoky Hill River in central Kansas. See also Susan C. Vehik, "Wichita Ethnohistory," in Hoard and Banks, *Kansas Archaeology*, 206-18; and Brad Logan, "The Plains Village Period on the Central Plains," in Hofman, *Archeology and Paleoecology of the Central Great Plains*, 123-33.

<sup>8</sup> Wedel, "Plains Village Tradition: Central," 173-74; and West, *Contested Plains*, 27-29.

<sup>9</sup> Donna C. Roper, "The Pawnee in Kansas: Ethnohistory and Archaeology," in Hoard and Banks, *Kansas Archaeology*, 233-47.

<sup>10</sup> West, *Contested Plains*, 31.

## Migrations and Lifeways of Central Plains Indian Tribes Traditionally Associated with North Central Kansas



**Figure 7. Traditional territories of Native American groups in prehistoric Kansas. Reprinted from Native American Tribes of Kansas, <http://www.native-languages.org/kansas.htm>.**

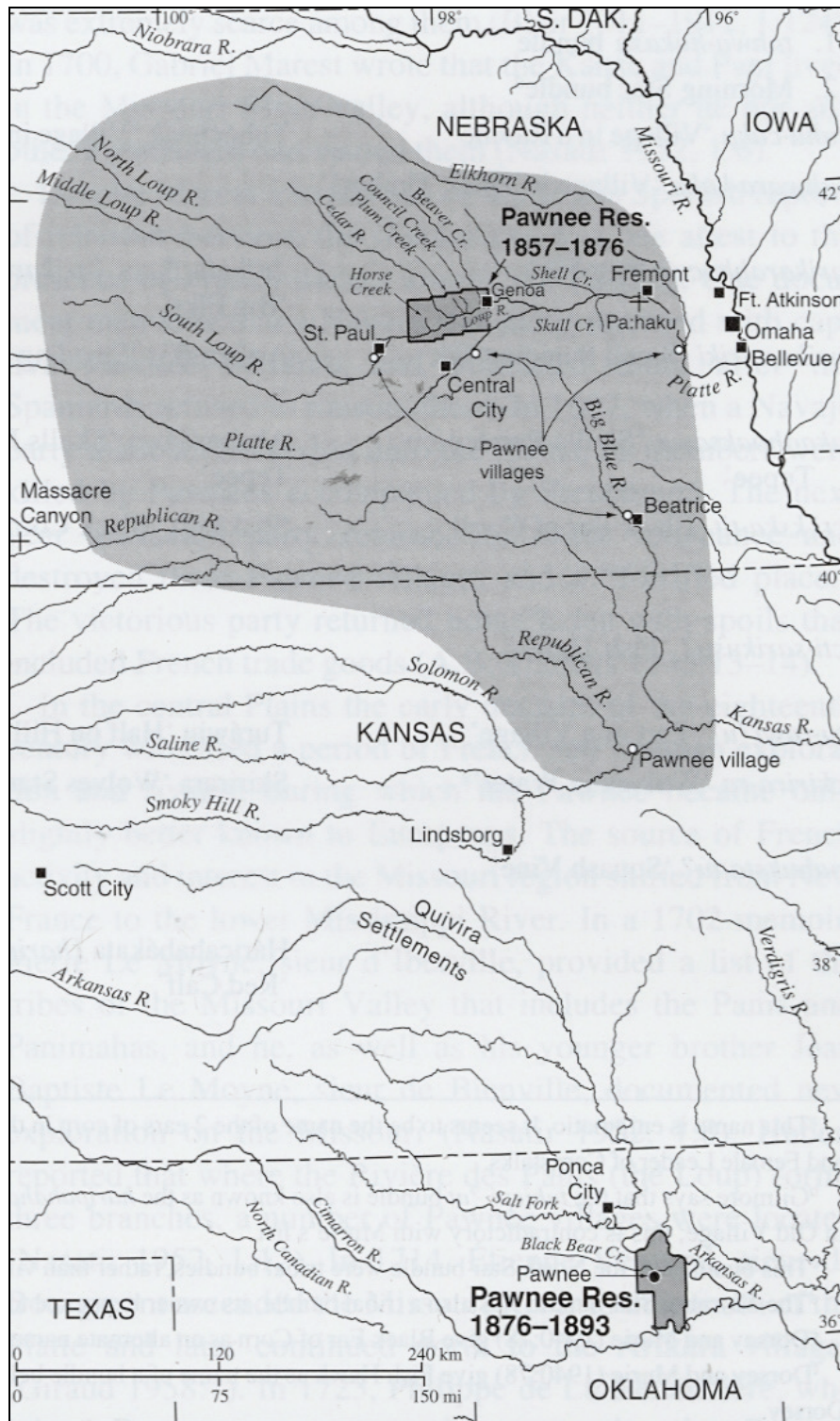
### *Pawnee*

The Caddoan-speaking Pawnees were a semisedentary people who comprised four historical groups that shared a common language but considered themselves separate bands with distinct political organizations. In the late nineteenth century, they consolidated into one tribe and relocated to a reservation in Oklahoma. Prior to then, the Pawnees lived primarily in east-central Nebraska and north-central Kansas. The four bands did not have a single name for themselves as Pawnees, but rather distinguished themselves and each other by names that reflected their status as independent bands: Skiris (Panimahas or Loups); Chawis (Grands); Kitkahahkis (Republicans); and Pitahawiratas (Tappages).<sup>11</sup>

From the earliest-known historical references to the Pawnees in the mid-sixteenth century until their removal to Indian Territory in 1876, the four bands occupied semipermanent earth-lodge villages and hunted in most of what is now central and eastern Nebraska and north central Kansas, specifically around the areas of the Platte, Loup, and Republican rivers. The northernmost group, the Skiris, once occupied numerous villages along the Loup River, while the other three bands lived to the east and south. In the eighteenth century, the Kitkahahkis lived at two different sites on the middle Republican River, but in the early 1800s, they moved north to the area on the south side of the Platte River, closer to the other two bands. Eventually, the three bands living south of the Skiris of the Loup River became known as the South Band.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Douglas R. Parks, "Pawnee," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 515. See also Roper, "Pawnee in Kansas."

<sup>12</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 515.



**Figure 8. Pawnee Territory before 1833 and reservations.** Reprinted from Douglas R. Parks, "Pawnee," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001).

Pawnee subsistence was based on an annual cycle that regularly alternated between farming and hunting, supplemented by gathering. During the eighteenth century and earlier, farming was of great importance to the Pawnees. Their horticultural tradition relied on cultivation of small family plots assigned to women. Corn was the primary crop for the Pawnees due to its religious and dietary significance, and they grew as many as fifteen varieties of four subspecies—flint, flour, sweet corn, and popcorn. Other crops, such as beans, squash, and pumpkins, also figured prominently in their diet. Women would prepare plots for planting in late April or early May before the group departed for the summer hunt.<sup>13</sup>

After the acquisition of the horse and the introduction of metal and other European manufactured goods, Pawnee bands more fully integrated hunting into their year-round subsistence cycle. Bison was the primary game animal hunted, but the Pawnee also took elk, deer, pronghorn, and bear when available. The entire village, except for the aged and ill, set out on semiannual hunts. The summer hunt began in June or early July, once crops were planted, and it lasted until late August. When the bands returned home for harvest, they dried and stored corn, squash, beans, and pumpkins in a cache for future use. The winter hunt commenced in the latter part of October, after harvest was complete, and extended through early spring. Successful hunts often provided the Pawnee with thousands of pounds of meat and fat, much of which was dried and stored for later consumption. The Pawnees also collected wild vegetables, berries, nuts, seeds, fruits, and tubers.<sup>14</sup>

### *Arapaho and Cheyenne*

When the Algonquian-speaking Arapahoes entered the Northern Plains is unknown, but they were most likely there by the early eighteenth century. During the early 1800s, the Arapahoes occupied an area of the Northern Plains centered around present-day southeastern Montana, most of Wyoming, and part of South Dakota around the Black Hills. The Arapahoes formed an alliance with the Cheyennes, who were also living in the area. Later, in the 1810s, the Arapahoes moved south onto the Central Plains of southeastern Wyoming, eastern Colorado, parts of Nebraska, and western Kansas. Toward the mid-nineteenth century, the Arapahoes separated into the Northern Arapahoes, who settled on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, and the Southern Arapahoes, who were moved to a reservation in Oklahoma in 1867 with the Southern Cheyennes.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the eighteenth century, the Cheyennes lived near the present-day Minnesota-Wisconsin border, where they were agriculturists. In the early part of the eighteenth century, they began migrating westward possibly due to incursions into their territory by the Lakotas. For a time, the Cheyennes settled along the Missouri River. Eventually, though, they adopted a more nomadic, hunting lifestyle and moved into the region of the Cheyenne River and the Black Hills in present-day South Dakota. They were located there in 1804 when Meriwether Lewis and William Clark traveled up the Missouri River on their expedition to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>16</sup>

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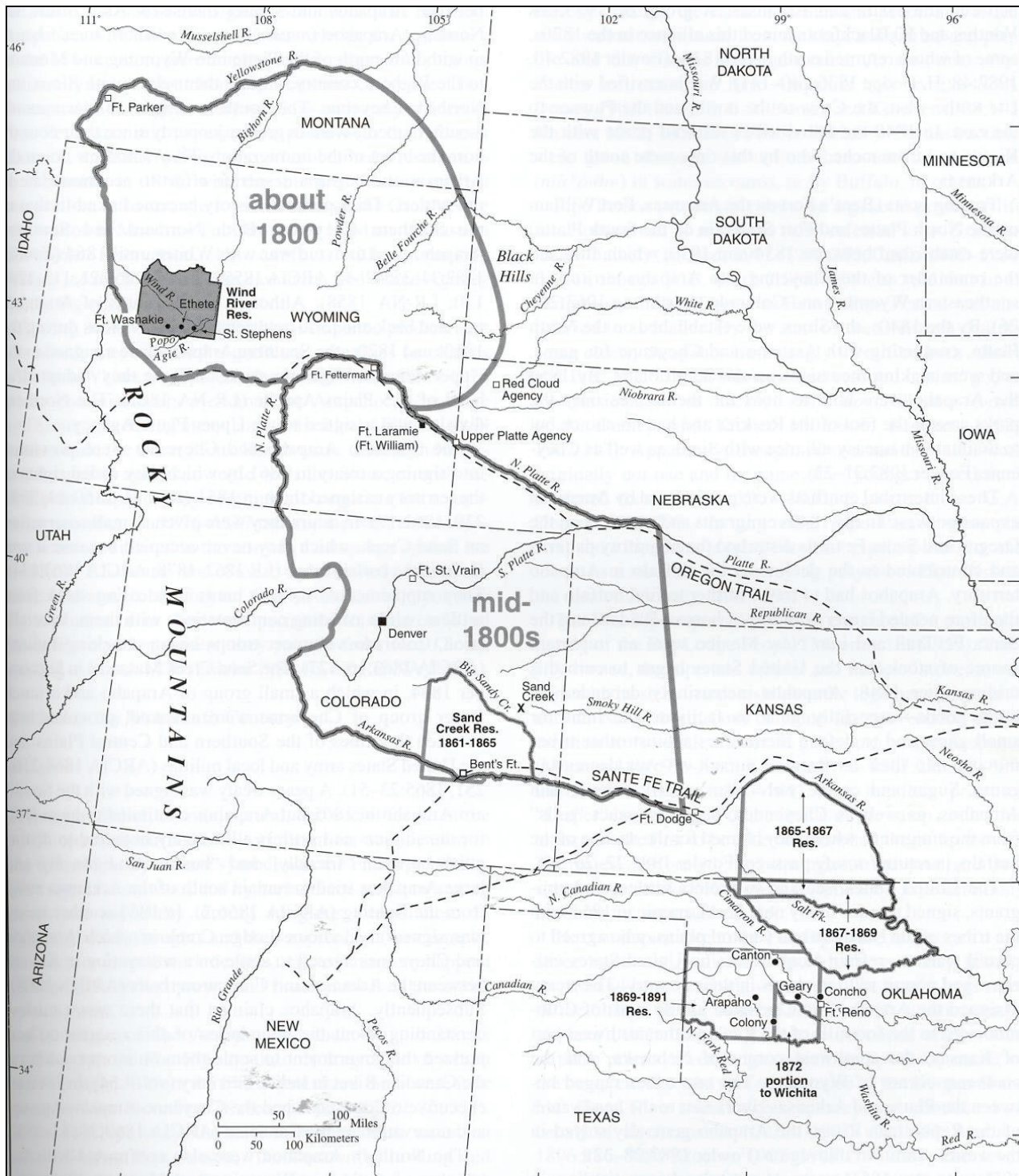
<sup>13</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 525-26.

<sup>14</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 526.

<sup>15</sup> Loretta Fowler, "Arapaho," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 840.

<sup>16</sup> John H. Moore, Margot P. Liberty, and A. Terry Straus, "Cheyenne," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 863-65.





**Figure 9. Arapaho territory about 1800; mid-nineteenth century Arapaho and Cheyenne territory; and reservations. Reprinted from Loretta Fowler, "Arapaho," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 132, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001).**

The primary source of food, clothing, shelter, tools, and weapons for both the Arapahoes and the Cheyennes was bison. Until about the mid-nineteenth century, bison were abundant in the Arapaho and Cheyenne territory of the Central Plains, with the Arapahoes hunting as far south as the Arkansas River in central Kansas. They also hunted elk, deer, wild sheep, pronghorn, bear, beaver, and other smaller game for food and hides. To supplement their meat diets, the Arapahoes and Cheyennes gathered prairie turnips, Jerusalem artichokes, groundnuts, bison berries, and other berries found growing in the plains region. Prior to acquisition of the horse and the transition to a mostly nomadic lifestyle, the Cheyennes also grew corn, squash, and beans.<sup>17</sup>

### *Kiowa, Comanche, and Plains Apache*

Kiowa oral tradition places their original homeland in the headwaters region of the Yellowstone River in Montana. Later, they moved east to present-day western South Dakota around the Black Hills and established good relations with the Crows. In 1805, Native American informants told Lewis and Clark that the Kiowas lived near the North Platte River in present-day Wyoming and Nebraska. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the Cheyennes and Lakotas had forced them south to the South Platte River in Colorado. From there, the Kiowas moved south across the Republican, Smoky Hill, and Arkansas rivers of western Kansas. Due to a linguistic relationship to Tanoan speakers in the Southwest, some scholars believe that the Kiowas may have been horticulturists who entered the plains from the Southwest instead of being hunter-gatherers who came from the north.<sup>18</sup>

The Numic-speaking Comanches had a strong presence in the northern plains as early as 1500, and they were among the first Plains Indian tribes to obtain horses and to adopt an equestrian culture. As with other tribes in the region, subsistence activities for the Kiowas, Comanches, and Plains Apaches revolved around hunting, primarily for bison, which provided meat and material for clothing, shelter, tools, and weapons. Other smaller game, such as deer, antelope, coyote, fox, and rabbit were also hunted when available. The Plains Apaches, prior to acquiring the horse in about the mid-1600s, lived as horticulturists in areas of eastern Colorado, western Kansas, and northwestern New Mexico. Once they started trading for horses, some bands fully adopted the nomadic horse culture, while others continued their farming lifestyle with hunting as a supplement. Where available, varieties of fruits, vegetables, and tubers were gathered, including chokecherries, plums, grapes, blackberries, prairie turnips, and wild onions.<sup>19</sup>

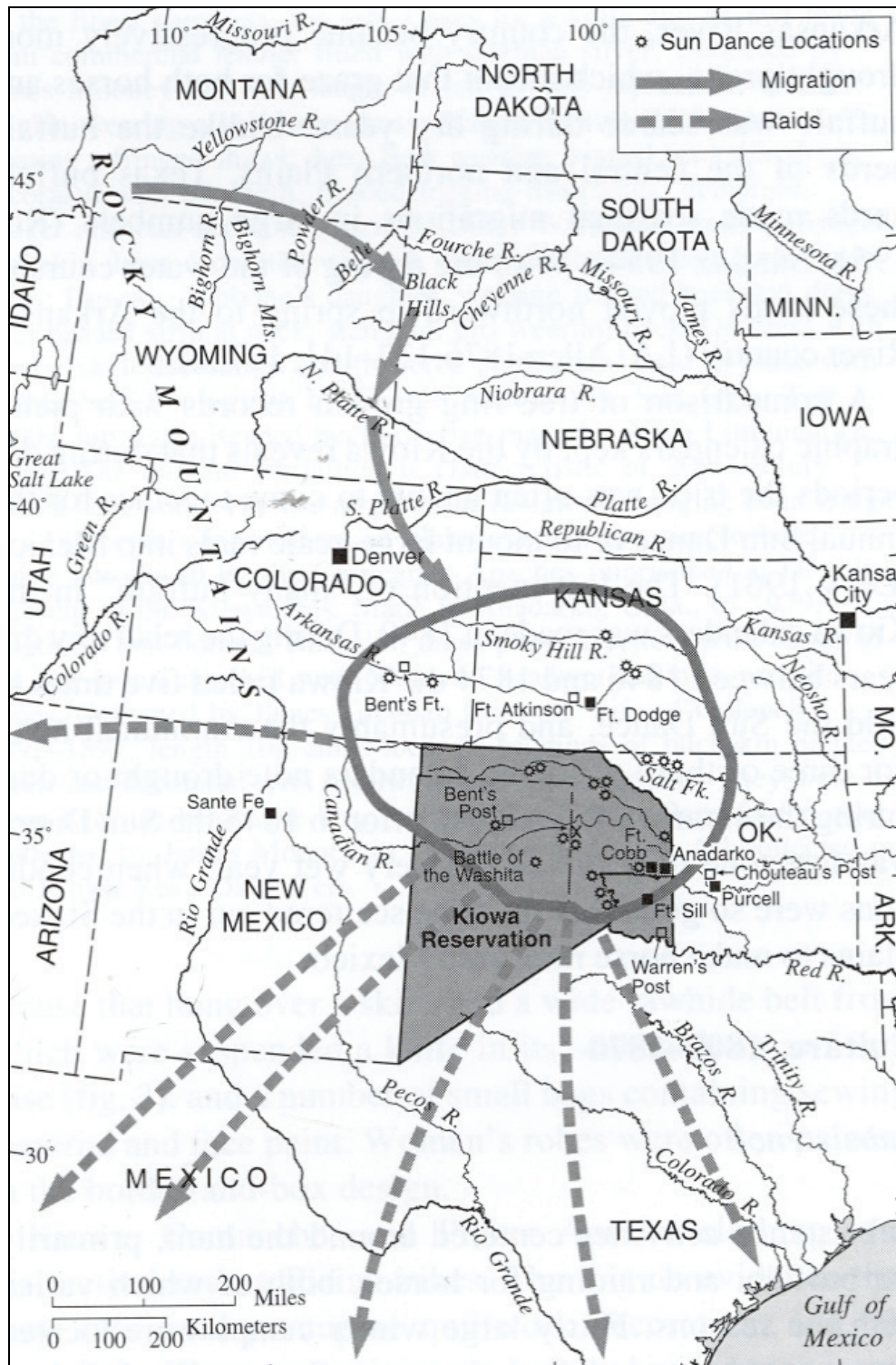
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<sup>17</sup> Fowler, "Arapaho," 847; and John H. Moore, Margot P. Liberty, and A. Terry Straus, "Cheyenne," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 867.

<sup>18</sup> Jerrold E. Levy, "Kiowa," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 907.

<sup>19</sup> Levy, "Kiowa," 908; Thomas W. Kavanagh, "Comanche," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 889; and Morris W. Foster and Martha McCollough, "Plains Apache," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 926, 928-29.





**Figure 10. Kiowa migration in the eighteenth century to their nineteenth century territory, with annual Sun Dance locations. Reservation boundaries date from 1865, reduced to southwestern Indian Territory in 1867, and allotted in 1901 and 1906. Reprinted from Jerrold E. Levy, "Kiowa," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 2, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001).**



The Plains Apache language, often called Kiowa Apache, is one of six that make up the Apachean branch of the Athapaskan language group. As a tribal designation, Plains Apache is used to refer to any Apache-speaking groups on the plains in early historic times. Scholars disagree as to the origins of the Plains Apaches. According to anthropologist James Mooney, they originated on the northern plains, where, sometime in the early eighteenth century, they allied with the Kiowas in the Black Hills of western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming. Other scholars, however, argue that the Plains Apaches were part of the older migration of the Athapaskan from western Canada to the Southwest and that they were driven back north by Comanche movement onto the southern plains in the early 1700s. These scholars have associated archeological remains of late-seventeenth to early eighteenth-century ceramics-using horticultural peoples of western Kansas and Nebraska and eastern Colorado and Wyoming with the ancestral Plains Apaches. Mooney also believed that they functioned as a band of the Kiowas from the early eighteenth century until their reservation settlement in 1875. While the Plains Apaches often found it necessary to ally themselves for long periods of time with the Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Comanches, Kiowas, and other southern tribes, they maintained their language and culture even during extended periods of alliances with these tribes.<sup>20</sup>

### *Kansa*

The Kansa (also called the Kaw), spoke Dhegiha, a branch of the Siouan language family, whose speakers also included the Osages, Omaha-Poncas, and Quapaws. Dhegiha-speaking tribes originated from a single tribe that at one time lived along the Ohio River, and possibly the Wabash River. From the mouth of the Ohio, the Quapaws migrated south, and the rest of the group continued to the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. From there, the people who became the Kansa and the Osages migrated slowly west up the Missouri River. During the 1700s, the Kansa remained primarily in the area of what became northeastern Kansas and northwestern Missouri, avoiding their enemies, the Pawnees and the Plains Apaches. Toward the latter years of the eighteenth century, a significant portion of the Pawnees moved north. This allowed better access to the plains of western Kansas, where the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and other tribes hunted bison. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Kansa had ceded much of the territory they claimed in central and north central Kansas and had settled on a reservation at Council Grove, and later, one in Indian Territory, where they remain today.<sup>21</sup>

Subsistence activities of the Kansa revolved around farming and hunting. In the spring, they cleared their fields in river bottoms near their permanent villages in eastern Kansas where corn, beans, squash, and melons were planted. After the crops had been planted, the tribe left for the summer bison hunt either north toward the area of the Smoky Hill River in Pawnee and Comanche territory or to the south along the Arkansas River. By late summer, the Kansa returned to their villages to harvest crops and prepare for a longer winter hunt. Once the harvest was complete, the tribe again took to the prairie to hunt for bison. At the end of the hunt, rather than returning to the villages, they would split into smaller groups in search of deer and beaver for hides and pelts to trade with non-Indians.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Foster and McCollough, "Plains Apache," 926.

<sup>21</sup> Garrick A. Bailey and Gloria A. Young, "Kansa," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 462-64.

<sup>22</sup> Bailey and Young, "Kansa," 464.

## Central Plains Indians during the Protohistoric Period

The 1540–1542 Spanish expedition of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and his encounters with American Indian peoples of present-day west Texas and Kansas marked the beginning of contact between non-Indians and Indians on the Central Plains, a period known as the “protohistoric.” Interactions between the Spanish and American Indian groups were at best sporadic and documentation of these encounters was inconsistent. Following Spanish contact and prior to 1700, interactions among French *voyageurs* and the Indians, particularly the Pawnees, became more common. Throughout the eighteenth century, the French maintained successful business relationships with area Native Americans. The French presence and their economic strategy encouraged Central Plains groups to interact profitably with them rather than the Spanish. By the end of the century, however, four nations—France, Spain, Great Britain, and the United States—were vying for control of this area, which would become the Louisiana Territory.<sup>23</sup>

The earliest historical reference to the Pawnees comes from the sixteenth-century narrative of Captain Juan Jaramillo, a member of the exploring expedition headed by the Spanish general Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, whose party in 1541 traveled into the Central Plains as far north as present-day Lindsborg, Kansas. After the party reached Quivira, which comprised several ancestral Wichita villages, they learned of another village farther beyond Quivira called Harahey. Since Harahey is an interpretation of the Wichita name for the Pawnees, it is generally accepted as a reference to the Pawnee villages to the north. No direct contact between the Pawnees and the Spanish or French is known to have occurred until the early 1700s, but numerous explorers traveled the Missouri River during the seventeenth century, and their maps reflect indirect knowledge of the Pawnees.<sup>24</sup>

During the early decades of the eighteenth century, rival French and Spanish vigorously explored the region of the Central Plains and encountered Pawnee villages along the rivers of eastern Nebraska and north central Kansas. Numerous French explorers recorded in their journals and on maps information about the villages. According to Spanish records, French *voyageurs* from Canada were reaching the Pawnees possibly as early as the end of the seventeenth century but certainly by the first two decades of the eighteenth century. Pawnee trade with Spanish from Santa Fe may have begun as early as 1714, but few sources exist to verify the exact date. Due to French dominance in the Central Plains and their ability to bring in a larger quantity of trade goods, the French had a greater impact on and more influence among the Pawnees and other tribes of the region.<sup>25</sup> Over the first part of the century, the Spanish became less active in the area, likely due to military defeats at the hands of the French and, at times, their American Indian allies. During the 1760s, however, the Spanish reemerged on the Central Plains and began to employ the Pawnees in the developing Missouri River fur trade.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, as the nascent United States began its westward expansion, the Pawnees had been trading with both the French and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish, for at least a century.

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<sup>23</sup> William R. Swagerty, “History of the United States Plains until 1850,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 256, 264-69.

<sup>24</sup> Parks, “Pawnee,” 517.

<sup>25</sup> Parks, “Pawnee,” 517-19.

<sup>26</sup> Parks, “Pawnee,” 517-18.

The Kitkahahkis of the Republican River received their first known mention in the historical record in a November 1777 report by Spanish Lieutenant Governor Francisco Cruzat to the governor-general of Louisiana. Cruzat wrote that the Kitkahahkis, as well as another Pawnee band, engaged in hunting and obtained skins from beaver, bison, otter, and deer for the fur trade. In a subsequent report, Cruzat named the traders who had been granted licenses to trade with the tribes on the Missouri River, including one who was licensed to trade with the Kitkahahkis and two with other Pawnee bands. The Kitkahahkis, and the Pawnees generally, were again mentioned by name in Governor-General Esteban Rodríguez Miró's 1785 report on the Missouri River Valley. The report indicated that the "Pani" (Chawis and Pitahawiratas) were located on the right bank of the Platte River; the Skiris farther upstream on the Loup River; and the Kitkahahkis on the Republican River.<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned above, the Kansa's permanent territory was located in northeastern Kansas and northwestern Missouri. The Kansa limited their presence in western Kansas to summer and winter bison hunts in an effort to avoid their enemies in the area, including several Central Plains tribes, such as the Pawnees, Plains Apaches, and Comanches. Contact between the Kansa and non-Indians started in the 1680s, when French traders penetrated the lower Missouri River Valley. The Kansa and the French quickly developed a trade relationship with each other, in which traders provided the American Indians with guns, metal, tools, and other items in exchange for horses, pelts and hides, and Plains Apache and Pawnee slaves. For the rest of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and into the first few years of the nineteenth century, the French and the Kansa were staunch allies and maintained cordial trading relations.<sup>28</sup>

## ***U.S. Westward Expansion and its Effects on Indians***

### **The Early American Period**

Following independence from England, the new U.S. government sought to foster and maintain peaceful relations with Native Americans both within and outside the country's boundaries (which would soon expand greatly to encompass new Indian groups) to accommodate non-Indian desire for westward expansion away from the original Atlantic Coast colonies. In a time when land acquisition and cultivation equaled wealth in the mind of non-Indians, it is not surprising that many Euroamericans were eager to take Native American lands, which they perceived as vast and "unused." While U.S. lawmakers were sympathetic to the territorial desires of non-Indians, they also wished to facilitate orderly and peaceful settlement by regulating relations between American Indians and the new citizens of the United States. As historian Francis Paul Prucha described it, "these measures were intended as a tight web to hold back unruly frontiersmen, thus preserving the honor of the nation by enforcement of the agreements made between the United States and the Indians in formal treaties."<sup>29</sup> Early U.S. Indian policy focused primarily on protecting Indian land boundaries, regulating trade with Indians, controlling liquor traffic, and punishing crimes by and against Indians (so as to prevent private retaliation on the frontier). A small but growing military that would establish a series of forts throughout the nation supported the enforcement of these regulations, which were further filtered through the

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<sup>27</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 518-19.

<sup>28</sup> Bailey and Young, "Kansa," 462-64.

<sup>29</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, 2 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 1:30.

larger U.S. goal of assimilating American Indians into the larger society through “civilizing” and “Christianizing” them.<sup>30</sup> Despite the intentions of U.S. lawmakers (who believed that creating a just nation based on the rule of law was essential to a successful democracy), the policies they devised and the people who implemented them ultimately had far-reaching and often deleterious effects on American Indians across the continent.

The United States’ early dealings with tribes east of the Mississippi River set the stage for its American Indian policy in the lands it would acquire west of the Mississippi in 1803 and after. In the years following ratification of the Constitution (1787), which simply gave Congress the power “to regulate commerce . . . with the Indian tribes,” the U.S. government entered into numerous treaties with the various tribes remaining in the east.<sup>31</sup> Tensions began to grow between non-Indian settlers moving west and the Indians residing in those regions. Expansion into the Northwest Territory north of the Ohio River in the late 1700s, for example, sparked strong resistance among tribes, who had refused to accept the new U.S. border. Despite some early defeats and the belief among the tribes that Britain would come to their assistance, the United States ultimately prevailed, signing Jay’s Treaty in 1794, which not only ensured peace with the American Indians in the area known as the “Old Northwest” but also provided for the British to evacuate certain traditional posts now located in U.S. territory.<sup>32</sup>

Euroamerican settlers also faced resistance in the south, where the new nation held a similarly precarious hold. In the late 1700s, much of the present states of Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia were occupied by the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws. Additionally, those states were bordered by the Spanish (to the south in Florida) and French (to the west and south in Louisiana holdings), both of which would have benefited by ongoing conflict between the American Indians and the new U.S. government as well as by continuing to control trade with the tribes in the region. Not wanting to spark a war with either of these countries but recognizing the imperative of controlling the situation, the U.S. government established a line of military posts to reinforce its authority in the area. Once hostilities had been resolved in the Northwest Territory, the U.S. was then able to sign the Treaty of San Lorenzo with Spain in 1795, which recognized the thirty-first parallel as the southern border of the United States and gave the United States navigation rights on the Mississippi. Less than a decade later, the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, effectively removing France from the Native American equation in the south and opening up vast territory in the west. The United States could begin to imagine using this new territory to ameliorate the Indian “problem” east of the Mississippi.<sup>33</sup> The era of Indian removal was about to begin.

### **Indian Removal East of the Mississippi River and the Creation of Indian Territory**

Initially, Indian Territory encompassed most of what are now the states of Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma, originally home to the Osages, Wichitas, Arapahoes, and others. The creation of a large and permanent land base for the settlement of American Indian tribes (the term “Indian Territory” was not applied until 1834) in the mid-1830s was the result of a decades-

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<sup>30</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:29-31.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion of early American Indian policy and its political and social underpinnings, see Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:esp. chap. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:62-67.

<sup>33</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:67-71.

long process that had been gaining momentum ever since the creation of the United States.<sup>34</sup> With the 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory by the United States, Euroamerican settlers came west and established trading posts for local Native Americans along the lower Missouri River. Furthermore, the acquisition of such a vast amount of land provided the means by which land transfers—an idea first originated by President Thomas Jefferson, who brokered the Louisiana Territory purchase—could be accomplished to facilitate Indian removal.<sup>35</sup> Following the conclusion of the War of 1812, President James Monroe and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun began working in earnest to change the situation of American Indians east of the Mississippi, whose lands were increasingly surrounded by and being encroached upon by Euroamerican settlement. In 1818 and 1819, the Shawnees, Delawares, Miamis, Weas, Wyandots, Potawatomis, Kickapoos, and other tribes signed cession treaties in response to pressure from governmental agents who urged them to sell their lands. Calhoun, who remained in the Secretary of War post when President John Quincy Adams took office, worked with Adams during the early 1820s to lay the groundwork for the government's new Indian policy. President Andrew Jackson, Adams' successor, finalized a policy in 1825 that designated all lands west of the Mississippi River as "Indian Country."<sup>36</sup>

During the 1820s, the removal of American Indian tribes living east of the Mississippi River also began building steam.<sup>37</sup> People like Monroe and Calhoun argued that the solution to the Indian "problem" was to exchange lands west of the Mississippi for traditional Indian lands in the east. The problem was particularly thorny in the southeastern states of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, home to the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws.<sup>38</sup> These tribes actively resisted attempts to be removed from their lands, which they farmed in a fashion very similar to Euroamericans in the region. In the opinion of the tribes, they had assimilated successfully into the new culture and should therefore be allowed to stay on their tribal lands. Monroe was sympathetic to the plight of these tribes, but he and others believed that removal was the only way to protect a tribe like the Cherokees while also promoting the interests of the state of Georgia, which had ceded lands in the west on a promise from the federal government to extinguish American Indian title to lands within the state's boundaries and hand it over to the state.<sup>39</sup>

As Monroe neared the end of his presidency in 1824, he called on Congress to formulate a plan for the land swap, wherein the U.S. would give lands in the west to eastern American Indian tribes, who in turn would vacate their lands and relocate. The Senate responded by drafting just such a bill in February that year, but it did not pass the House. Two years later, a similar bill was introduced in the House. The February 21, 1826, bill set aside land west of the Mississippi for Indians' exclusive use; the bill stated that Indians would be removed as individuals not tribes and made provisions for tribal extinction and distribution of property

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<sup>34</sup> Arrell M. Gibson, "Indian Land Transfers," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, ed. Wilcomb E. Washburn (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 221-22.

<sup>35</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:183.

<sup>36</sup> Diana Everett, "Indian Territory," in *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, (Stillwater: Oklahoma State Historical Society, 2007), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/i/in018.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph B. Herring, *The Enduring Indians of Kansas: A Century and a Half of Acculturation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 13, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:184-86.

<sup>39</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:186-87.

among individuals; and established a governing structure for the proposed territory under the purview of the U.S. government. However, this bill, too, did not pass.<sup>40</sup>

Following the demise of these two bills, the situation between the Cherokees and the state of Georgia became increasingly dire. By 1827, based on recommendations by President John Quincy Adams and his Secretary of War Peter B. Porter, the House Committee on Indian Affairs was in agreement that removal was imminent.<sup>41</sup> Thus, when Andrew Jackson, a vocal advocate for Indian removal, assumed the presidency in 1829 and gave his first message to Congress, it is not surprising that he moved quickly to address the perceived necessity of an aggressive federal policy of Indian removal.<sup>42</sup> Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act on May 28, 1830.<sup>43</sup> The Cherokees appealed to the president and Congress and ultimately brought suit in the Supreme Court. Although initial rulings appeared to be in their favor and Chief Justice John Marshall expressed sympathy for their plight, Cherokee attempts to retain their traditional lands were ultimately futile.<sup>44</sup> Within five years of the removal act's passage, the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws had signed removal treaties with the United States. Only five years later, the vast majority of southeastern American Indians had been resettled in Indian Territory.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most infamous account of American Indian removal from the east can be found in the tragic "Trail of Tears," by which over 16,000 Cherokees—about a quarter of whom died along the way—trekked from their homelands in Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, and Georgia west to Indian Territory. Although their stories may not have been as dramatic, many other tribes from different regions of the United States were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Indeed, with the exception of the Iowas, three of the four tribes that retain reservations in Kansas today—Kickapoos, Prairie Band Potawatomis, and the Sacs and Foxes—came from traditional homelands in what was then referred to as the "Old Northwest."

Clearing the Old Northwest of American Indians proved to be a complicated process. Many of these Indians lived in scattered bands with overlapping land claims and retained more migratory patterns of settlement than the American Indians of the south, who had become agricultural over the past few centuries of assimilation to Euroamerican social and cultural norms.<sup>46</sup> Among these Old Northwest tribes who came to Indian Territory were the Kaskaskias, Peorias, Shawnees, Ottawas, Wyandots, Miamis, Potawatomis, Delawares, Sacs and Foxes, Piankashaws, Weas, Kickapoos, Lakotas, and several New York Indian Tribes.<sup>47</sup>

Almost all of the Old Northwest tribes entered into a series of negotiations with the U.S. government that involved sometimes multiple rounds of land cessions, creation of reserves, and displacement to new lands. The history of Potawatomi removal exemplifies this "drawn out, piecemeal removal of Indians from the Old Northwest."<sup>48</sup> Prior to removal to Indian Territory,

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<sup>40</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:188.

<sup>41</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:190-91.

<sup>42</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:194.

<sup>43</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:206.

<sup>44</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:208-13.

<sup>45</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1: chap. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:243-44.

<sup>47</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:244.

<sup>48</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:244-53, esp. 244-48, and quotation on 248. For a detailed look at the Potawatomi, particularly the Prairie Band, see James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture, 1665-1965* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977).

the Potawatomis had resided in over fifty different Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana villages. These American Indians, who had fought alongside U.S. troops in the Black Hawk War of 1832 (discussed below), received five million acres of land just northeast of Fort Leavenworth, in present-day Kansas, in exchange for relinquishing large amounts of their traditional territory. By 1834, however, federal officials substituted land in Iowa for the property in Kansas, which Missouri politicians and settlers had decided they wanted. Many of the Potawatomis decided not to leave the Leavenworth area. They chose instead to settle with the Kickapoo, or to move southwest of Fort Leavenworth on the Marais des Cygnes River in eastern Kansas. By 1847, those who had chosen to move to Iowa had sold their land and returned to Kansas. In 1838, bands of Potawatomis that had refused to leave Indiana were forced out by President Martin Van Buren, who had troops escort the band to Kansas.<sup>49</sup> In 1861, the Potawatomis divided into the Citizen and Prairie bands, the latter of which remained on a diminished reservation in eastern Kansas that had been part of the original National Reserve. In 1867, the now-landless Citizen Band, which had been trying unsuccessfully to survive at the margins of the Prairie band's reservation, treated again with the U.S. government and moved out of the state, leaving only a few hundred Prairie Potawatomis on the Kansas reservation that remains today.<sup>50</sup>

The Black Hawk War was named after the Sac warrior called "Black Hawk," who had fought against the United States in the War of 1812 and had since remained vocally opposed to the United States and refused to abide by a number of land-cession treaties signed by the Sacs and Foxes starting in 1804. Although some Sacs and Foxes had begun to move west across the Mississippi under the leadership of Keokuk by the early 1830s, Black Hawk refused to leave the traditional Sac village of Saukenuk in the state of Illinois. A short period of relative peace ensued once Keokuk and his followers had departed, followed by a reluctant Black Hawk and his group, who had been pushed out of the state by the militia. The peace was quickly ended, however, when a group of Sac and Fox tribal members killed twenty-eight unarmed Menominees as retaliation for an earlier massacre of Fox chiefs by Menominees and Lakotas. Euroamerican settlers in the area, convinced they would be the next victims of this cycle of American Indian retaliation, demanded that the state bring the murderers to justice. In the meantime, Black Hawk, believing that the British and other Indians would rally to his side, recrossed the Mississippi into Illinois with a group of about 500 mounted warriors and another 1,500 followers. Fearing the size of the group, General Henry Atkinson called on Illinois governor John Reynolds to send the mounted militia. After a number of raids, skirmishes, and outright battles, the militia defeated Black Hawk's band at the Battle of Bad Axe on August 1-2, 1832, in present-day Wisconsin. Black Hawk escaped the final battle, but was soon captured, imprisoned, and ultimately returned to live out the remainder of his life under Keokuk's custody.<sup>51</sup>

The Black Hawk War proved a turning point for the Sacs and Foxes, as well as for the Kickapoos. With their confederation diminished in power, the Sacs and Foxes also experienced a precipitous decline in population and internal dissension after the war's final battle. In 1833, they treated with the U.S. government to cede a large strip of land along the Mississippi River in what is now Iowa and move onto a smaller piece of land on the Iowa River. Just five years later, the Sacs and Foxes sold that land and thereafter moved to the headwaters of the Osage River in

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<sup>49</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 1:248-53.

<sup>50</sup> Clifton, *Prairie People*, 351-53.

<sup>51</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 253-57.

Kansas.<sup>52</sup> The Kickapoos (Prairie and Vermillion bands) met in fall 1832 with William Clark, then superintendent of the Office of Indian Affairs, who persuaded them that they should take advantage of the opportunity to leave a country where they had “long been looked upon with suspicion” and move to Kansas, which he assured them (although he had never been there) would provide a good home. The Kickapoos signed the Treaty of Castor Hill on October 24, 1832, relinquishing their land in Missouri and along the Wabash, and moved to locations near Fort Leavenworth in eastern Kansas soon thereafter.<sup>53</sup>

The Iowas and Missouri Sacs and Foxes had come to eastern Kansas earlier than most tribes. Although they derived from different cultural backgrounds, they had been closely allied for years and had assimilated to the Plains Indians culture. By the time of the Black Hawk War, they were longtime residents on the Platte with a few villages near the eastern border of Kansas and Nebraska. The two tribes met with Clark in 1836 to cede claims to Platte land in exchange for reserves in that area, but by 1837, most had reestablished themselves on their old familiar territory. They thereafter refused to leave the area, as did small bands of Chippewa and Munsee Indians, who settled in the same area.<sup>54</sup> They would be joined in the 1840s by the Sacs and Foxes of Mississippi and others.<sup>55</sup>

### Indian Removal West of the Mississippi River

The United States’ purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 commenced a new and complex relationship between the U.S. government and American Indian groups that would lead to the creation of the reservation system in the decades that followed. By the first decade of the nineteenth century and continuing over the next few decades, disease would decimate many Plains Indian tribes, who were additionally coming into contact with non-Indian explorers, settlers, traders, and military.<sup>56</sup> The famed party of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark embarked on an expedition west of the Mississippi in 1804 intent both on pacifying the Indians they encountered and impressing upon them the seriousness with which the United States intended to control its newly acquired territory. East of the Mississippi River, ever-growing non-Indian pressure for land fueled the flames of support for Indian removal policies, which had been sparked in the late eighteenth century with the creation of the United States and further fanned by the land-exchange policies Thomas Jefferson originated and others promulgated after 1803. Increasingly aggressive Indian removal policies of the 1820s and 1830s forced west those

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<sup>52</sup> Prucha, *Great Father*, 253-57.

<sup>53</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> A series of disease epidemics among Native Americans began as early as the 1730, when the Cree and probably the Sioux and Arikara suffered from smallpox. Devastating outbreaks of smallpox, whooping cough, streptococcal infections, measles, influenza, cholera, and other diseases worked to decimate Indian populations, who had no immunities to these mostly viral infections. By the time of the infamous smallpox epidemic of 1837–1838, which killed as many as 70-80 percent of certain Plains tribes, many Indian groups had been reduced to a mere fraction of their earlier population sizes. Disease, coupled with forced migrations and growing financial dependence on non-Indians had dire sociocultural effects such as increased suicide rates, fertility decline, and the creation of refugee populations, not to mention the loss of traditional languages and cultural practices. Death from outbreaks of these diseases continued throughout the nineteenth century, although to a lesser degree. Today, Native Americans still have high incidences of disease and shortened life spans, as compared to non-Indians. See Swagerty, “History of the United States Plains until 1850,” 257-58; Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 45, 152-53; and William E. Unrau, *The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People, 1673–1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 70, 132, 148-52.



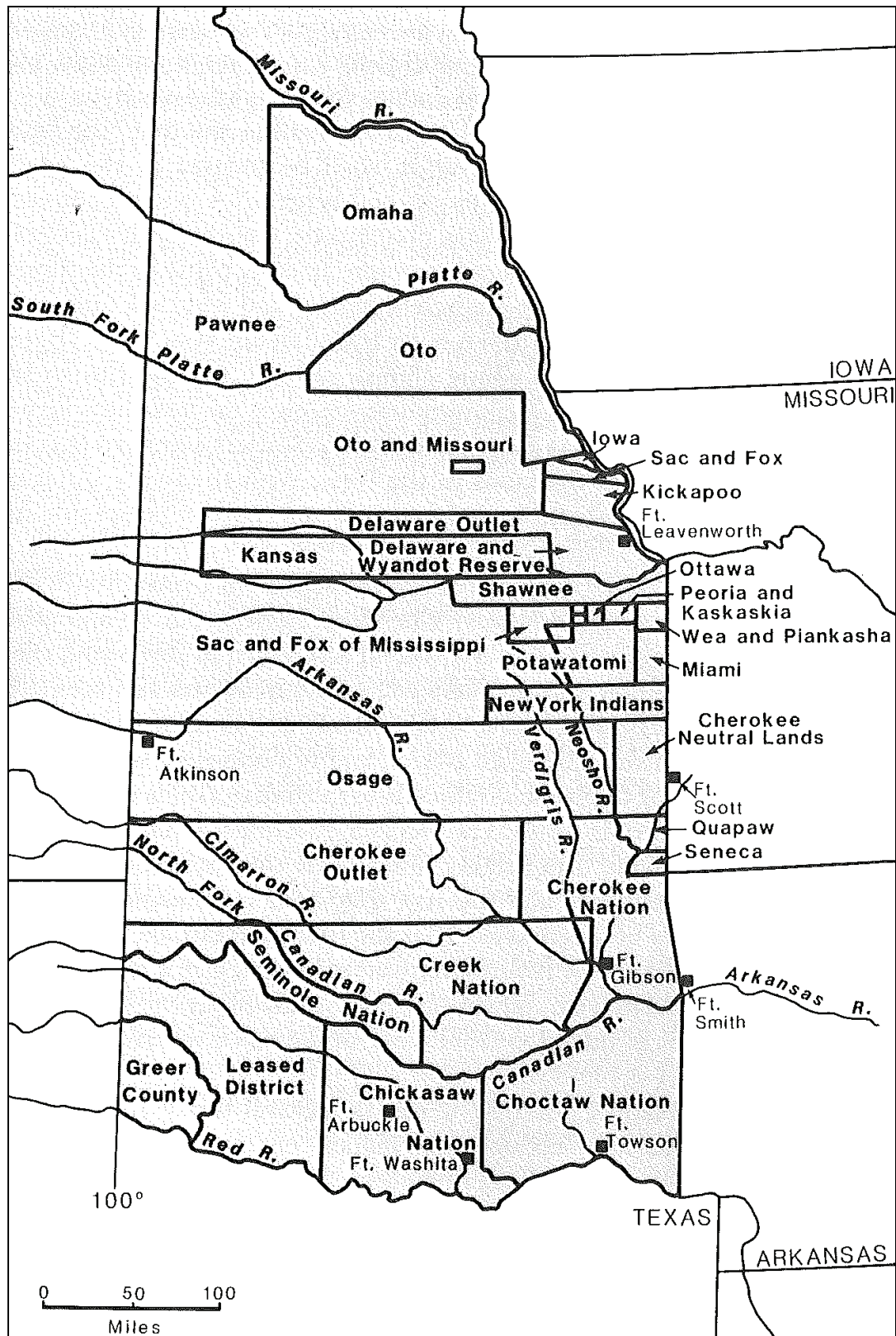


Figure 11. Location of Indians in the Indian Territory, after Removal. Reprinted from Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 1:275.

American Indians who had once resided in the southeast and Old Northwest; they in turn encroached on the homelands and hunting grounds of the Central Plains Indians. By the middle of the nineteenth century, then, Indians like the Osages, who had long called the Central Plains home, were soon outnumbered by members of emigrant tribes such as the Potawatomis, Chickasaws, Delawares, Choctaws, and Cherokees—as well as exploding numbers of non-Indian settlers. By the time Kansas became a state, the tribal makeup of the region had completely changed.

Although the Lewis and Clark expedition passed up the Missouri River east of the Pawnee villages without visiting them, the explorers obtained information on their locations, size, culture, subsistence, and trade. The first non-Indian American actually to meet the Pawnees was Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, who reached the Republican River Kitkahahkis in 1806 during his exploration of southwestern parts of the Louisiana Territory. In 1811, Major George Sibley visited the villages of the Skiris and South Band, with hopes of making peace among the Pawnees, Osages, and Kansa of eastern Kansas. Sibley reported that the Kitkahahkis had abandoned their village on the Republican River to settle on the Platte River to be closer to the other Pawnee bands.<sup>57</sup>

In the second decade of the nineteenth century, the U.S. Congress passed an act limiting licenses to trade with American Indians only to U.S. citizens and also imposed a duty of up to 30 percent on items that British suppliers had largely provided. These two pieces of legislation, both of which were passed in 1816, combined to diminish Native American access to high-quality British goods at a time when the Indians needed those most.<sup>58</sup> Indians' lives were further complicated by the need to respond to treaty commissions being formed to ensure their loyalty to the United States and to regulate relations between American Indians who had lived in the area for centuries, eastern Indians whom many non-Indians were sure would need to be “removed” from their own traditional homelands east of the Mississippi, and non-Indians, who were interested in settling the new territory. Over the next several decades came increased pressure from non-Indians who were either passing through the homelands of traditional Central Plains Indians for areas farther west or settling in their territory. During the nineteenth century, Euroamericans, primarily following two trails, pushed westward through the territories of several Central Plains Indian groups. The Oregon Trail to California and Oregon followed the Platte River through the territory of the Pawnee, as well as through the hunting territory of the Cheyennes and the Arapahoes. Settlers traversing the other major trail, the Santa Fe Trail, went through Comanche and Kiowa territory. As emigrants moved west, pockets of settlement appeared, particularly in the Kansas and Nebraska territories and in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in eastern Colorado where gold had been discovered.<sup>59</sup>

As the century progressed, emigration steadily increased, putting added demands on resources that the Native peoples living in the region relied on for survival. Additionally, as described previously, forced removal of American Indians who resided east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river added approximately 30 percent to the overall American Indian population already living there. In order to make room for Native Americans relocated to the

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<sup>57</sup> Parks, “Pawnee,” 519.

<sup>58</sup> Swagerty, “Plains until 1850,” 272.

<sup>59</sup> Loretta Fowler, “History of the United States Plains since 1850,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant, vol. 13, part 1, *Plains*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 280.

west, the government treated with Indian tribes to cede their territory in exchange for annuities and smaller reservations.<sup>60</sup> In an attempt to regulate relationships between non-Indians and American Indian groups residing on the Central Plains, the federal government negotiated a series of peace and friendship treaties in which signatories agreed to forgive and forget “every injury, or act of hostility, committed by one or either of the contracting parties against the other.” These treaties were designed to establish and maintain cordial interactions between Indians and non-Indians; no lands changed hands and no annuities were promised. The Osages and Kansa signed peace and friendship treaties in 1815, the Otoes in 1817, four branches of the Pawnees and Quapaws in 1818, and the Comanche in 1834. The Grand Pawnee treaty specifically stated that they would “oblige themselves to deliver up” tribal members who were disloyal to the United States. The unspoken subtext of the Pawnee agreement was that they would become U.S. allies in a possible confrontation with Spain.<sup>61</sup>

Starting in 1818 and persisting through the 1850s, a second type of treaty was negotiated with Central Plains groups such as the Pawnees, Osages, and Kansa. William Clark, who served as governor of Missouri Territory from 1813 to 1821 and who was superintendent of the newly formed Bureau (often called Office) of Indian Affairs from 1822 to 1838, was a moving force behind U.S. Indian removal policy and served as a negotiator for many of these treaties. In 1834, Congress established Indian Territory as a permanent homeland for Indian groups when they were relocated, bounded by the Platte River to north, the Red River to the south, Spanish territory to the west, and Arkansas territory to the east.<sup>62</sup> Eventually, most all of the American Indian groups who claimed portions of the Central Plains, specifically western and north central Kansas, were removed to reservations in Indian Territory, which was subdivided into the territories and then states of Kansas and Nebraska and later Oklahoma. Clark and others negotiated a number of treaties during this period by which tribes like the Quapaws, Osages, Kansa, Otoe-Missouris, Pawnees, Comanches, and Wichitas ceded all or portions of their land for the use of Eastern Indian groups being moved west of the Mississippi River. These treaties were ostensibly meant to ease tensions among tribes moved into the region and those already living there. However, as one historian has explained it, the “oddly shaped reserves” that resulted from the land-cession treaties, were “often bordered by enemies or total strangers from the east, [which] created crisis and factionalism in many of the treaty tribes.”<sup>63</sup>

### *Negotiations with the Pawnees*

In 1818, William Clark and Auguste Chouteau, representing the United States government, negotiated separate but identical treaties with each of the four Pawnee bands. The treaties established friendship between the signatories and acknowledged that the Pawnees were under U.S. protection. The 1818 treaties were followed in 1825 with another treaty, in which the Pawnees were treated as one tribe composed of four federated bands. The main purposes of this 1825 treaty were to regulate trade with non-Indians, to limit that trade to U.S. citizens, and to insure that the Pawnees refrained from selling or trading firearms to hostile American Indians. The primary type of interaction between the Pawnee bands and non-Indians until the early 1830s was the fur trade. Traders who visited the villages provided the Pawnees with manufactured

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<sup>60</sup> Parks, “Pawnee,” 519-20; and “Treaty with the Pawnee, 1833,” in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:416-18, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0416.htm>.

<sup>61</sup> Swagerty, “Plains until 1850,” 272.

<sup>62</sup> Swagerty, “Plains until 1850,” 256, 270-73.

<sup>63</sup> Swagerty, “Plains until 1850,” 274.

goods such as firearms and metal objects in exchange for robes and hides from the Indians' semiannual hunts. The fur trade, however, had mostly ended by the mid-1830s, and the Pawnee relationship with non-Indians dramatically changed.<sup>64</sup>

In an 1833 treaty negotiated with the four Pawnee bands, the Pawnees ceded all their lands south of the Platte River in exchange for annual payments, agricultural implements, blacksmiths, a mill, a school, and military protection, contingent upon the Pawnees' agreeing to settle in permanent farming villages and give up their semiannual hunts. Due to increased non-Indian travel through and settlement on the Central Plains and the provisions of the 1833 treaty, the Pawnee presence in north central Kansas all but ended.<sup>65</sup>

### *Negotiations with the Arapahoes and Cheyennes*

By 1811, groups of Arapahoes ranged mainly along the North Platte River and as far south as the Arkansas River, while the Cheyennes stayed primarily between the Platte and Arkansas rivers.<sup>66</sup> During the 1820s and 1830s, tribal warfare intensified on the Central Plains, in particular between the Arapahoes and Cheyennes and the Utes to the west, Lakotas and Crows to the north, and Pawnees to the east. By the 1840s, however, the Lakotas had also established themselves on the North Platte River. From there they competed with the Arapahoes and Cheyennes for game and made incursions on the South Platte River, forcing the allied group to remain in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in eastern Colorado and in western Kansas. Euroamerican expansion west into this territory compounded intertribal conflicts. Between 1834 and 1839, several trading posts were established in Arapahoes and Cheyennes territory, with Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River in present-day eastern Colorado being the closest trading post to serve the Native Americans of western Kansas.

Trading posts served as locations for American Indians to obtain trade goods on which they had become dependent. But this commerce simultaneously brought growing numbers of non-Indians to the area, who competed for already scarce natural resources. It was the opening of the Santa Fe (1821) and Oregon (1841) trails, however, that arguably most affected the tribes of the Central Plains. Fueled by the 1848 California Gold Rush, thousands of emigrants flooded the trails and depleted game, grazing lands, firewood, and other resources along their routes. In September 1851, seeking to protect settlers and emigrants on the Oregon and Santa Fe trails, U.S. government officials negotiated a peace treaty at Fort Laramie with the tribes of the northern and Central Plains. Participating Indian tribes agreed to limit warfare with other tribes, cease attacks on non-Indians, and permit military posts in their territories. The treaty assigned the

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<sup>64</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 519; "Treaty with the Grand Pawnee, 1818," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:156-57, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/gra0156.htm>; "Treaty with the Noisy Pawnee, 1818," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:157-58, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0157.htm>; "Treaty with the Pawnee Republic, 1818," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:158-59, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0158.htm>; "Treaty with the Pawnee Marhar, 1818," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:159, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0159.htm>; and "Treaty with the Pawnee Tribe, 1825," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:258-60, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0258.htm>. Although Chouteau signed as a "Commissioner of the United States," he was primarily the head of a vast fur trading empire. See Stan Hoig, *The Chouteaus: First Family of the Fur Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 519-20; "Treaty with the Pawnee, 1833," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:416-18, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0416.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Moore et al., "Cheyenne," 863-65.

combined Arapahoes and Cheyennes groups most of eastern Colorado west to the foothills of the Rockies, the northwest part of Kansas, the southwest corner of Nebraska, and the southeast corner of Wyoming.<sup>67</sup> Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the Cheyennes had split into two groups. The Northern Cheyennes remained in the region of the Black Hills, northern Wyoming, and southern Montana. A second, larger segment of the tribe, the Southern Cheyennes, moved to areas now designated as Colorado, western Kansas, and western Oklahoma.

### *Kiowas, Comanches, and Plains Apaches*

In the eighteenth century, the Comanches dominated the southern plains, controlling the foothills of the Rocky Mountains from Eastern Shoshone territory in central Wyoming southward to Texas and New Mexico. Because of pressure from northern enemies and non-Indian travel on the Santa Fe Trail, by the 1820s, the Arkansas River had become the northern border of Comanche territory.<sup>68</sup>

While the Kiowas and the Comanches maintained their respective languages, cultures, and political systems, the two tribes formed an alliance in the early 1800s and shared a common territory. The Kiowas settled more to the northwest, along and south of the Arkansas River. The Comanches tended to keep farther south in New Mexico, the Texas Panhandle, and western Oklahoma. This alliance was likely more beneficial to the Kiowas, in that they could pass through the southern plains for trade and join the Comanches in raiding Mexican settlements. By the 1820s and 1830s, Kiowa and Comanche influence was more focused on territory south of the Arkansas River and much less so in areas of western Kansas.<sup>69</sup>

### *Negotiations with the Kansa and Osages*

In 1825, the Kansa and Osages met with William Clark in St. Louis for treaty negotiations and agreed to relinquish claims to lands in Missouri and Arkansas, as well as much of eastern Kansas, which they ceded. That same year, the Shawnees relinquished their claims in Missouri and moved farther west into Kansas. Over the next few years as Indian removal was finally codified in law and began to gather real momentum, the Kansa, Osages, and Shawnees would be joined in what would become the state of Kansas by bands of Delawares, Pinkashaws, Weas, Peorias, Miamis, and other American Indian groups.<sup>70</sup> In 1846, federal representatives again treated with the Kansa, who ceded the remainder of their territory and agreed to settle on a twenty-by-twenty-mile reservation located at Council Grove, Kansas.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Fowler, "Arapaho," 842; and Moore et al., "Cheyenne," 865; "Treaty of Fort Laramie with Sioux, etc., 1851," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:594-96, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/sio0594.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Kavanagh, "Comanche," 886.

<sup>69</sup> Levy, "Kiowa," 908; and Kavanagh, "Comanche," 886-88.

<sup>70</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 18, 23.

<sup>71</sup> Bailey and Young, "Kansa," 463, 471-72; "Treaty with the Kansa, 1825," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:222-25, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kan0222.htm>; "Treaty with the Kansa, 1846," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:552-54, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kan0552.htm>; and "Treaty with the Kansa Tribe, 1859," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:800-803, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kan0800.htm>.

## *Black Presence in Indian Territory*

Tribes that were relocated to Indian Territory were very different from each other and from those Plains Indians who had originally populated the region. The Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles brought with them not only different cultures from the ones indigenous to the Central Plains but also a number of people of African descent.<sup>72</sup> In the years between 1830 and 1865, a number of blacks lived in Indian Territory, having come to the region either during removal with eastern, slave-holding tribes, as free blacks moving west, or as freedom-seeking blacks escaping Southern slavery. Because Indian Territory was not officially a part of the United States, enslaved people of African descent living in the area were technically members of American Indian nations. By 1860, black slaves comprised between 10 and 20 percent of the residents of the Five Nations.<sup>73</sup>

Continued non-Indian settlement caused Congress to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which created the Kansas and Nebraska territories from the northern section of Indian Territory. This, along with continued negotiations of land-cession treaties with American Indian tribes, made more land available for non-Indian settlement in western and north central Kansas.<sup>74</sup> In 1854, then, after just forty years, the tribal and racial makeup of the area that would become the state of Kansas had been transformed by Native Americans relocated from east of the Mississippi as well as by the non-Indian settlers who were also moving into the area. This trend would accelerate over the next two decades.

## **Indian Kansas**

Although some longstanding American Indian communities had remained and other tribes had been relocated to Indian Territory throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Indian relocation to the area that was to become the state of Kansas accelerated and was more formalized during the years between 1854 and 1871. The arbitrarily defined reservations that were delineated during this time provided a temporary home to a number of Indian groups. By

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<sup>72</sup> Ariela J. Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), chap. 5, "Black Indian Identity in the Allotment Era," esp. 147-48.

<sup>73</sup> Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 4-5, 19. Other books about the black experience among tribes before and after removal to Indian Territory and in the years after the Civil War include Rudy Halliburton, *Red over Black: Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979); four volumes by Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr.: *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), *The Cherokee Freedmen: From Emancipation to American Citizenship* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), and *The Chickasaw Freedmen: A People without a Country* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Katja May, *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion* (New York: Garland, 1996); Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma, 1865-1907* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Fowler, "Plains since 1850," 280.

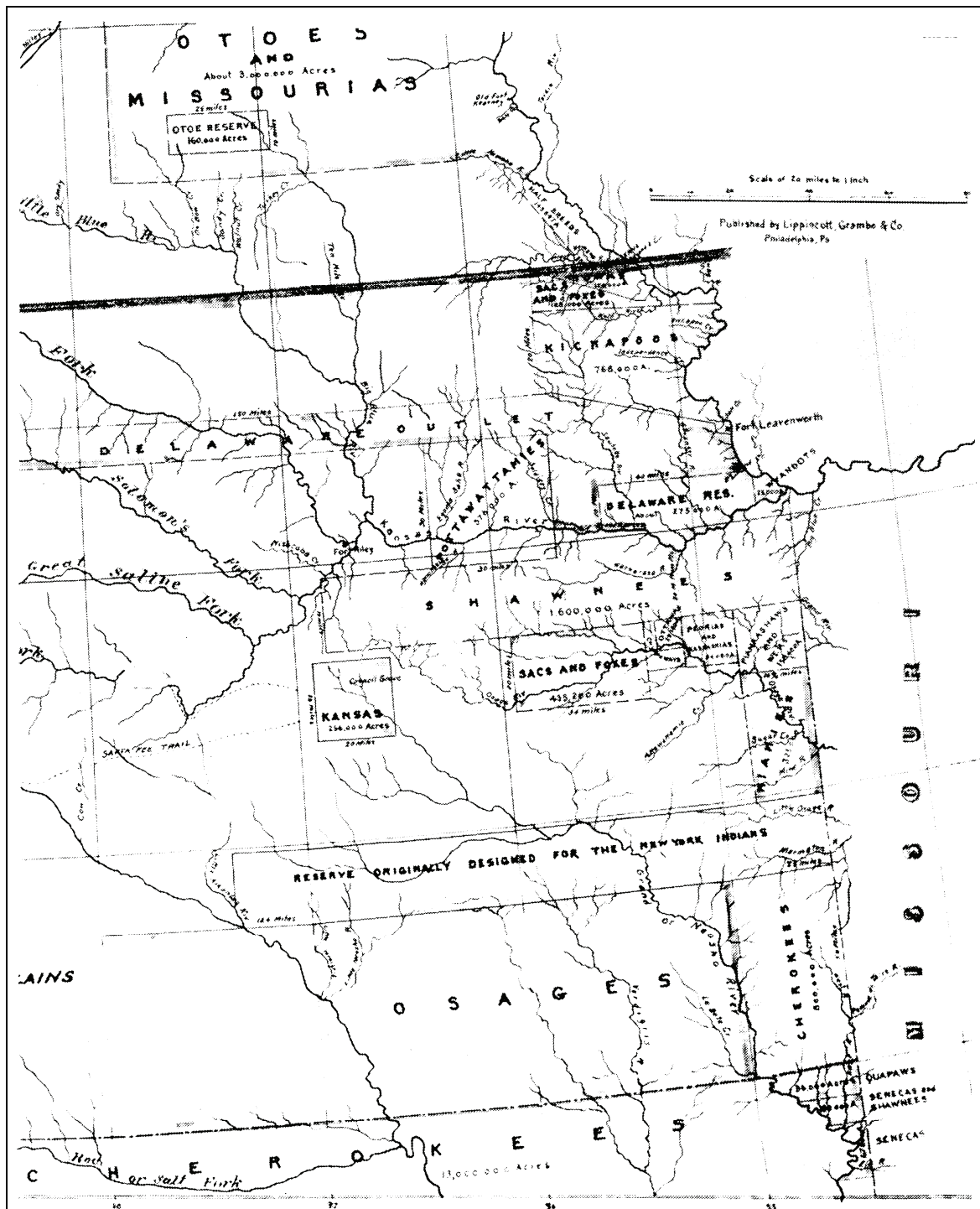
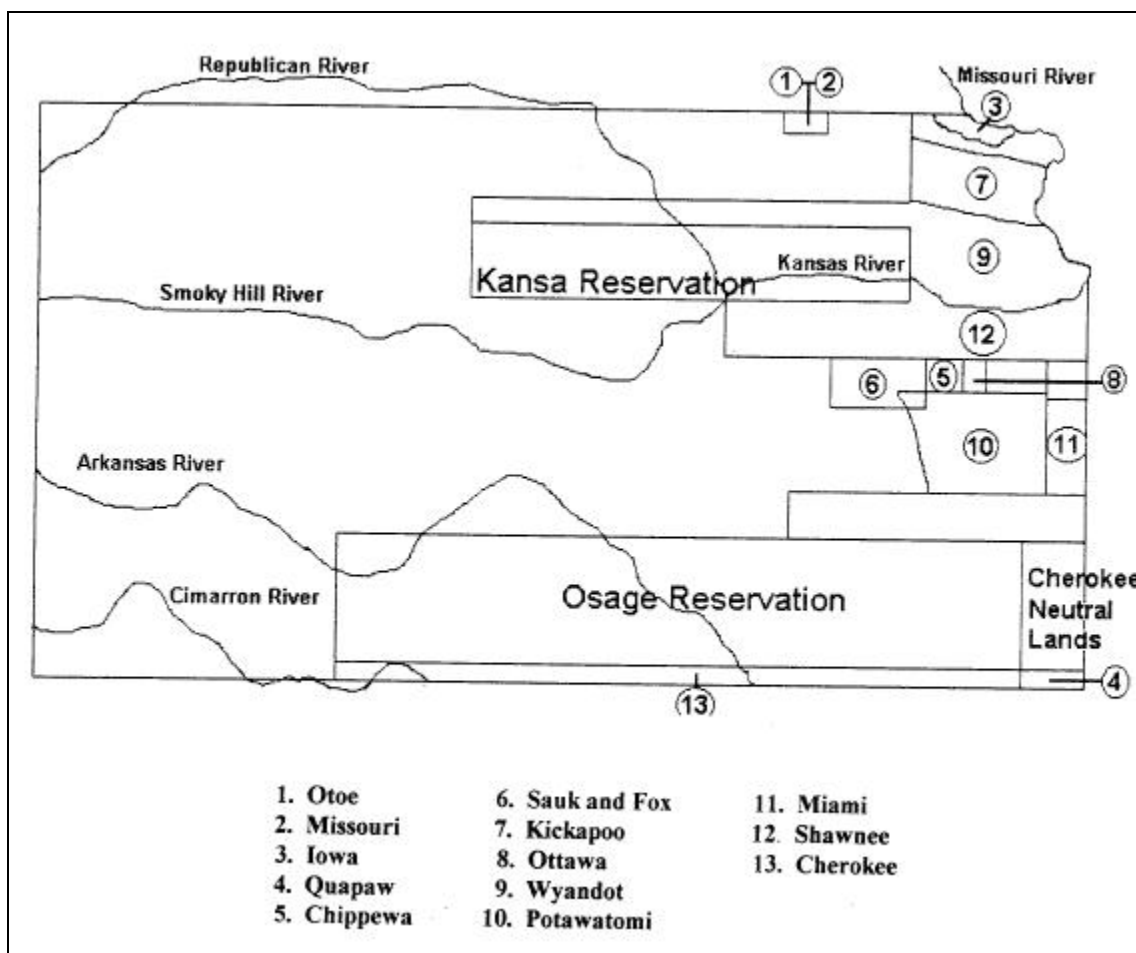


Figure 12. Detail, Capt. Seth Eastman's 1854 map of the Kansas and Nebraska territories. Reprinted from H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).



**Figure 13. Indian Reservations, Kansas Territory, ca. 1854.** Reprinted from Emporia State University, *Tales Out Of School*, May 1994, *Emigrant Indian Tribes of Kansas*, Michael J. Marchand, <http://www.emporia.edu/cgps/tales/m94tala.htm>.

1854, when Kansas Territory was officially organized, however, most Indians in the region did not descend from the area's original human inhabitants. Indeed, by that year, few of the Native American tribes that had resided in the area prior to 1812 remained. Instead, relocated tribes predominated, including the Otoe and Missouri (in present-day Nebraska), Missouri and Mississippi Sacs, Iowas, Kickapoos, Delawares, Shawnees, Potawatomis, Chippewas, Ottawas, Munsees, Kaskaskias, Peorias, Piankashaws, Weas, and others.<sup>75</sup> Original and relocated tribes alike were pushed farther south and west (most to the now-diminished Indian Territory, which would become Oklahoma in 1907) as non-Indians grabbed lands in the Kansas Territory before it became a state in 1861. The influx and presence of so many varied Indian groups meant that there was constant contact between American Indians, Euroamericans, and blacks.

American Indians residing in Kansas during this transitory period were forced by the terms of the treaties into a life of dependency on the United States coupled with severe

<sup>75</sup> See Figure 4; Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 27, map on 51; and H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854–1871* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), and map facing 18.



population loss due to disease, starvation, and skirmishes with non-Indians and other Indians. These conditions led remaining Pawnees in the territory, for example, to seek further protection and aid from the government. On September 24, 1857, the Pawnees concluded a treaty at Table Creek that established a fifteen-by-thirty-mile reservation for them on the Loup River (in present-day Nebraska). By the end of summer 1859, the four bands of Pawnees had moved to the new reservation. They established three contiguous villages, with the Skiris occupying two of these villages and members of the South Bands living together in the third and largest. In 1874, a second reservation was set aside for the Pawnees on Cherokee land between the Cimarron and Arkansas rivers in what was then Indian Territory (now Oklahoma); the Pawnees abandoned their Loup River land the next year and were moved to their new reservation, where they remain today.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, which had set aside land in Kansas for the Arapahoes and Cheyennes, non-Indians began settling in the area, pushing some Arapaho bands to move north and other bands to move south, furthering the separation of the tribe. Although the U.S. government did not formally recognize the Arapahoes and Cheyennes as two distinct groups, by 1851 they had established themselves in separate locations. Throughout the 1850s, non-Indians penetrated the Smoky Hill River Valley of western Kansas, one of the best bison hunting areas utilized by several Central Plains Indian tribes. In response, the Southern Arapahoes and Southern Cheyennes negotiated another treaty with the United States in 1861, by which they ceded rights to the territory assigned to them in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty. In return, they received a small reservation on Sand Creek in eastern Colorado, which, however, they never occupied due to its distance from the bison. In order to supplement their meager hunts, Southern Arapahoes and Southern Cheyennes began to steal stock from non-Indians living in the area. In retaliation, Colorado volunteer militia began attacking various American Indian groups of the Central Plains.<sup>77</sup>

The Sand Creek Massacre in September 1864, in which the Colorado volunteers under the command of U.S. Army Colonel John Chivington killed hundreds of Southern Arapahoes and Southern Cheyennes, touched off a series of confrontations between the U.S. Army and militia groups and tribes of the Central and Southern Plains. In 1865, the Southern Arapahoes signed a peace treaty, but they continued to be at risk because soldiers and settlers often did not distinguish between different tribes of Indians. For the most part, the Southern Arapahoes remained south of the Arkansas River and away from the fighting. By contrast, both groups of Cheyennes went to war against the United States, engaging troops in over fifty skirmishes between 1854 and 1879. The most significant battles taking place on the Central Plains were the 1856–1857 raids along the Kansas frontier; the 1857 fight with Colonel Edwin Sumner's troops at Solomon's Ford in northern Kansas; the 1863–1864 raids along the Arkansas and Platte rivers; the general frontier war of 1865 along the Platte River; the 1867 destruction of a Cheyenne and Lakota village near Fort Larned in central Kansas; and renewed raiding in 1868 followed by the battle on Arikaree Fork near the Colorado and Kansas border.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 520-23; and "Treaty with the Pawnee, 1857," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:764-67, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/paw0764.htm>.

<sup>77</sup> Fowler, "Arapaho," 842; and Moore et al., "Cheyenne," 865; "Treaty with the Arapaho and Cheyenne, 1861," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:807-11, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/ara0807.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Fowler, "Arapaho," 842; and Moore et al., "Cheyenne," 865; "Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, 1865," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:887-91, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/che0887.htm>.

In the midst of the Plains Indian Wars of the 1850s through 1870s, the government concluded a treaty in 1867 at Medicine Lodge Creek in southern Kansas in which the Southern Arapahoes and Southern Cheyennes agreed to a reservation in south central Kansas between the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers. A dispute over the boundaries of the joint reservation, however, prompted government officials to establish another reservation for them. An 1869 executive order established the Cheyenne-Arapaho Agency and Reservation in Indian Territory in the area of the North Canadian River of western Oklahoma, where the descendents of these tribes remain today.<sup>79</sup>

References to Kiowa, Comanche, and Plains Apache presence in western Kansas during the nineteenth century are scant. By about the 1820s and 1830s, the Cheyennes and Arapahoes had forced the three-tribe group to areas farther south, particularly lands south of the Arkansas River. The Plains Apaches, who affiliated with the Kiowas and Comanches and eventually settled on a reservation with them, allied with the Cheyennes and Arapahoes in the 1840s, between 1858 and 1867, and again from 1868 until 1875. In 1865, the Treaty of the Little Arkansas reserved the Texas Panhandle for the Comanches and the Kiowas, and the subsequent Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 reduced the area by about 94 percent. By 1875, the combined group of Kiowas, Comanches, and Plains Apaches had settled on their reservation, where they remain today, which shared its northern border with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Reservation in Indian Territory.<sup>80</sup>

Although the Kansa had settled on a reservation at Council Grove in 1846, a subsequent treaty in 1859 reduced the reservation by two-thirds, leaving them with approximately 80,000 acres. Decimated by disease and desiring to be in proximity to their Osage allies, the Kansa sold their reservation at Council Grove in 1873 and bought 100,000 acres from the Osage along the Arkansas River in Indian Territory. Later that year, they relocated to the new reservation and conducted their last bison hunt.<sup>81</sup>

Despite having been moved to reservations and being forced to farm, raise cattle, and rely on government rations, many of the tribes that had originally roamed freely over the Plains tried to continue traditional practices, such as hunting. During the first few years of Pawnee residence in Indian Territory, for example, they attempted buffalo hunts in Kansas Territory, but these attempts proved futile. Other Central Plains tribes in the area (Southern Cheyennes, Southern Arapahoes, Kansa, Plains Apaches, Comanches, and Kiowas) also tried to maintain hunting activities in their former territories, but they too were mostly unsuccessful and, therefore, had to adapt to the new reservation culture.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Fowler, "Arapaho," 841-42; and "Treaty with the Cheyenne and Arapaho, 1867," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:984-89, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/che0984.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> Kavanagh, "Comanche," 888; Foster and McCollough, "Plains Apache," 927-28; and "Treaty with the Comanche and Kiowa, 1865," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:892-95, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/com0892.htm>; "Treaty with the Kiowa and Comanche, 1867," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:977-82, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kio0977.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> Bailey and Young, "Kansa," 463, 471-72; "Treaty with the Kansa, 1825," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:222-25, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kan0222.htm>; "Treaty with the Kansa, 1846," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:552-54, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kan0552.htm>; and "Treaty with the Kansa Tribe, 1859," in Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, 2:800-803, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/kan0800.htm>.

<sup>82</sup> Parks, "Pawnee," 538-39; and Fowler, "Plains since 1850," 280-84.

By the time African Americans from east of the Mississippi settled Nicodemus in 1877, almost all of the American Indian tribes that had originally lived and hunted in the area of western and north central Kansas, as well as those who had been living in eastern Kansas more recently, had officially been removed to reservations in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). Fewer than one thousand Indians—members of the Prairie Band Potawatomis and small numbers of a few other tribes—remained in Kansas.<sup>83</sup>

Still, at the turn of the twentieth century, as Kansas's non-Indian population continued to grow, Indian culture regained a semblance of its precontact strength in Kansas. According to historian Joseph B. Herring, "the remaining Kickapoos and Potawatomis, as well as the Iowas, Missouri Sacs, Chippewas, and Munsees, had overcome tremendous obstacles in their quest to survive" and to remain in Kansas. In the case of the Kickapoos and Potawatomis, "a renewed religious spirit was an important factor in the struggle to hold on to their lands and traditions."<sup>84</sup> The Kickapoos, for example, continued dancing such traditional dances as the Indian Green Corn Dance, and the Prairie Band Potawatomis also maintained traditional religious views (although some became Catholic) and fought hard to retain control over their lands. The Sacs and Foxes, and to a lesser extent the Munsees and Chippewas, turned to Christianity. Unlike the Kickapoos and Potawatomis who held on fiercely to their traditional culture, and to a greater extent than the Sacs and Foxes or Iowas, the Munsees and Chippewas assimilated into non-Indian culture. By 1899, the two bands sold all their lands to the government for just over \$40,000."<sup>85</sup> Today, just four reservations exist in Kansas: Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Iowa, and Sac and Fox.<sup>86</sup>

## ***Encounters between the Nicodemus Settlers and American Indians***

Although the American Indian tribes that had once occupied various parts of Kansas were either completely departed or living on small reservations in eastern Kansas by the time the Nicodemus settlers arrived in 1877, oral traditions note that individuals or small groups of Indians continued to have an occasional presence in western and north central Kansas near Nicodemus. Stories of encounters between different Indian tribes and early Nicodemus settlers remain in circulation among historians, American Indians, and Nicodemans alike. Historian Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, who wrote on the creation of black towns in the west, indicated that the Osage helped the early settlers of Nicodemus. According to Hamilton, during the first winter, Osages traveling from the Rocky Mountains to eastern Kansas assisted the settlers by sharing meat and their government commodity subsidies.<sup>87</sup> Osage member and historian Jerry Shaw echoed this story, noting that this tradition had been conveyed to him both by people from Nicodemus and from other tribal members. The story that Shaw heard was that one winter evening, during the early years of the settlement, settlers heard hoof beats. Having heard about the war-like Indians from other non-Indians in Kansas, the frightened Nicodemans locked their doors. According to the story, once the visitors departed, the hungry settlers came out of their cabins and found food on their doorstep. When Shaw inquired among his people about this story,

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<sup>83</sup> Miner and Unrau, *End of Indian Kansas*, 139.

<sup>84</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 148.

<sup>85</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, 149.

<sup>86</sup> Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, map on 151.

<sup>87</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 14. Note that Hamilton does not provide a source for this statement. See also Daniel Chu and Bill Shaw, *Going Home to Nicodemus: The Story of an African American Frontier Town and the Pioneers Who Settled It* (Morristown, NJ: Silver-Burdett Press, 1994), 37, who reference Hamilton's account.

he was told that the Osages, who often went west to hunt buffalo during those years, had been in the area around that time and were the ones who left the food for the struggling settlers.<sup>88</sup>

A tradition of the Prairie Band of Potawatomi of eastern Kansas relates a similar story, depicting an encounter between the Prairie Band Potawatomi and Nicodemus settlers. According to the tribe's web site,

William Mzhickteno recalls the story, recounted to him by his father and other Potawatomi tribesmen, of the Potawatomi's final buffalo hunt in the late 1840s.

The Potawatomi were anticipating a long, cold winter. Since buffalo were an important food source, preparations were made for a hunt. The Potawatomi had not only become adept at curing and preserving buffalo meat, they were also skilled at transforming buffalo hides into attractive, functional blankets.

Federal regulations of the 1840s required the Potawatomi to secure permits from the local Indian agent before leaving the reservation. With permit in hand, the Potawatomi hunting party, including Mzhickteno's father, Joseph, and his grandfather, Wamego, traveled west in search of buffalo. The tribesmen experienced a long horseback journey, traveling through the present-day towns of Junction City, Lindsborg, Great Bend and Wakeeney, before finally locating a buffalo herd. There the Potawatomi hunting party took enough buffalo to satisfy their winter needs.

On the return trip through Graham County, the hunting party came across the crude settlement of Nicodemus. They found a black settlement whose members were "helplessly stranded, hungry and without any means of shelter." It was apparent to the tribesmen, the settlers lacked the pioneering know-how to survive the winter. That night, over campfire light, the hunting party discussed the plight of the Nicodemus settlers. They decided to return the next day and help the settlers cut slough grass from a nearby creek, teaching them to build shelters similar to their own tribal homes.

"We can't leave them this way," said one of the Potawatomi.

"They'll have to have something to eat and skins to wrap themselves in." The Great Spirit touched the hearts of the hunting party, and they agreed to give the Nicodemus settlers half their buffalo meat.

When the Potawatomi left for their reservation, their loads were considerably lighter, but they felt justified in the knowledge they had saved a community. Mzhickteno characterized the sacrificial act as a "bright page in human history." Upon returning home, the story of the Potawatomi hunting party quickly spread throughout

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<sup>88</sup> Jerry Shaw, e-mail message to Heather Lee Miller, September 27, 2010, and informal telephone interview, October 1, 2010.

the reservation, and hunting party members were hailed as heroes.<sup>89</sup>

Park staff and Potawatomi tribal members have been working to understand the meaning of this story, since some details contained within it appear to contradict each other. Because the Nicodemus settlers did not arrive until 1877, for example, the story's date of the hunt as occurring in the 1840s seems unlikely. However, this does not mean that an encounter did not happen. A few different scenarios are possible. First, if the 1840s date is correct, then the Potawatomis may have encountered slaves seeking freedom or free blacks in the West during the antebellum period; however, those blacks would not have been the Nicodemus settlers.<sup>90</sup> Second, it is possible that the author of the narrative mistakenly referred to the Last Buffalo Hunt as occurring in the 1840s because of the discussion a few lines later about Indians during that time period having to acquire permits to leave reservations to hunt more generally. Although most of the Citizen Potawatomis had moved off the Kansas reservation and out of the state following the Treaty of 1867, approximately 400 to 500 Prairie Band Potawatomis remained in the state, in small reservation villages along Soldier Creek.<sup>91</sup> By 1877, the Nicodemans's first year in Kansas, the Prairie Band people mostly subsisted on hogs and cattle, augmented by small game, some fish, and subsistence agriculture. The historical record indicates that as early as the 1860s, there was almost no game on the Prairie Band's reservation, and that the precipitous decline in the buffalo population over the next decade kept Potawatomi men from their usual annual hunts.<sup>92</sup> Still, some of the Indians remaining on the reservation in the 1870s may have headed west occasionally to hunt buffalo.

Early Nicodemus settler, teacher, and historian Lula Mae Sadler Craig, who was ten years old when she arrived in Nicodemus in 1879 and penned numerous stories about the early history of Nicodemus, recorded the following encounter as told to her by Mrs. Zach T. Fletcher, which reportedly took place in 1877:

The Indians were there to give the newcomers a welcome; they came to visit the little colony. . . . The colonists were afraid of the red face, and ran to hide in a cliff they knew of, while the Indians followed them closely, and reaching the rock cliff in due time. The Chief got off his horse, came close, and stooped down, looking under the cliff and said, giving the Indian grunt, "Ug! dark skin, way back" but assuredly he persuaded them to come out, and that if they would there should be no hard befall them. When they did emerge from their refuge, they were given corn and other provisions which the Indian brought and better still were given the

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<sup>89</sup> Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, "Tribal History," electronic document, <http://www.pbpindiantribe.com/tribal-history.aspx>. The dates pose a problem, as Nicodemus was not settled until 1877. For more on the history of Potawatomi settlement in Kansas, see Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, "Tribal History," <http://www.pbpindiantribe.com/tribal-history.aspx>; Clifton, *Prairie People*; and Herring, *Enduring Indians of Kansas*, esp. 23–25.

<sup>90</sup> The authors thank Nicodemus NHS staff member Annette Thille-White for her assistance in contacting tribal representatives, especially as pertains to understanding the provenance of the Potawatomi tradition about meeting the Nicodemus settlers during a buffalo hunt.

<sup>91</sup> Clifton, *Prairie People*, 351–53, 357.

<sup>92</sup> Clifton, *Prairie People*, 389, 357. See also S. L. A. Marshall, *Crimsoned Prairie: The Wars between the United States and the Plains Indians during the Winning of the West* (New York: Scribner's, 1972), 90–91.

assurance by the chief, “We deq- no hurt dark shine. We look for pale face, we no like him. Being low on supplies, the Indians gave them supplies enough to last several weeks and these friendly visitors came again and again to see the newcomers.”<sup>93</sup>

In interviews done with Nicodemus residents in the late 1990s, residents recounted similar stories of American Indian assistance to the settlers of Nicodemus.<sup>94</sup> Their oral histories attribute the visit to either the Osages or the Potawatomis, or to an unidentified tribe. George Irvin Sayers reported, for example, that “[if] it hadn’t been for the Indians, they’d starved to death. But the Indians would kill buffalo and bring them some meat.”<sup>95</sup> Other residents either had not heard the stories or believed that they were untrue. One older resident, Ola Wilson, insisted that the stories were “made up. . . the first colony didn’t come in contact with the Indians. They thought they were going to come. They got word that they would be here, but they didn’t come.”<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

Over time, various Indian groups resided in or near and passed through the area of north central Kansas in which Nicodemus is located. As noted above, although exactly which tribes might have been in the region when the first settlers arrived is hard to determine, both the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi and the Osage recount the traditional story of providing assistance to the struggling newcomers.

As of this writing, four Indian reservations with close to 6,000 residents are extant in the eastern part of Kansas. In terms of population, the largest reservation is the Kickapoo (4,419), followed in size by the Prairie Band Potawatomi (1,238), Iowa (146), and Sac and Fox (86).<sup>97</sup> Today, there are no organized groups of Indians living in or near Graham County. Of the 2,946 people the 2000 U.S. Census listed as living in the county that year, only .34 percent (or approximately ten individuals) were identified as Native American (tribal affiliation unknown).<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “The First Colony with Morrism [*sic*] Bell,” typescript, Nicodemus Historical Society, Nicodemus, KS.

<sup>94</sup> See for example, the following oral histories: Norma Switzer Jackson interview with Pat Morgan, August 1, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 6; Orlo Van Duvall and Norma Switzer Jackson interview with Pat Morgan, August 1, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 5; Wanda Williams Adams and Pearlina Moore interview with Jennifer Michael, October 21, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 58; Charlesetta Williams Bates interview with Jennifer Michael, October 20, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 44; Hattie Craig Burnie interview with HABS Oral History researchers, ca. 1977, Nicodemus, KS, 7-8; George Irvin Sayers and Minerva Wellington Sayers interview with Jennifer Michael, September 28, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 25; and Leroy Van Duvall interview with Jennifer Michael, December 7, 1998, Denver, CO, 6, all transcripts on file at NNHS.

<sup>95</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, September 28, 1998.

<sup>96</sup> Ola Wilson interview with HABS oral history researchers, ca. 1978, Nicodemus, KS, 10, transcript on file at NNHS. See also C. Bates interview, October 20, 1998.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Census, “Kansas -- American Indian Area,” 2000, online, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=04000US20&-\\_box\\_head\\_nbr=GCT-PH1&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF1\\_U&-redoLog=false&-mt\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF1\\_U\\_GCTPH1\\_ST2&-format=ST-8](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US20&-_box_head_nbr=GCT-PH1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U&-redoLog=false&-mt_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_GCTPH1_ST2&-format=ST-8).

<sup>98</sup> U.S. Census, “Graham County, Kansas – Fact Sheet,” 2000, online, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?\\_event=Search&geo\\_id=&\\_geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=Graham+County&\\_cityTown=Graham+County&\\_state=04000US20&\\_zip=&\\_lang=en&\\_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&show\\_2003\\_tab=&redirect=Y](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&_geoContext=&_street=&_county=Graham+County&_cityTown=Graham+County&_state=04000US20&_zip=&_lang=en&_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&show_2003_tab=&redirect=Y).

## **Chapter 2: Slavery, Emancipation, and Reconstruction: Kentucky and the Upper South in the National and Regional Context (ca. 1840s–1877)**

### ***Introduction***

The Civil War and its aftermath wrought changes to every aspect of life in the American South, including an end to the formal institution of slavery. Although the federal government attempted to restrain or carefully contain emancipation at the outset of armed conflict, the actions of thousands of Southern black men and women seeking freedom ultimately forced the Union's hand in the matter. The Lincoln administration and Congress gradually shifted toward a de facto emancipation of Southern slaves before they took overt action—with the Emancipation Proclamation and Emancipation Act—to free slaves in the Confederacy from bondage. Emancipation alone could not equip former slaves with the means to make a living or help them integrate into the slowly rebuilding Southern economy. After a decade of mainly failed federal efforts to assist the South to rebuild and to provide blacks with some means of gaining meaningful citizenship, African Americans residing in former slave states still encountered substandard living conditions, unemployment, entrapping credit systems, and threats of bodily harm. In the state of Kentucky, conditions that African Americans faced after the Civil War pushed many to leave their former homes behind and migrate to nearby northern and farther distant western states. In the meantime, events and decisions that had originally made Kansas a non-slave state helped make it a popular destination for black emigrants fleeing the South from the early 1860s through the 1870s and beyond. The post-Civil War and post-Reconstruction conditions in the South combined with available opportunities in the state of Kansas set the stage for the creation of Nicodemus.

### ***Slavery in Kentucky and the Upper South***

The majority of the original settlers of Nicodemus came from the Commonwealth of Kentucky, which was part of what is sometimes called the “upper South.”<sup>1</sup> A slave-holding state from its formation in 1792 from the Virginia Colony, more than 95 percent of all African Americans in Kentucky were listed as slaves in censuses taken between 1790 and 1860.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the Civil War, Kentucky had the largest number of slaves among the four states—Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware—that were loyal Border States during the war. But in contrast to some of the states in the Deep South, including some in which African Americans accounted for more than half of the total population, Kentucky's slave population accounted for less than 20 percent of the state's total population.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Sheumaker examined the 1880 and 1900 United States federal censuses, along with the 1895 Kansas state census, and identified Tennessee, Mississippi, and Nebraska as other states from which many Nicodemus settlers came. See “The Gravemarkers of Nicodemus, Kansas, as a Test of Black Town Isolation” (Master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1993), 18n6.

<sup>2</sup> Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, Volume 1, *From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (N.p.: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), xvi-xviii, xx.

<sup>3</sup> “University of Virginia Historical Census Browser,” electronic resource, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>.



Kentucky adopted its first slave code in 1798 in an effort to regulate the movement of slaves. Among other things, this code authorized private citizens to apprehend blacks suspected of being runaways, with the incentive of a reward if certain conditions were met. The state gradually revised the slave code to make it more difficult for slaves to escape bondage and to increase the penalties for anyone found assisting slaves seeking freedom. The federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 ultimately superseded Kentucky statutes and increased the severity of restrictions on black people's ability to move about. Between 1850 and the advent of the Civil War, the annual percentage of freedom seekers in Kentucky never rose above 1 percent.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to curtailing the movement of slaves, the commonwealth's Non-Importation Act of 1833 had slowed the influx of newly purchased slaves into the state. After passage of the Non-Importation Act, owners could not bring slaves purchased in other states into Kentucky, although owners who moved to Kentucky still brought their slaves into the commonwealth with them. The majority of slaves in Kentucky worked on small farms as opposed to large plantations, and the average ratio of slaves to an owner was five to one. In 1850, only 12 percent of Kentucky slave-owners held more than twenty slaves, while 25 percent owned only one slave. Because the typical Kentucky farm was smaller than the plantations of Virginia, North Carolina, or the Deep South, "Kentucky slaves usually labored side-by-side with their masters, working as farmers, handymen, cattlemen, and merchants."<sup>5</sup> Historian Marion Lucas notes that the conditions of slavery may not have been as "harsh" as they were in the Deep South, but the experiences of each individual varied greatly according to the temperament of the owner and the type of labor they endured. In Kentucky and throughout the South, the lot of the field hand was generally considered the poorest, due to the physical demands, drudgery, and exposure to the elements that came with the position.<sup>6</sup> Slaves sent to work in Kentucky's hemp fields, which produced fiber used to make rope and clothing, confronted some of the worst conditions. Lucas writes, "Working in the hemp fields was the hardest, dirtiest, most laborious agricultural task performed by Kentucky field hands."<sup>7</sup> Slaves performing any manual farm labor "were constantly exposed to injury" and were held in the lowest social status of all the slaves on their farm or plantation, a status that contributed to their exploitation and abuse. Regardless of the conditions and attacks they endured, slaves could do very little to alter their circumstances. As in other slave-holding states, "Kentucky law placed few restraints on slaveholders while providing virtually no legal redresses for bondsmen."<sup>8</sup>

Blacks who toiled in other types of servitude sometimes found their tasks were less demanding than the labors of their fellow slaves in the fields, but there remained great variability in the conditions each person had to tolerate. Blacks in antebellum Kentucky frequently worked as domestic servants in the homes of their owners. The household tasks included cooking and serving meals, gathering food, house cleaning, laundering, mending, and childcare.<sup>9</sup> Some owners assigned blacks to learn and perform semiskilled and skilled work, in tasks such as milling, tanning, spinning, blacksmithing, and carpentry, among others. If an owner ran a

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<sup>4</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 29, 61, 62.

<sup>5</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 3, 33.

<sup>7</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 50.

<sup>9</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 6-7.

commercial business or industrial plant, slaves might be detailed to jobs in shops, textile mills, and iron foundries, or work on construction crews, river boats, and hotel staffs.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of Kentucky blacks who moved to Nicodemus came from the north-central part of the state, including several hundred black emigrants from an area that encompassed just Scott and Fayette counties. The latter demographic was a result of W. R. Hill's recruitment of potential colonists in the towns of Lexington and Georgetown, the seats of the two adjacent counties. Both Scott and Fayette counties had substantial African American populations. Scott County was approximately 30 percent black in 1810, increasing to over 40 percent by 1860. Georgetown, seat of Scott County, was 63 percent black in 1840, home to 912 slaves. Fayette County was more than 50 percent black in 1840 and 1850, while the population of Lexington, seat of Fayette County, was 30 percent or more black from 1820 until the advent of the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

## ***The Creation of Kansas***

While enslavement of blacks as the central cog of the Southern economy continued in the established slaveholding states throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Congress began to challenge the institution of slavery in federal territories and in new states entering the Union. The political conflict over slavery and the enactment of new federal laws aiming to restrict the expansion of slavery beyond the Southern states underlay the creation of the state of Kansas and shaped the early history of the state. The eventual decision, after several disputed elections, to admit Kansas to the Union as a free state in 1861 helped make Kansas a desirable location for the settlement of Nicodemus sixteen years later.

Prior to 1854, the future states of Kansas and Nebraska were part of Indian Territory, which had been carved in part from the earlier Louisiana Territory. Slave ownership had not become established there because the Missouri Compromise of 1820 banned slavery from the northern portion of the Louisiana Territory, with the exception of the proposed state of Missouri. The compromise was between proslavery and antislavery factions in Congress, who maintained a tenuous balance between the number of slave and free states admitted into the Union.<sup>12</sup> In 1854, however, the Kansas-Nebraska Act nullified the Missouri Compromise.

By early 1854, Congress was preparing to open the area for settlement by creating the Nebraska Territory. A proposed amendment to this bill, introduced by Whig senator Archibald Dixon of Kentucky, which became section 19 of the final act, stated that "when admitted as a State or States, the said Territory, or any portion of the same, shall be received into the Union with or without slavery, as their Constitution may prescribe at the time of their admission."<sup>13</sup> By offering the option of "popular sovereignty" (as espoused by Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois), the proposed act eliminated the Missouri Compromise's slavery ban. Instead, the citizens of each territory would choose their eventual state's stance on the topic.

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<sup>10</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, xvi-xviii, xx.

<sup>12</sup> "Missouri Enabling Act," in *The Annals of America*, Volume 4, 1797-1820: Domestic Expansion and Foreign Entanglements (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1976), 591-92.

<sup>13</sup> "Transcript of Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854)," electronic document, [http://www.ourdocuments.gov/print\\_friendly.php?flash=true&page=transcript&doc=28&title=Transcript+of+Kansas-Nebraska+Act+%281854%29](http://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?flash=true&page=transcript&doc=28&title=Transcript+of+Kansas-Nebraska+Act+%281854%29).

Antislavery Democrats, led by Senator Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, argued, “whatever apologies may be offered for the toleration of slavery in the states, none can be urged for its extension into territories where it does not exist and where that extension involves the repeal of ancient law and the violation of solemn compact.”<sup>14</sup> Douglas countered this argument by claiming that the Missouri Compromise had been defeated six years earlier, when the House of Representatives had voted against extending it to territory acquired from Mexico in 1848.<sup>15</sup> The bill ultimately passed both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and President Franklin Pierce signed the bill into law on May 30, 1854.

Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act heralded an era in Kansas history referred to as “Bleeding Kansas.” While some scholars suggest that this period was not as bloody as the name implies, it was a period of conflict between proslavery and antislavery forces over the future state of Kansas.<sup>16</sup> Since the Kansas-Nebraska Act gave the inhabitants of Kansas and Nebraska the power to determine whether they would enter the Union as slave or free, adherents to both points of view flocked to the newly opened territories not only to settle there but also to try to tip the balance in favor of their preferred view. Nebraska was far enough north that the question of slavery did not arise in that territory—in other words, “there is no history of a ‘Bleeding Nebraska’”<sup>17</sup>—but Kansas’s proximity to Missouri, a slave state, made it much more of a battleground. Both abolitionists and supporters of slavery sent numerous settlers to the area, and proslavery advocates from Missouri regularly crossed the border to vote in Kansas elections.<sup>18</sup>

Early elections in the territory were strongly proslavery, but by 1857, antislavery forces were able to resist the ratification of a proslavery constitution, known as the Lecompton Constitution. President James Buchanan was willing to accept the Lecompton Constitution, but Congress refused to recognize the document. After Congress called for another election, which proslavery voters boycotted, the antislavery supporters prevailed. By 1859, antislavery sentiment in Kansas was strong enough to ensure approval of an antislavery constitution. With that constitution approved by a two to one majority, Kansas became a free state in January 1861.<sup>19</sup>

Although the struggle over Kansas’s status as a slave or non-slave state produced violent engagements in the years preceding the Civil War, the state did not become a major theater of fighting during the war itself. Approximately 20,000 men enlisted in Kansas battalions of the Union Army, but they mainly fought in battles in other states. The most significant military engagement in Kansas during the Civil War took place in October 1864. Confederate General Sterling Price was moving north to take St. Louis until a series of skirmishes with Union troops in Missouri forced him to retreat south along the Missouri River. When he decided to advance on Fort Scott in southeastern Kansas, a Union force of 2,800 intercepted and defeated Price’s 8,000

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<sup>14</sup> “Opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill,” in *The Annals of America*, Volume 8, 1850-1857: *A House Dividing* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1976), 253.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen A. Douglas, “Defense of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill,” in *The Annals of America*, Volume 8, 1850-1857: *A House Dividing* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1976), 257-58.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Dale E. Watts, “How Bloody Was Bleeding Kansas? Political Killings in Kansas Territory, 1854-1861,” *Kansas History* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 116-29.

<sup>17</sup> James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: “Bleeding Kansas” and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1969), 98.

<sup>18</sup> Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 1-8; and Rawley, *Race and Politics*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> “Social Issues, Mid 1850s – Precursor to the Civil War,” electronic document, <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h84.html>.

Confederate troops at the Battle of Mine Creek on October 25, 1864.<sup>20</sup> After a series of rearguard actions, Price retreated into Missouri, marking the end of Confederate efforts to invade Kansas. Mine Creek was the largest Civil War battle fought on Kansas soil, and also was one of the larger cavalry clashes of the Civil War.<sup>21</sup> Guerrilla warfare in Kansas, in the form of such infamous expeditions as Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence in August 1861, was much more common and deadly.<sup>22</sup> However, the state's significance during the Civil War far outweighed the number or size of military encounters on its soil. Kansas played a crucial role as a destination for emancipated blacks during the war, particularly for the roughly 10,000 former slaves who escaped from owners in the neighboring state of Missouri. As a result, the black population of Kansas soared from a total of 625 residents in 1860 to 12,527 by the end of the war.<sup>23</sup> The influx of blacks from the South who found safe refuge in Kansas established the state as a logical destination for black emigrants in the postwar era.

## **Civil War**

At the outset of the Civil War, the Lincoln administration operated under the assumption that the Union could carry the fighting into the Southern states without attacking the institution of slavery, at least for the duration of the war. Lincoln's strategy was aimed at appeasing Union sympathizers in the Confederacy, and especially in the Border States, by allowing them to maintain their estates and profits derived from slavery. The majority of legislators in Congress were in accord with Lincoln regarding this strategy. In July 1861, the Crittenden-Johnson Resolutions in the House and the Senate asserted that the government's war aims did not include freeing slaves. Abolitionists countered that freeing Southern blacks was a military, as well as moral, necessity because slaves accounted for more than one-half of the labor force in the Confederate army.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless of the political debate taking place in Washington D.C., the willingness and efforts of Southern slaves to attain their freedom despite the dangers and unknowns before them eventually undermined the government's initial aim to keep the system of bondage in place during the war. Soon after armed conflict began in 1861, slaves found that the Civil War offered opportunities to escape from slavery. When Union troops arrived in Southern or Border States—the four slaveholding states that chose to remain in the Union—early in the war, many slaves ran away from their homes and workplaces in an effort to find freedom behind Union lines. The rapid influx of escaped slaves into Union camps, and behind Union lines whenever federal troops entered a new area, quickly exposed the untenable underpinnings of the appeasement strategy. Historian Leslie Schwalm states that the surge of blacks fleeing enslavement “challenge[d] the fiction that war could be fought on southern soil with slavery left intact.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kansas State Historical Society, “Kansas in the Civil War,” and “Mine Creek Battlefield State Historic Site,” <http://www.kshs.org/places/minecreek/index.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> See Lumir F. Buresh, *October 25th and the Battle of Mine Creek* (Kansas City, MO: The Lowell Press, 1977).

<sup>22</sup> See Thomas Goodrich, *Bloody Dawn: The Story of the Lawrence Massacre* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Eugene H. Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 24.

<sup>24</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 354.

<sup>25</sup> Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 47-48.

As no consistent federal policy stipulated what to do with freedom seekers who arrived in Union encampments, some commanders attempted to return slaves to their masters, while others allowed the slaves to remain.<sup>26</sup> The Confiscation Act of 1861 had authorized the Union army to confiscate property, including slaves that belonged to Confederate soldiers or civilians. The Second Confiscation Act of 1862 significantly revised the First Confiscation Act by allowing freedom seekers to pass through Union lines and enabling the U.S. Army to enlist newly free blacks into work details. Furthermore, the act barred Union officers from returning slaves to their owners or Confederate authorities.<sup>27</sup>

Many escaped slaves, whether “contrabands”—fugitive slaves who found freedom by joining Union forces as contraband of war—from the seceded states or runaways from Union states, eventually labored on behalf of the Union Army.<sup>28</sup> More than 30 percent of the African Americans who joined the Union Army in Tennessee units were natives of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Kentucky, but their ability to join units in their own states was limited.<sup>29</sup> Congress authorized recruitment of black soldiers in July 1862, but President Abraham Lincoln did not use this legislation immediately. Instead, the Union Army was more inclined to use black labor on public works projects for the military, such as bridge construction and road repair, rather than recruiting free or enslaved blacks for combat.<sup>30</sup> The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, however, formally altered the government’s stance from one of tacitly supporting the demise of slavery to one that overtly demanded the abolishment of slavery in Confederate-held states.

African Americans who left Southern farms and plantations seeking freedom risked their personal safety, as many were punished severely if captured and returned to their owners. Moreover, due to the political balancing act involving Border States and Union loyalists in Confederate territory, blacks trying to escape in Border States, including Kentucky, during the early stages of the Civil War could not rely on federal troops to provide protection or free passage into Union territory. The four Border States—Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware—were slaveholding states that chose to remain in the Union, at least at the outset of the war. The Lincoln administration made a number of concessions to border-state slave-owners, especially those in Kentucky, in hopes of keeping those states in the Union.

Lincoln’s policy regarding slavery in the Border States was a vestige of his previous attempts to keep the Union intact before the war began. When the states of the Deep South seceded from the United States in quick succession during the winter of 1860-1861, the slave states of the upper South became the federal government’s last reasonable hope for maintaining the Union without going to war. Although these states—Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas—had all voted to remain in the Union when their Southern neighbors elected to depart, they remained close to the tipping point of joining the Confederacy. One of Lincoln’s most delicate tasks during his first year in office was to convince the still-loyal slave states to stay that way. For instance, Lincoln selected his cabinet positions with a keen eye toward maintaining the allegiance of slave state leadership. If

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<sup>26</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 148-49.

<sup>27</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 58-59.

<sup>28</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 69.

<sup>29</sup> Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862-1884* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 45-46.

he managed to succeed, he obviously would keep the bulk of the Union intact, but more importantly, he might undermine the existence of the Confederacy before the breakaway government was firmly established. On the other side of the argument, legislators and governors of the upper South perceived that their decision to remain in the Union was closely linked to the rights of each state to decide whether or not to allow slavery. Thus the Lincoln administration moved carefully around the issue of emancipation in order to avoid alienating the upper South. This approach would have a significant impact on the slaves in the Border States, particularly Kentucky and Missouri, once the war was underway.

When Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, and North Carolina joined the Confederacy shortly after the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1861, the stakes regarding slavery became even higher in the four states that remained within the Union. Each of the Border States had developed an industrial base much larger than the industrial capacity of the states in the Deep South. If the Border States decided to join the secessionists, their addition would have boosted the South's industrial capabilities by 80 percent, and would have contributed significant numbers of troops, officers, and foodstuffs.<sup>31</sup>

Of the four Border States, Kentucky was the most crucial for the Union war effort. Kentucky was the site of eleven battles or skirmishes during the Civil War, including the 1862 battle at Perryville, which historians believe firmly secured Kentucky for the Union.<sup>32</sup> More than 90,000 Kentuckians fought in the Union Army and 40,000 took up arms for the Confederacy. Individual loyalties, whether to the Union or the Confederacy, varied according to geographic location. Scott County, for instance, with a larger number of slaves than many Kentucky counties, furnished just over 100 soldiers to the Union Army and ten times that number to the Confederate Army.<sup>33</sup> But Kentucky played a much larger role than the number of soldiers or battles would seem to indicate, primarily because it held such a politically strategic position for the Union cause. Lincoln is alleged to have declared, "while he hoped to have God on his side, he must have Kentucky."<sup>34</sup>

In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, with its rich natural resources and strategic position, Lincoln put greater emphasis on his policy of appeasing border state slave-owners—in order to keep them loyal to the Union—than he applied in the other Border States. Lincoln "instructed his commanders to insulate the state's Unionist slave-owners from any military policy that might be interpreted as emancipatory."<sup>35</sup> When Congress passed the Confiscation Act of 1861, authorizing the Union army to confiscate slaves owned by Confederate soldiers or sympathizers, the law exempted non-Confederate Kentucky slaveholders. Until 1864, when the administration lifted many of these restrictions, Union troops in Kentucky were under orders to refuse sanctuary to freedom seekers and to deny them opportunities to enlist.<sup>36</sup> However, commanding officers in the field made the ultimate determination of how to treat freedom-seeking blacks entering Union encampments.

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<sup>31</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 284.

<sup>32</sup> Lowell H. Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 57.

<sup>33</sup> Lindsay Apple, Frederick A. Johnston, and Ann Bolton Bevins, *Scott County Kentucky: A History* (Georgetown, KY: Scott County Historical Society, 1993), 193-94. See also William Henry Perrin, *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, Kentucky* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co. Historical Publishers, 1882), 174.

<sup>34</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 284.

<sup>35</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 57.

Lincoln's attempt to mollify Kentucky slave-owners with Union loyalties continued through much of war. Another example of concessions Lincoln made in hopes of keeping Kentucky in the fold was his decision to exclude Kentucky blacks when he first authorized the enlistment of blacks to serve as Union soldiers in December 1862. The recruitment of black troops in Kentucky did not begin until early 1864, and even then only free blacks or slaves who had the consent of their owner could enlist. Many black Kentuckians, however, were unwilling to wait out the war to enter the struggle for freedom. Even though they risked severe retribution if caught running from their owners, thousands of Kentucky slaves crossed state lines to join the Union Army at recruiting centers in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee, and other neighboring states.<sup>37</sup> By early 1864, thousands of African Americans from Kentucky had contributed to the Union cause through labor or military service, regardless of widespread public opposition to enlisting or drafting African American soldiers.<sup>38</sup> Not until March 1864, just over one year before the war's end, did official recruitment of blacks in Kentucky begin; even then, recruitment was limited.<sup>39</sup> Lexington served as a major recruiting city for the Union Army, as black volunteers arrived en masse during June 1864.<sup>40</sup>

However, not all Kentucky slaves attempted to cross Union lines to enlist or find freedom. For slave families that had worked on one farm for a generation or more, the effort to flee from bondage also entailed leaving behind all that was familiar and meaningful to them, including their homes, relatives, church and social communities, and ancestors' legacies and burial plots. Freedom was a potential reward for those who departed, but they also found unknowns, uncertainties, and new hardships. Lucas explains that the considerable number of slaves who chose not to seek service in the Union Army, "expressed concern for their families well-being, since many slaveholders threatened retaliation against loved ones of volunteers."<sup>41</sup> In fact, when the Union Army began recruitment of Kentucky blacks in 1864, the shortage of enlistees from the state prompted the Army to commence the forced induction of blacks into the ranks, a policy that continued for the remainder of the war.<sup>42</sup>

## **Reconstruction**

Federal officials knew that in order to successfully repair the Union and heal the scars of war they would have to rebuild the South. In addition to emancipating the slaves, the Civil War wreaked economic devastation and social upheaval in every part of the Confederacy. Railroad lines, roads, and other transportation systems lay in ruins, and former trade relationships were severed. But the government could not simply restore the former economy and way of life, because the foundation of both—the institution of slavery—was abolished. The new economy had to somehow integrate the millions of free blacks still in the South, though few officials or legislators knew how to accomplish such a task. The government also faced the task of readmitting representatives from the seceded states into Congress, determining what should be done with Confederate officials, and deciding which additional rights they should grant to former slaves. The term *Reconstruction* refers to the federal government's roughly decade-long attempt

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<sup>37</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 151-152.

<sup>38</sup> Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky*, 47-55.

<sup>39</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 152-53.

<sup>40</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 154.

<sup>41</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 157.

<sup>42</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 157.



to rebuild the Southern economy and political system while also trying to employ and empower former slaves within that system. Planning for Reconstruction began during the final months of the war and cover the period from 1865 until 1877, when maneuvering during the presidential election of 1878 resulted in the removal of federal troops from the Southern states.

The goals of Reconstruction were as wide and varied as the personalities of those who supported and enacted the program. While the ostensible overall goal was to rebuild and reunite the United States after the Civil War, government and military officials were often at odds over how to implement Reconstruction at the state and local levels. While pragmatic white Southerners were concerned about losing their labor force if former slaves fled North or elsewhere, a sizable number of former Confederate sympathizers had volatile reactions to the further imposition of federal authority in their lives, and directed their anger and resentment toward former slaves, who became the targets in a wave of indiscriminate violence throughout the South.<sup>43</sup> In Kentucky, which did not have federal troops on hand to quell the violence, the number of white assaults and murders of African Americans in the decade after the war reached unprecedented levels. Amid the racist violence and halting federal policy strategies, Southern blacks continued to seek out freedom and justice. Historian Eric Foner points out, “blacks were active agents in the making of Reconstruction . . . although thwarted in their bid for land, blacks seized the opportunity created by the end of slavery to establish as much independence as possible in their working lives, consolidate their families and communities, and stake a claim to equal citizenship.”<sup>44</sup>

From the start, freed blacks faced seemingly insurmountable blocks to finding jobs, housing, and education, and many whites, whether they had been opposed to slavery or not, seemed at a loss as to what to do with the population of ex-slaves. In April 1865, Frederick Douglass argued that African Americans should be given the opportunity to make their own way in the world just as whites were allowed to do. “Everybody has asked, ‘What shall we do with the Negro?’” Douglass remarked. “I have but one answer. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, let them fall! . . . And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance.”<sup>45</sup> This lofty suggestion went largely unheeded by whites, who continued to discriminate against African Americans in a variety of ways.

Many members of Congress recognized that some type of land reform would be necessary to help give emancipated blacks the chance to successfully enter the South’s rebuilding economy. Congress tried to take a step in that direction with the creation of the Freedman’s Bureau in March 1865.<sup>46</sup> Congress authorized the Freedman’s Bureau to “distribute clothing, food, and fuel to destitute freedmen,” to provide education and find employment for former slaves, and to generate opportunities for blacks to obtain land.<sup>47</sup> But Southern landowners staunchly resisted any governmental action that supported black landownership. Having just laid

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel M. Johnson and Rex R. Campbell, *Black Migration in American: A Social Demographic History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 45.

<sup>44</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), xv.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: Black People Tell the Story of Reconstruction* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), vii.

<sup>46</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 6-8.

<sup>47</sup> Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 31.

down their arms in the military conflict, legislators and landed gentry in the former Confederacy commenced a new battle over the remaking of the post-Civil War South. They carried on this second conflict for many years longer than the previous five years of combat with the Union Army.

The government's failure to establish effective land reform made it difficult for most blacks to make a successful living in the South. According to historian Nell Irvin Painter, "Exorbitant rents for land and the crop-lien system were the two most common grievances of Southern Blacks in the immediate post-Reconstruction South."<sup>48</sup> In particular, Painter faults the ancient credit system because it "oppressed the people at the bottom in economic hard times, such as the years between 1873 and 1879."<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the Freedman's Bureau became a lightning rod for Southern white rage against the imposition of federal authority in the promotion of greater economic opportunities for former slaves. According to Lucas, "Within a short time after the introduction of the Freedmen's Bureau, a hard core of terrorists," became active throughout the South, launching attacks on African Americans wherever they encountered them.<sup>50</sup> However, the introduction of the Freedmen's Bureau was not the cause of the violence, but rather the symbolic target of white rage toward newly freed slaves and toward black soldiers returning from service in the Union Army. In Kentucky, "mob violence posed one of the biggest problems facing the new freedmen during the life of the Freedmen's Bureau. Gangs roamed at will throughout much of Kentucky, especially in rural areas, intimidating, beating, and murdering freedmen."<sup>51</sup> Black soldiers returning to Kentucky drew especially violent retribution, as former owners and other whites regularly attacked the veterans.<sup>52</sup> Historian George Scott explained that: "although poor, young, uneducated blacks were the primary victims of white violence, no black person within Kentucky was immune from attacks by whites."<sup>53</sup>

Terrorist gangs in Kentucky ranged in size from a few individuals to mobs of fifty people or more, and, depending upon the particular region in which the attacks occurred, were known as "moderators," "regulators," or "guerillas."<sup>54</sup> Gatherings of Ku Klux Klan chapters also threatened or perpetrated violent assaults and murder. Although the exact toll will likely never be known (some black communities refused to acknowledge attacks on neighbors or relatives because of fear of retribution), between 1866 and 1871, terrorist groups in Kentucky carried out well over a hundred murders, rapes, and whippings of innocent blacks.<sup>55</sup> Another source reveals a total of eighty-seven blacks killed by lynching alone in Kentucky between 1865 and 1874.<sup>56</sup> In only a handful of these cases did civil authorities make arrests and attempt to prosecute (almost always unsuccessfully) the perpetrators of crimes. Blacks in Kentucky had little influence in the

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<sup>48</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 55.

<sup>49</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 188.

<sup>51</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 188.

<sup>52</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 191, 194.

<sup>53</sup> George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings,"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 71.

<sup>54</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 188.

<sup>55</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 188-89.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940*, 71

legal process of these criminal cases, as state laws prohibited them from testifying in court against a white person until 1872.<sup>57</sup>

Facing mob violence, poverty, and starvation in the rural countryside, blacks began flooding into urban areas, particularly Lexington and Louisville, after the war. Cities offered some degree of safety in numbers, and many former slaves hoped to find urban jobs that could free them from indentured labor on the farm of a former slave-owner. But as the number of blacks entering the cities rapidly increased, the living conditions they found grew more abhorrent. Although the chances of being threatened or killed by a lynch mob lessened, succumbing to starvation or disease was just as likely in the city as in the countryside. In Lexington, “multiple families crowded into a single room as freedmen clustered into shanties on poorly drained streets and alleys near the railroad or the stockyard.” Clothing, fuel, and health care were all in short supply. Former slaves who fled to Louisville crowded into one of the two ghettos in the city. Blacks in “Smoketown” lived in ramshackle housing that offered little protection from near-freezing temperatures in winter and had to abide “the stench of decaying filth, garbage, and stagnant water during summer.” Extreme destitution eventually forced many who could not find work into “begging, stealing, or prostitution to stay alive.”<sup>58</sup>

The dangerous postwar conditions in both the cities and countryside eventually persuaded many blacks to take advantage of their proximity to Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio, and leave Kentucky for these traditionally non-slave states. Others departed for Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, and the upper Midwest. Between the start of the Civil War and 1870, the percentage of blacks in the total state population dropped from 20.4 percent to 16.8 percent.<sup>59</sup> However, those numbers do not give the full extent of the outmigration, because by 1870, former slaves fleeing the Deep South were also moving to Kentucky in hope of finding work and better conditions there.

For African Americans who managed to escape violence and starvation, obtaining suffrage for their race was the next significant step toward genuine freedom. Passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 finally provided black men with the right to vote, and numerous black candidates attained state and federal offices during the early years of Reconstruction. Their electoral success often depended upon their location. During the 1870s in Scott County, Kentucky, for example, white Republicans allowed blacks to run for and hold political office. In neighboring Fayette County, while the Republican Party allowed blacks to have a voice in the selection of candidates, they did not allow blacks to run for office.<sup>60</sup> However, as Reconstruction began to falter in Kentucky and elsewhere in the South, African Americans found it ever more difficult to achieve legislative offices or even maintain the right to vote. After passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, “White Kentuckians began obstructionist tactics . . . to discourage or prevent blacks from exercising the franchise.”<sup>61</sup> From the mid-1870s onward, Southern states employed both legal and illicit methods, including threats and acts of violence against blacks who sought to register as voters, to keep most blacks in those states effectively disenfranchised.

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<sup>57</sup> Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 182-83. See also Sterling, *The Trouble They Seen*, 299; and Wilber L. Jenkins, *Climbing Up to Glory: A Short History of African Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002), esp. chap. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 196.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 309.

<sup>61</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 305.

This usurpation of African Americans' long-sought civil rights in mid-1870s Kentucky helps to explain the desire of many of the original Nicodemus colonists to depart for a state that offered genuine freedom.

Kansas became a popular destination for many emigrating blacks because the Civil War and Reconstruction eras in that state produced different social and political outcomes for African Americans, particularly when compared to the experiences of blacks in the South. Kansas never had a large slave population, and did not suffer the devastating physical and social effects of warfare. As a result, the federal government's Reconstruction objectives for Kansas focused almost solely on enfranchisement of the black population, many of whom had arrived in the previous five years. Referendums on the creation of African American and women's suffrage appeared alongside each other on an 1867 Kansas ballot, but the white, male electorate easily defeated both measures. Not until passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 did Kansas's male African American population receive the vote. As such, 1870 effectively marked the end of official Reconstruction in Kansas.<sup>62</sup> But among the proslavery settlers who had come to Kansas in the wake of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, hostilities toward Reconstruction policies, including suffrage, spurred increased discrimination against blacks in some parts of the state. According to historian Randall Woods, there was no systematic and "concentrated effort during the late nineteenth century to disfranchise" the black population in Kansas.<sup>63</sup>

Reconstruction was waning nationwide by 1872, when President Ulysses S. Grant was elected to his second term. The Compromise of 1877, which helped to settle the impasse regarding the results of the 1876 presidential election, marked the formal end of the Reconstruction era.<sup>64</sup> The contest between Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes and Democratic nominee Samuel J. Tilden had no clear winner after the election, which was made more problematic because of disputed results in Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Oregon.<sup>65</sup> Overall, Tilden was the clear winner of the national popular vote and the electoral college. But the disputed results in the four states with faulty ballots delayed the declaration of a winner.

Congress appointed a fifteen-member electoral commission to determine which candidate had won the popular vote in the three Southern states in question.<sup>66</sup> True to the nature of national party politics in the nineteenth century, behind-the-scenes political maneuvering played as large a role as the commission did in making the final decision. Ultimately, the commission's Democratic members consented to award the election to Hayes in exchange for concessions from

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<sup>62</sup> Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction*, 24, 158, 172; and Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 105, 126.

<sup>63</sup> Randall B. Woods, "Integration, Exclusion, or Segregation? The 'Color Line' in Kansas, 1878-1900," in *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, ed. Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardaway (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 132-33.

<sup>64</sup> Roy Morris, Jr., *Fraud of the Century: Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Tilden, and the Stolen Election of 1876* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 36.

<sup>65</sup> The dispute in Oregon differed from that of the southern states in question. Only one electoral vote from Oregon (out of three) was disputed by the Democratic governor after his state elected Hayes. He appointed a replacement elector who attempted to split the state's electoral votes, while the duly appointed electors reported all three electoral votes for Hayes. All three of Oregon's electoral votes were ultimately awarded to Hayes. This action was significant mainly in that Hayes ultimately won the electoral vote by a single vote. See Keith Ian Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia: The Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, [1973]), 225-28.

<sup>66</sup> William H. Rehnquist, *Centennial Crisis: The Disputed Election of 1876* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 5.

the Republican committee members, which included removal of federal troops from Southern states. As presidential historian Roy Morris, Jr., has noted, “The dismantling of Reconstruction, and the consequent political and social disempowerment of the region’s sizable black minority, set the stage for nearly a century of de facto and legalized segregation . . . that formalized the social, political, and economic marginalization of southern blacks begun in earnest three decades earlier.”<sup>67</sup> In fact, the Jim Crow era, during which “state-sponsored and sanctioned social hierarchies” severely restricted opportunities for blacks to participate fully in the South’s educational, social, cultural, and political systems, had its start in the aftermath of Reconstruction.<sup>68</sup> In the mid- to late-1870s, seven Southern states passed new state constitutions that began to institutionalize some discriminatory measures and erode African American voting rights. For instance, Kentucky and other southern states legislated very complicated and demanding voter registration requirements while others began to require payment of a poll tax in order to vote.<sup>69</sup>

Ultimately, the end of Reconstruction and the advent of Jim Crow became additional reasons that former slaves in the South began to look for new places where they and their families could live safely and comfortably. The troubling results of the 1876 election confirmed, for many Southern blacks, that the federal government had turned its back on them. Blacks who had chosen to remain in Kentucky during Reconstruction saw that their living conditions and protection of civil liberties had worsened, rather than improved, as the decade of the 1870s progressed. Many concluded that they could only achieve the freedoms and rights they wanted if they left Kentucky and the South altogether. They began to look at the possible opportunities in the western states, particularly Kansas, as a place to build new lives.

## **Federal Land Policies**

Changes in federal land policy in the mid-nineteenth century contributed further to the viability of Kansas as a new home for all, including the African Americans who wished to create new communities there. In 1841, Congress passed the Preemption Act, which permitted settlers, who were technically squatters, on western lands to claim legal title to up to 160 acres of surveyed land at the minimum land price. Settlers were required to make a minimum number of improvements, which included construction of a dwelling, but otherwise were able to become landowners for relatively little money. In 1844, Congress passed the Town Site Preemption Act, which differed from the earlier act by allowing the purchase of 320 acres for town site development, at a similarly low price as land purchased under the Preemption Act. The Town Site Preemption Act “sought to ensure the development of actual towns rather than speculative sites.”<sup>70</sup> Settlement in Kansas increased to a small degree after passage of these Acts, but the number of new emigrants was small compared to the influx of homesteaders into the state after the Civil War.

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<sup>67</sup> Morris, *Fraud of the Century*, 248.

<sup>68</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 367.

<sup>69</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 366. The states that passed new constitutions were Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

<sup>70</sup> “Tyler Preemption Act of 1841,” electronic document, [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0193-13586\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0193-13586_ITM); and Rita Napier, “Frontier Agricultural Settlements and Government Regulation: the Town Site Preemption Act of 1844,” in *Working the Range: Essays on the History of Western Land Management and the Environment*, ed. J. R. Wunder (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 113.

In 1862, President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law, to take effect as of January 1, 1863. Like the Preemption Act, the Homestead Act offered 160 acres to settlers on western lands. The new legislation, however, conveyed land to settlers either free of charge for “proving up”—living on the land for five years and constructing a dwelling—or for \$1.25 per acre (\$200 for 160 acres) after improving the land and a six-month residency. Civil War veterans could deduct the amount of time they served in the Union Army from the five-year requirement. Former Confederate soldiers and government officials were not eligible for land under the Homestead Act. Aside from these requirements, citizenship (or declaration of intention of citizenship, for immigrants) was the only other stipulation, permitting freed African Americans to take advantage of this act. Although railroad companies and other land speculators used loopholes in the legislation to snatch up large parcels of land and then sell them at inflated prices, the Homestead Act offered settlers the possibility of acquiring property and a new life in Kansas and other parts of the West.<sup>71</sup>

## **African American Settlement of the West**

From the Civil War years through the 1880s, there were a series of large-scale migrations of African Americans out of the south into the American West (broadly defined as states and territories that straddled or lay west of the 100th Meridian). The first wave consisted of runaway and emancipated slaves leaving the South during the war years, as blacks in both Confederate and Border States seized the opportunity to seek freedom whenever Union troops neared their homes. One estimate put the number of slaves escaping bondage and departing the South during the war at approximately 100,000, with roughly 80,000 of them emigrating to the Midwest and Great Plains regions, including 10,000 to 15,000 who went to Kansas.<sup>72</sup> But even prior to the Civil War, small numbers of African American slaves and free blacks migrated to the western states and territories and sought to make their livelihoods there.

One of the largest groups of black people to reside in the antebellum West were the slaves of Native American tribes living in parts of Indian Territory that later became the state of Oklahoma. When the federal government forcibly removed the Five Civilized Tribes—Chickasaws, Choctaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles—from their homeland in the Southeast, the tribes brought their slaves, most of them black, to Indian Territory. Some blacks accompanied tribal members as members of the family or as spouses.<sup>73</sup> When they received their freedom, one group of free blacks established the first all-black town in Indian Territory as early as 1859.<sup>74</sup> After the Civil War, federal officials met with tribal leaders and secured freedom for slaves in Indian Territory, many of whom were subsequently adopted into the tribes they had served in bondage. Another important distinction marked the end of slavery in what is now Oklahoma. Several decades later, in 1893, the federal government provided many of these black Oklahomans with up to one hundred acres of land. Because they carried the status of tribal

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<sup>71</sup> Lee Ann Potter and Wynell Schamel, “The Homestead Act of 1862,” *Social Education* 61, no. 6 (October 1997): 359-64, available as electronic document, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act>. See also Michael L. Lanza, *Agrarianism and Reconstruction Politics: The Southern Homestead Act* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 9-10.

<sup>72</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 45-46.

<sup>73</sup> George O. Carney, “Oklahoma’s All-Black Towns,” in Billington and Hardaway, eds., *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Carney, “Oklahoma’s All-Black Towns,” 151.



members, they qualified for the land allotments under the revised authority of the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1877.<sup>75</sup>

For several decades after the war, the number of blacks migrating to Indian Territory from Southern states was much smaller than the scope of black emigration to neighboring Kansas and other Midwestern states. That changed in 1899, when thousands of blacks were among the 50,000 settlers who swarmed into the area during the Oklahoma Land Rush. Oklahoma's African American population more than doubled from 1890 to 1900, when 55,684 blacks lived in the territory. The black population had doubled again (to 137,612) by 1910.<sup>76</sup> As the black population expanded, Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory became home to twenty-nine all-black towns in the nearly two decades between the land rush and Oklahoma statehood in 1907.<sup>77</sup> Among them was the town of Boley, which at the start of the twentieth century was the largest "predominantly black town" in the country.<sup>78</sup> Eventually Langston, home to Langston University, overtook Boley, as the largest of the state's formerly all-black towns.<sup>79</sup>

One of the common reasons blacks in Oklahoma gathered to create these communities was the rise in racial discrimination and violence toward African Americans, as manifested by the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan in the territory.<sup>80</sup> But individual entrepreneurship was also at the heart of each town's existence. Similar to the beginnings of many all-blacks towns in Kansas (including Nicodemus) and elsewhere in the West, white real-estate developers proposed or promoted (or both) the creation of almost all the Oklahoma all-black towns. As with so many other small farming communities on the Great Plains, many of the Oklahoma black towns withered and were abandoned during the harsh economic times of the twenties and thirties. Nonetheless, thirteen of the towns, including Boley and Langston, survived into the twenty-first century.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to Indian Territory, free blacks and recently escaped slaves also made their way West in small numbers prior to the Civil War. Abolitionists ferried runaway slaves to freedom in Kansas, where several towns became "stops" of the Underground Railroad.<sup>82</sup> But antebellum black populations in the West remained small and consisted mainly of free individuals. Although chattel slavery did extend to Texas, most slaveholders and slaves remained east of the Mississippi rather than setting out for the frontier. Some proslavery Missourians who moved to Kansas Territory after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act brought with them small numbers of slaves. Overall, however, the most prominent occupations found on the Great Plains

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<sup>75</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 121.

<sup>76</sup> "Appendix," in Billington and Hardaway, *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, 259.

<sup>77</sup> Carney, "Oklahoma's All-Black Towns," 151. Another publication lists as many as 32 all-black towns established in Oklahoma during roughly the same frame. William Loren Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (1971; reprint, New York: Broadway Books, 2005), 226.

<sup>78</sup> BlackPast.org, "Boley, Oklahoma (1903-)," <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aaw/boley-oklahoma-1903>.

<sup>79</sup> BlackPast.org, "Langston, Oklahoma (1890-)," <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/langston-oklahoma-1890>.

<sup>80</sup> Carney, "Oklahoma's All-Black Towns," 151.

<sup>81</sup> Carney, "Oklahoma's All-Black Towns," 152.

<sup>82</sup> Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854-1865," *Kansas History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 46.

and mountain states—mining, cattle ranching, and subsistence farming—did not benefit largely from slave labor, thus providing slaveholders few incentives to move west.<sup>83</sup>

During the Civil War, the population of African Americans in the western states suddenly soared, as slaves seeking their freedom escaped Southern farms and plantations and headed west. One estimate put the number of blacks who migrated into the west during the war years at 80,000, including roughly 12,000 former slaves who escaped owners in nearby slave states and fled to Kansas.<sup>84</sup> In the years immediately following emancipation and the war's end, former slaves—more than half of them from the Upper South states of Missouri, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee—exercised their newfound freedom and headed west. African Americans rarely traveled in wagon trains, opting instead for the least expensive means of transport, which usually was by steamboat. Even then, numerous riverboat captains refused passage to African Americans, particularly those traveling along the lower Mississippi. Those without the money to pay transportation costs managed to walk long distances to reach their ultimate destination.<sup>85</sup> While some new emigrants sought merely to claim a piece of land they could homestead, other groups of former slaves set out with the intention to build new black communities in the American West. Many of the earliest African American communities of the West were in Oklahoma, as described above, and in Texas, a former slave state where African American settlers established their own communities apart from former masters and other whites. Other groups of black emigrants established communities farther afield, and each passing year saw new African American communities spring up in the West.<sup>86</sup>

As early as 1861, African Americans had also begun to establish communities in Kansas. Migrants from Missouri, Arkansas, and the Indian Territory populated the earliest communities, such as one in Douglas County, Kansas (ironically, named after Stephen A. Douglas, who was partly responsible for the struggle over slavery in Kansas), near the town of Lawrence, in northeastern Kansas. Lawrence and other communities where black migrants settled were not exclusively African American and generally developed within particular neighborhoods of already established white towns. Nonetheless, geographic patterns of emigrant settlements added to the cohesion of African American society in Kansas, as black residents of Lawrence and other cities established “population pockets” within particular neighborhoods, further solidifying a sense of community.<sup>87</sup>

African Americans in Douglas County and Lawrence also created more cohesive communities and reaffirmed their identities by establishing their own black churches and through Emancipation Day celebrations, which commemorated the anniversary of the freeing of slaves in the West Indies. Although Emancipation Day celebrations began in the Northeastern states during the late 1830s, Emancipation Day had its origins in the African American Freedom Day events that dated to the early nineteenth century. Freedom Day celebrations, often held on July 14, melded a commemoration of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1808 with an

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<sup>83</sup> W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, Number 23 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 193; and Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 30-31. For more on slaveholders moving to the frontier during this period, see Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>84</sup> Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 134-35.

<sup>86</sup> Katz, *The Black West*, 186.

<sup>87</sup> Katie H. Armitage, “‘Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free’: African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County,” *Kansas History* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 156, 164.

even earlier tradition of annual July festivals, usually attended by both free and enslaved blacks. As the Emancipation Day tradition evolved, the event became a manifestation of African American autonomy as well as a venue for activism. Where new black communities formed, celebrations of Emancipation Day “became vital rituals of self-definition and community bonding.”<sup>88</sup> When recent African American emigrants held these celebrations in their Kansas cities and towns, they were constructing a distinctive black social and cultural space in the American West.

Once they arrived in the West, former slaves continued to work as field hands or domestic servants, but blacks also began to work at jobs that had not been available (at least not to African Americans) in the East. Black men and women took jobs as cowboys, miners, soldiers, railroad workers, clerks, and numerous other positions. A small minority ran their own businesses. Some socioeconomic domains were easier than others for blacks to enter.

Following the Civil War, the U.S. Army became another avenue for blacks to enter the West. Several all-black army regiments had demonstrated their battlefield discipline and bravery during the latter years of the Civil War, giving some Army officials an appreciation for the value of African American troops. As a result of their distinguished service for the Union and of Reconstruction policies aimed at providing citizenship rights to former slaves, Congress authorized, for the first time, African Americans to serve in the “peacetime” army. Army regulations still segregated enlistees into all-black units, albeit with white commanding officers.<sup>89</sup> Most of the black soldiers were assigned to regiments in the west, where they became involved in the Indian Wars of the late 1860s through 1880s. The first black soldiers in the west served with the same infantry or cavalry companies that they had fought with against the Confederacy. The army disbanded many of these units in the years immediately following the South’s surrender, and the majority of these black soldiers were sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, to obtain their official discharge. An unknown number of them chose to remain in Kansas, or settle in another western state.<sup>90</sup>

In 1866, the army went through a reorganization, which kept active four black infantry and two black cavalry regiments garrisoned at isolated western forts, primarily in New Mexico and Indian Territory. By that time, the black soldiers serving in the Indian Wars had garnered the nickname “buffalo soldiers,” a term with uncertain origins that has secured longstanding usage. Another army reorganization in 1870 combined the former four regiments into just two black units, the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Army Regiments, and kept intact the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments. Those four regiments served at garrisons throughout the American West for the remainder of the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> In the thirty-year span from the end of the Civil War to the onset of the Spanish-American War (1898), approximately 14,000 blacks served in uniform, accounting for roughly 10 percent of army enlistees during that period.<sup>92</sup> The black Ninth

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<sup>88</sup> Mitchell Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 54-72, quotation on 69.

<sup>89</sup> Monroe Lee Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West, 1865-1900,” in Billington and Hardaway, *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, 54-55.

<sup>90</sup> Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 56.

<sup>91</sup> Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 57.

<sup>92</sup> Billington, “Buffalo Soldiers in the American West,” 56.

Cavalry, then stationed in Nebraska, acted as a support unit in what was considered the final engagement of the Indian Wars, the Battle of Wounded Knee with the Lakota.<sup>93</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the presence of black soldiers, the earlier influx of escaping slaves, and the ongoing emigration of homesteaders and colonists beyond the 100th meridian, gradually altered the demographic makeup of the American West. According to the U.S. census, African American population of the West increased significantly every ten years between 1850 and 1910, beginning at 59,799 in 1850 and reaching 941,176 by 1910. Much of the increase was due to outmigration of blacks from the Southern states. Texas, due to the state's size and former slaveholding status, had the highest concentration of African Americans of any state or territory in the West, accounting for more than 80 percent of the total black population until after 1900, but several western states also experienced large increases in their black populations. Nebraska and New Mexico both started with small numbers of African Americans in 1860 (black populations of eighty-two and eighty-five, respectively), but saw similar rates of increase as Texas and Oklahoma from 1860 to 1890. By 1890, 8,913 African Americans lived in Nebraska and 1,956 in New Mexico. Colorado's black population increased ten-fold between 1860 and 1870 (from 46 to 456) and five-fold between 1870 and 1880 (from 456 to 2,435) before the rate of increase slowed. California saw its most dramatic increase in African American population between 1850 and 1860, growing from 962 to 4,068, as blacks were among the crowds pouring into the state during the gold rush years.<sup>94</sup>

During the decade of the Civil War and its aftermath, Kansas saw the largest increase in black population of any western state, while California experienced the smallest.<sup>95</sup> The African American population of Kansas ballooned from 627 in 1860 to 17,108 in 1870; slaves seeking freedom from their owners in Missouri and Arkansas during the war accounted for more than half of that number. Whereas African Americans were less than 1 percent of the Kansas population in 1860, the influx of former slaves increased the proportion to 8.8 percent of the population in 1865. By the end of the war, five cities in Kansas boasted African American populations of more than 15 percent—Leavenworth had 2,455 African Americans out of a total population of 15,409 (16 percent); Lawrence claimed 933 out of 5,401 (17 percent); Mound City had 270 out of 1,494 (18 percent); Osawatomie had 138 out of 750 (18 percent); and Fort Scott boasted the highest percentage, with 359 African Americans out of 1,382 residents (26 percent). Also notable was Wyandotte County, which was 31 percent African American in 1865 (1,504 out of 4,827 in the entire county). Five years later, in 1870, Atchison, Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte all boasted African American populations of more than 1,000. Even with these increases, the African American population of Kansas was still small compared to many states in the eastern U.S., including all of the Southern states.<sup>96</sup>

The earliest, large-scale African American migration to Kansas, consisting of the former slaves who moved to the state during the Civil War, "raised the black population of Kansas to its highest level," in comparison to the white and Indian populations.<sup>97</sup> After the war, a new wave of

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<sup>93</sup> Billington, "Buffalo Soldiers in the American West," 61.

<sup>94</sup> "Appendix," in Billington and Hardaway, *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, 259.

<sup>95</sup> Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction*, 23-24.

<sup>96</sup> "Appendix," in Billington and Hardaway, *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, 259; Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854-1865," *Kansas History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 38; and Berwanger, *West and Reconstruction*, 24..

<sup>97</sup> Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas," 28-47, quotation on 37.

free black emigration to Kansas continued to increase the total number of blacks in the state. Kansas's black population more than doubled between 1870 and 1880 (from 17,108 to 43,107), before the rates of black population growth leveled off during the rest of the century. Despite the steadily growing number of African Americans in Kansas, the proportion of black residents out of the total population actually began to decrease after the war. Kansas's white population was increasing even more rapidly, as the opportunity to homestead on the prairie lands of western Kansas enticed new settlers from diverse racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds between the late 1860s through the 1890s. Whereas blacks accounted for almost 9 percent of the state's population in 1865, that number fell to only 4.7 percent in 1870, and then stayed between 3 to 4 percent for the remainder of the nineteenth century. But the statistics are somewhat misleading, for in some areas of Kansas during the 1870s and 1880s, black economic and political influence increased due to the establishment of cohesive all-black towns that became centers of commerce, trade, and county government. Nicodemus was the first and best example of a new black colony significantly altering economic and political spheres in the area surrounding the new settlement.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the emancipation of slaves during the Civil War and abolition of slavery with passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments, many former slaves in the Southern and Border States found that landowners, local officials, and, in the most extreme cases, terrorist mobs, continued to threaten or assault the civil liberties, personal safety, and individual dignity guaranteed to them under federal law. Dissatisfaction and anger about these conditions prompted many black individuals and families to seek freedom anew, to escape poverty, fear, and oppression. Most of those who left the South traveled by foot or riverboat into previously non-slave states north of the Ohio River, or to the western states and territories. Federal land policy changes offered inexpensive lands to those willing to move to unsettled western states. Some blacks left the South to set up family homesteads on the public domain or to seek work in existing western towns and cities. Others former slaves, including the black men and women who would establish the town of Nicodemus, departed for the West to create brand-new communities and a new world for themselves.





## Chapter 3: Waves of Colonists (1877–1879)

### **Introduction**

Settlement of Nicodemus occurred in a series of migrations out of the South from 1877 through 1879, with the majority of the colonists coming from central Kentucky. Although the town began to flourish in the 1880s, the first years after settlement were fraught with difficulties. A disabling drought, shortage of farm equipment, and lack of money and supplies created serious obstacles that the earliest colonists had to struggle to overcome. Nicodemus settlers also had to accommodate themselves to the radically different climatic and social conditions they found in Kansas. Nicodemus colony had its own unique beginning and unfolding story. But the founding of the town was also part of the much larger outmigration of blacks from the South during the 1870s and was representative of the colonizing impulse, at that time advocated by many black leaders and embraced by large numbers of former slaves.

### **Migration and Colonization**

In the early years of the Civil War, after the “fiction” of fighting the war without attacking slavery was laid bare, whites and blacks on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line raised questions and expressed anxieties about the ultimate destination of former slaves who wanted to leave the South. As Historian Leslie Schwalm described it, “The war’s emancipationist direction brought with it the unanswered questions: What would be the social, political, and geographic destiny of African Americans in the aftermath of slavery’s destruction?”<sup>1</sup> Some black organizations, as well as white politicians, pitched the concept of colonization as one possible answer. That is, freed slaves could depart the South and establish entirely new black communities—colonies—in locations such as the western states, the Caribbean, Africa, or wherever they could obtain “unoccupied” land. During the war, the Lincoln administration began evaluating prospects for a colonization program for emancipated slaves.<sup>2</sup> In 1864, Tennessee Governor William Brownlow encouraged Congress to reserve land for the settlement of former slaves, in order that they might live as “a nation of freemen.”<sup>3</sup>

Colonization ventures for freed blacks began to appear in the early eighteenth century. Paul Cuffee, a Quaker of African American and Native American ancestry, convinced the British government, members of Congress, and a group of free black leaders in the U.S. to support his plan for a resettlement of free blacks to the African nation of Sierra Leone. In 1816, he arranged, at his own expense, for a ship to carry a group of thirty-eight free blacks to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Cuffee died in 1817, but that year a group composed mainly of white northerners established the American Colonization Society, with the aim of sending “free African-Americans to Africa as an alternative to emancipation in the United States.”<sup>4</sup> In 1822, the Colonization Society founded a colony of free African Americans on the Atlantic Coast of West Africa. The colony was the first piece of what, in 1847, became the independent country of Liberia.

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<sup>1</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 83.

<sup>3</sup> Foner, *Short History of Reconstruction*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Library of Congress, “The African American Mosaic,” online exhibit (Washington DC: Library of Congress, July 2010), <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html>.

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, the Colonization Society promoted and financed emigration of free blacks to Africa.<sup>5</sup> When the Colonization Society became burdened with financial problems during the 1840s, they stopped underwriting the emigration of large groups going to Africa, and African American migration to Liberia slowed.

In the wake of the Civil War, interest in black emigration to Liberia soared, prompting the establishment of colonization societies in many states.<sup>6</sup> In 1877, Henry Adams, representing the Colonization Council of Louisiana, wrote to the head of the American Colonization Society to request help for the 69,000 blacks, almost all residents of Louisiana, who had signed up to migrate to a foreign land.<sup>7</sup> Two-thirds of them wanted to go to Liberia. By that time the Colonization Society was incapable of responding to such an enormous demand. Adam's Colonization Council had planned to send three delegates to Liberia to investigate the possibilities, but they eventually cancelled the scouting trip because of lack of funds. Without financial backing from private organizations or the government, the high costs of sailing across the Atlantic and establishing new settlements curtailed the dream of transporting thousands of former slaves to Africa.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, smaller groups of black men and women who could afford to pay the costs continued to make the trans-Atlantic voyage to Liberia with the American Colonization Society.<sup>9</sup>

While many blacks in the postwar South still looked to Liberia as a promised land, others explored the more pragmatic possibility of creating new black colonies in the American West. Some of the Southern black benevolent aid organizations formed during and after the war surveyed the failures of Reconstruction and foresaw only a bleak economic and social future awaiting African Americans who remained in the South. As the poor future prospects for Southern blacks became increasingly evident when formal federal Reconstruction efforts ended in the mid-1870s, colonization societies in numerous Southern states increased their proposals to establish new black settlements west of the Mississippi, primarily in Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and west Texas. All of these destinations shared two elements in common: 1) they offered inexpensive land available for settlement, and 2) except for Texas, their economies had not been based on slavery. Thus blacks who emigrated to those states would have the opportunity to obtain their land of their own, which they would stand little chance of achieving if they remained in the South.

As mentioned earlier, Kansas became a logical destination for blacks throughout the Reconstruction era, in part because as many as 15,000 former slaves had escaped into Kansas during the war and settled in a few specific areas—Lawrence, Leavenworth, Atchinson, and Fort Scott—where blacks accounted for a third of the total population.<sup>10</sup> Some of those blacks who successfully settled there during the war subsequently wrote to family members or church congregations still in the South, praising Kansas and encouraging others to migrate there. During the early 1870s, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton sent exploration committees to Kansas to investigate the prospects for establishing new black colonies in the state. They came away encouraged about the available land and the political environment they found there and began to promote the

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<sup>5</sup> Library of Congress, “The African American Mosaic.”

<sup>6</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 90-93.

<sup>9</sup> Library of Congress, “The African American Mosaic.”

<sup>10</sup> Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas,” 37.

creation of a black colony in Cherokee County. Kansas Governor John P. St. John and others in the state lauded Singleton's efforts: "From the best information it would seem that the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association, formed at Nashville in 1869, with Benjamin Singleton as President, begun [*sic*] the work of the emigration of the colored people from the south to Kansas."<sup>11</sup> Obviously, with 15,000 former slaves having entered Kansas during the Civil War, the emigration of blacks to the state was in full swing before any of Singleton's reconnaissance trips. Some time in the mid-1870s, a small number of African American families had followed Singleton's lead and emigrated into the Baxter Springs area of Cherokee County, in the far southeastern corner of the state. However, recent historical scholarship has severely undercut Singleton's claims that he led as many as 300 Tennessee blacks to establish a successful colony in Cherokee County as early as 1873.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the colony was far from being the success Singleton had claimed. Although census records show that there were ninety black households in the vicinity of Baxter Springs in 1880, the community was in the midst of a significant crisis, with most of the residents destitute and on the verge of starvation.<sup>13</sup> When sufficient relief did not appear, individuals and families began to abandon the colony. Singleton himself withdrew from involvement with Baxter Springs and turned his attention to colonization in other areas of the state. In 1878, Singleton achieved more success with the establishment of other black colonies in Kansas, including Dunlap, in Morris County, and Morton City, in Hodgeman County.<sup>14</sup>

Nicodemus, Dunlap, and the other early black settlements in Kansas arose at a time when the state was fertile ground for the creation of colonies by numerous emigrant groups of other races, nationalities, and religious affiliations, in addition to Southern blacks. During the 1870s, western Kansas saw the establishment of colonies by settlers from Ireland, England, Russia, Germany, France, Austria, Denmark, and Sweden, as well as from eastern urban centers such as Chicago and Pittsburg.<sup>15</sup> Some of these settlements were primarily commercial ventures by real-estate speculators while others were fervent attempts of emigrants trying to build new lives free from racial, ethnic, and religious persecution. In this regard, the black colonists in Kansas, including the settlers of Nicodemus, shared more in common with groups such as the German Mennonites of Russian-held territories who were fleeing conscription or the Russian Catholic groups escaping religious discrimination, than they did with white colonists from Northern states. Not coincidentally, the strong desire in these groups for freedom and liberty held their communities together during the hardest times, enabling several towns or colony legacies to survive into the twentieth century. Historian Craig Miner suggests that the colonies of emigrants seeking freedom from racial or religious intolerance were less likely to break apart or return to

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<sup>11</sup> John P. St. John et al., letter, October 22, 1879, Benjamin Singleton Collection, KSHS.

<sup>12</sup> Gary R. Entz convincingly argues that Singleton did not settle the Cherokee County colony until 1877, nearly at the same time as Nicodemus' settlement. But Singleton's exaggerations of his own exploits was repeated again and again by local newspapers, and later by historians writing about black settlement in Kansas. See Entz, "Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairie," 125-39. For the older description of Singleton's exploits, see Nell Blythe Waldron, *Colonization of Kansas from 1861-90* (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1923), 123-24; and Chu and Shaw, *Going Home to Nicodemus*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Entz, "Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairie," 136. The colony required outside relief to get through 1880 and 1881.

<sup>14</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 149; and Angela Bates, "The Kansas African-American History Trail," *CRM* 19, no. 2 (1996): 30.

<sup>15</sup> Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 67-75.

former homes when conditions changed around them, because “the step they took to western Kansas was a very long one, spiritually and physically, and for them there was no turning back.”<sup>16</sup>

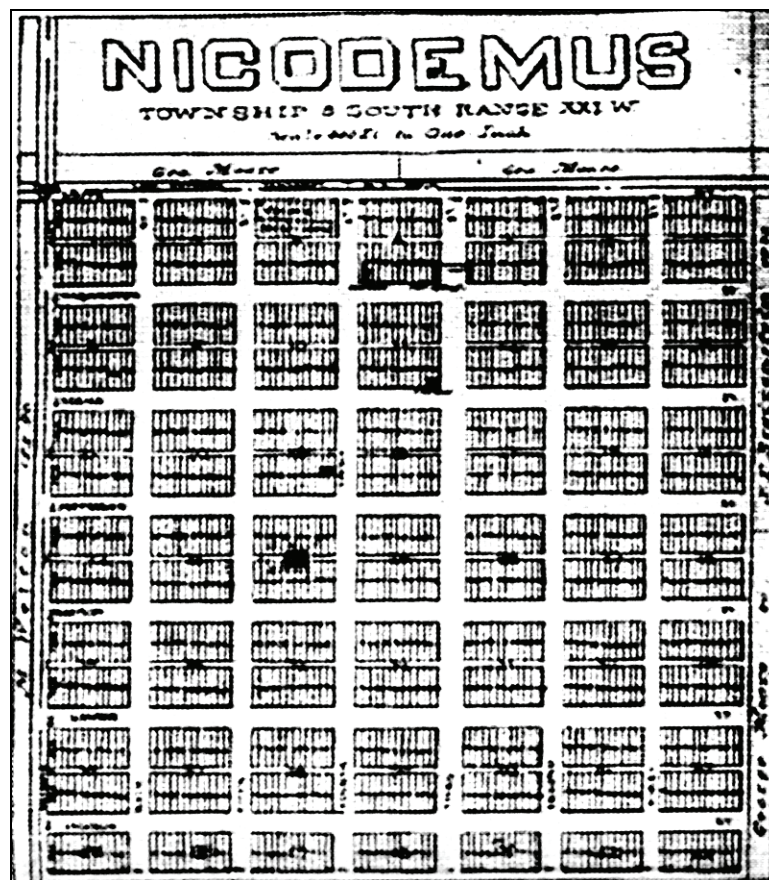


Figure 14. Plat of the Nicodemus townsite. Reproduced from Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

## Origins of Nicodemus

The story of Nicodemus’s settlement begins with W. R. Hill, a white man from Indiana, and six African American men who had migrated to Kansas prior to 1877: W. H. Smith, Reverend Simon P. Roundtree, Ben Carr, Jerry Allsop, Jeff Lenze, and William Edmons. With the exception of Hill and Smith, the latter of whom was from Tennessee, the remaining founders had all moved to Topeka, Kansas, from Kentucky.<sup>17</sup> Hill was a townsite promoter and may have been employed as an emigration booster for the Kansas Pacific Railroad, while Smith was president of the Nicodemus Town Company.<sup>18</sup> As historian Kenneth Marvin Hamilton has noted, Hill’s skill at promoting and developing towns, coupled with Smith’s knowledge of the desire of African Americans for free land in Kansas, led the two men to work together to promote the locale. While many tales have circulated over the years about why Hill selected the exact

<sup>16</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Claire O’Brien, “‘With One Mighty Pull’: Interracial Town Boosting in Nicodemus, Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 119.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 3.

location of Nicodemus, it seems most likely that he saw the prairie land as a good location for farms. The seven founders of Nicodemus formed the Nicodemus Town Company on April 18, 1877, and Hill filed the townsite plat two months later, on June 8, 1877.<sup>19</sup>

Two origins have been suggested for the name “Nicodemus,” with one story receiving more attention over the years. As a worker for the Federal Writers’ Project wrote,

The community was named Nicodemus not for the Biblical but for the legendary Nicodemus who came to America on a slave ship and later purchased his liberty. Of him the plantation Negroes of the South sang:

Nicodemus was a slave of African birth,  
And he was bought for a bag of gold,  
He was reckoned as a part of the salt of the earth,  
And he died years ago, very old.  
Nicodemus was a prophet, at heart he was wise  
For he told of the battles to come;  
Now he trembled with fear when he rolled up his eyes  
And he heeded the shake of his thumb.

Members of the Nicodemus colony added the following hopeful chorus:

Good time coming, good time coming,  
Long, long time on the way;  
Got tell Elijah to hurry up pomp,  
To meet us under the cottonwood tree  
In the great South Solomon Valley to build up  
The city of Nicodemus at the break of day.<sup>20</sup>

Longtime Nicodemus resident Ola Wilson recounted a similar story of the origins of the name: “It come from Africa. There was—you know—you heard them having chiefs of the tribe in Africa? Well, this Nicodemus was the oldest boy of the family, I guess. But they brought him to America as a slave, and he didn’t like it for the—his people to be in slavery. And he had the desire to want to free them, but he didn’t get to free them. But that was his desire.

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<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 6-8; and Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, “The Origins and Early Promotion of Nicodemus: A Pre-Exodus, All-Black Town,” *Kansas History* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 223.

<sup>20</sup> Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Projects Administration, *Kansas: A Guide to the Sunflower State* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 330, [http://www.archive.org/stream/kansasguidetosun00federich/kansasguidetosun00federich\\_djvu.tx](http://www.archive.org/stream/kansasguidetosun00federich/kansasguidetosun00federich_djvu.tx).





Even before the formation of the Nicodemus Town Company, the founders of Nicodemus had begun advertising the planned town. Hamilton describes the methods they chose to advertise the colony:

The promoters' lack of funds prohibited them from employing boosting agents, placing advertisements in Southern newspapers and periodicals, or distributing boosting brochures. Instead, they distributed circulars, the cheapest means to advertise their town lots. Even in this tactic, they were selective, however. Their cheaply printed sheets were mailed directly to likely prospects in the Southern states. Smith and Hill were not seeking mass numbers eager to escape the South. They were aiming at those who had some financial means.<sup>22</sup>

The first advertisement, dated April 16, 1877, boasted, "The largest colored colony in America!" and described the town's location, appealing characteristics, and plans for building a post office by June and houses by September.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the advertisement appealed to prospective settlers' desire for a morally upright community by promising a church building and a ban on "saloons or other houses of ill-fame" for five years.

On July 2, 1877 another advertisement for Nicodemus, addressed "To the Colored Citizens of the United States," described the town in glowing terms and noted,

Not quite 90 days ago we secured our charter for locating the town site of Nicodemus. We then became an organized body, with only three dollars in the treasury and twelve members, but under the careful management of our officers, we have now nearly 300 good and reliable members, with several members permanently located on their claims—with plenty of provisions for the colony—while we are daily receiving letters from all parts of the country from parties desiring to locate in the great Solomon Valley of Western Kansas.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Hamilton, "Origins and Early Promotion," 227.

<sup>23</sup> "The largest colored colony in America!" Reproduced in Hamilton, "Origins and Early Promotion," 220.

<sup>24</sup> "To the Colored Citizens of the United States." Reproduced in Hamilton, "Origins and Early Promotion," 230.



## To the Colored Citizens of the United States.

NICODEMUS, GRAHAM CO., KAN., July 2d. 1877.

We, the Nicodemus Town Company of Graham County, Kan., are now in possession of our lands and the Town Site of Nicodemus, which is beautifully located on the N. W. quarter of Section 1, Town 8, Range 21, in Graham Co., Kansas, in the great Solomon Valley, 240 miles west of Topeka, and we are proud to say it is the finest country we ever saw. The soil is of a rich, black, sandy loam. The country is rather rolling, and looks most pleasing to the human eye. The south fork of the Solomon river flows through Graham County, nearly directly east and west and has an abundance of excellent water, while there are numerous springs of living water abounding throughout the Valley. There is an abundance of fine Magnesian stone for building purposes, which is much easier handled than the rough sand or hard stone. There is also some timber; plenty for fire use, while we have no fear but what we will find plenty of coal.

Now is your time to secure your home on Government Land in the Great Solomon Valley of Western Kansas.

Remember, we have secured the service of W. R. Hill, a man of energy and ability, to locate our Colony.

Not quite 90 days ago we secured our charter for locating the town site of Nicodemus. We then became an organized body, with only three dollars in the treasury and twelve members, but under the careful management of our officers, we have now nearly 300 good and reliable members, with several members permanently located on their claims—with plenty of provisions for the colony—while we are daily receiving letters from all parts of the country from parties desiring to locate in the great Solomon Valley of Western Kansas.

For Maps, Circulars, and Passenger rates, address our General Manager, W. R. HILL, North Topeka, Kansas, until August 1st, 1877, then at Hill City, Graham Co., via Trego.

The name of our post-office will be Nicodemus, and Mr. Z. T. Fletcher will be our "Nasby."

REV. S. P. ROUNDTREE, Sec'y.

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### NICODEMUS.

Nicodemus was a slave of African birth,  
And was bought for a bag full of gold;  
He was reckoned a part of the salt of the earth,  
But he died years ago, very old.

Nicodemus was a prophet, at least he was as wise,  
For he told of the battles to come;  
How we trembled with fear, when he rolled up his eyes,  
And we heeded the shake of his thumb.

CHORUS:      Good time coming, good time coming,  
                 Long, long time on the way;  
Run and tell Elija to hurry up Pomp,  
To meet us under the cottonwood tree,  
In the Great Solomon Valley  
At the first break of day.

Figure 16. Handbill signed by Simon P. Roundtree, July 2, 1877. Reproduced from Kansas State University, Minorities Collection.

The founders focused their advertising and recruitment of colonists for Nicodemus on Fayette and Scott counties, Kentucky. Hill visited Fayette and Scott county black churches in 1877 to tell the congregations about the opportunities Nicodemus could offer them. Churches were an apt place to make these colonization pitches because, regardless of the particular denomination, the church was the heart of the black community in most Southern towns and rural areas. Hill had the support of several black ministers in this area, some of whom led groups from their congregations to Nicodemus.<sup>25</sup> George Moore, who moved from Georgetown, Kentucky, to Nicodemus, was in the congregation for one of Hill's promotional speeches. Years later, a Kansas reporter described Moore's recollections of the event:

There came to the little colored Baptist church one night a white man expounding the theories of a negro colony away out in western Kansas. With many others George listened to the stories of the wonderful opportunities for the colored man out on the prairies where 160 acres of land could be had for the asking, where horses were running wild but could be caught and tamed and turned into beasts of burden or doing farm work; where game was plentiful and would supply their every want in the meat line; where the colored man clasped hands with the white man as his equal; where there were no Jim Crow laws to humiliate the race. The great out-of-doors could be reclaimed with but little effort and bounteous crops would result.<sup>26</sup>

Although such glowing descriptions were the work of land promoters and often not based in fact, they had their intended effect.

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<sup>25</sup> Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> "When Nicodemus Was Thriving Village," *Concordia Kansan*, June 28, 1934, in *Negroes Clippings*, Vol. 7, KSHS.



**All Colored People**  
**THAT WANT TO**  
**GO TO KANSAS,**  
**On September 5th, 1877,**  
**Can do so for \$5.00**

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**IMMIGRATION**

WHEREAS, We, the colored people of Lexington, Ky., knowing that there is an abundance of choice lands now belonging to the Government, have assembled ourselves together for the purpose of locating on said lands. Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That we do now organize ourselves into a Colony, as follows:— Any person wishing to become a member of this Colony can do so by paying the sum of one dollar (\$1.00), and this money is to be paid by the first of September, 1877, in instalments of twenty-five cents at a time, or otherwise as may be desired.

RESOLVED, That this Colony has agreed to consolidate itself with the Nicodemus Towns, Solomon Valley, Graham County, Kansas, and can only do so by entering the vacant lands now in their midst, which costs \$5.00.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall consist of seven officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and three Trustees. President—M. M. Bell; Vice-President—Isaac Talbott; Secretary—W. J. Niles; Treasurer—Daniel Clarke; Trustees—Jerry Lee, William Jones, and Abner Webster

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall have from one to two hundred militia, more or less, as the case may require, to keep peace and order, and any member failing to pay in his dues, as aforesaid, or failing to comply with the above rules in any particular, will not be recognized or protected by the Colony.

Figure 17. Handbill promoting black emigration to Nicodemus. Reproduced from Kansas State University, Minorities Collection.

### Three Waves and Other Settlers

The first group of Nicodemus colonists, most of them from Topeka, arrived at the town site on July 30, 1877. These thirty individuals were African Americans who had migrated to Kansas during the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. The colony's six African American founders were part of this vanguard group of settlers, along with Zach T. Fletcher, who later became the town's first postmaster, and his wife, Jenny, who was the daughter of W. H. Smith and the first woman to settle in Nicodemus. The initial settlers had the first opportunity to choose from the available farm land surrounding the town or to settle on a lot within the town.<sup>27</sup> Colonists quickly discovered, however, that many of the glowing descriptions of the Nicodemus area were exaggerations or outright fabrications. Colonists directed their anger at Hill, and a few even discussed hanging Hill for his deception. Fearing for his safety, Hill fled Nicodemus for a time. Although other founders had been involved in organizing the colony, the colonists seem to have reserved their ire for Hill alone.<sup>28</sup>

The first large group of Nicodemus colonists—referred to as the “first wave”—arrived September 17, 1877.<sup>29</sup> The 300 individuals included 130 families who came from Lexington, Kentucky. Their arrival is celebrated as the founding of Nicodemus.<sup>30</sup> However, after the difficulties and fatigue of the long journey, some of the emigrants became so dispirited at the bleak scene that greeted them, a scene so completely different from what they had anticipated, that they decided not to stay. The day after they arrived, as many as sixty families left Nicodemus to return to Kentucky.<sup>31</sup> According to Lula Mae Sadler Craig, Nicodemus resident and local historian, these colonists “were not the material of which pioneers are made.” Craig noted that their primary reason for leaving was: “Our women cried all night, and if we do not go away we will probably have to send them to the asylum.”<sup>32</sup>

Craig's statement is understandable in one context, as it reflects the attitude conceivably held by some of the new colonists who stayed at the settlement, struggled to stick it out, and found a way to survive and flourish in their new world. But in the larger context of migration to Kansas, the comment seems to make light of the drastic emotional and physical challenges virtually all new emigrants, whether they stayed on or quickly departed, faced at their arrival. Entering Nicodemus, the colonists experienced not only disappointment that the scene that greeted them was contrary to everything they believed, they likely were also hungry, exhausted, and experiencing physical and emotional dislocation. Certainly, most of the colonists had learned how to overcome physical discomfort, abuse, and uncertainty in their former lives as Kentucky slaves. Whether as slaves or free people, they had suffered the injustices in the context of

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<sup>27</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 10-11; Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 13; and Chu and Shaw, *Going Home to Nicodemus*, 35; “Nicodemus, Kansas: The African-American Mosaic (Library of Congress Exhibition),” electronic document, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam010.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Chu and Shaw, *Going Home to Nicodemus*, 35-36; and “Out to Hang Hill,” undated newspaper clipping, in *Graham County Clippings*, Vol. 1, KSHS.

<sup>29</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003), 37.

<sup>30</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 14.

<sup>31</sup> Chu and Shaw, *Going Home to Nicodemus*, 36. See also Craig, “Second Colony,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, and Craig, “Twenty Families Left,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries. Although the two stories by Craig are nearly identical, they differ in the number of families that departed Nicodemus.

<sup>32</sup> Craig, “Second Colony.”

familiar surroundings and environment. If the actual hardships they came upon in Kansas seemed, on one level, less painful than those they faced in the past, the new difficulties would have been amplified by the absence of familiar surroundings of their Kentucky homes and by the strangeness of the Great Plains environment.

Historical narratives passed down by the original Nicodemus colonists offer very few details about the environment around them during their journey west. But numerous other emigrant groups did record their experiences as they entered the Great Plains. In one of his many essays on the arid American West, Wallace Stegner observed that nineteenth-century emigrants to the West, regardless of their ultimate destination, “almost universally note in their journals that a little beyond Grand Island [on a longitude roughly sixty-five miles east of Nicodemus] their nostrils dried out and their lips cracked, their wagon wheels began to shrink and wobble, and their estimates of distance began to be ludicrously off the mark.”<sup>33</sup> Stegner called the transition into the Great Plains environment the “border of strangeness.”<sup>34</sup> New arrivals to the fledgling Nicodemus colony would have experienced these changes to a lesser or greater extent, adding to their sense of being strangers in a new environment. When the colonists also found that the attractive descriptions of Nicodemus were heavily embellished, many of them made the decision to return to their old homes or find another place that lived up to their expectations.

Whereas the founders’ promotional pitches and advertisements had described the prairie land as, “the finest country we ever saw. . . and looks most pleasing to the human eye,” the new colonists found barren, treeless prairie with “no houses, no wells, no shelter of any kind.”<sup>35</sup> As noted in the Nicodemus Cultural Landscape Report, “because [the founders’] sole purpose was to entice emigrants to the Nicodemus vicinity, they also tended to exaggerate local conditions and make promises that could not be kept.”<sup>36</sup> The land that the colonists saw upon arriving at the town site was depicted more accurately in a Government Land Office surveyor’s report, “The larger portion of the township [Township 8S, Range 21W] is rolling and broken prairie, 2nd and 3rd rate quality, not adapted to cultivation. . . . We found no timber and no water except on line between Sections 3 and 34 where a spring branch about five links in width contains good fresh water.”<sup>37</sup> Nicodemus historian and resident Lula Mae Craig Sadler suggests that the colonists “had in their minds the pictures of the country from which they had come. They expected to see trees, springs, creeks, houses, towns and places to which they could go and work for money to support themselves. After looking the location over, their imaginations could not picture any means of living on the prairie.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wallace Stegner, “Living Dry,” in *The American West As Living Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Stegner, “Living Dry,” 19.

<sup>35</sup> See handbill, figure 17; quotation from W. W. Sayers, “Black Pioneers, From an Address Given by W. W. Sayers in Atchison, Kansas, January 10, 1935,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>36</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, “Nicodemus National Historic Site,” 37.

<sup>37</sup> Government Land Office, Surveyor’s Field Notes, Graham County, Kansas, National Archives RG 49, Microfilm Roll #139, Vol. 46, 7, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Craig, “On the Frontier,” unpublished article, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Library, copy in Resource Files, NPS Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, NE.





**Figure 18. Photograph of the Bates family, early homesteaders in Nicodemus, date unknown. From the private collection of Irvin and Minerva Sayers.**

Not surprisingly, when a second wave of colonists arrived from Georgetown, Kentucky, in March 1878, many of them were just as heartbroken as the previous group had been after first setting eyes on the town site. Willina Hickman, for example, left an often-quoted reminiscence of her arrival at Nicodemus.<sup>39</sup> After a journeying by train to Ellis, Kansas, the colonists anticipated a thirty-five mile walk to Nicodemus. However, an outbreak of the measles among the children delayed the entire group's departure from Ellis by two weeks. As if the wait were not enough, Hickman also took ill on the journey. As she explained, she was looking anxiously for a sign of the settlement when the men of the group announced that they had arrived. "I said, 'Where is Nicodemus? I don't see it.' My husband pointed out various smokes coming out of the ground and said 'That is Nicodemus.' The families lived in dugouts. We landed and once again struck tents. The scenery to me was not at all inviting, and I began to cry."<sup>40</sup> Despite Hickman's report of the settlement's dismal appearance, the second wave arrived in a town that had begun to grow, and the Georgetown colonists' arrival swelled the town's population by 150 or more.<sup>41</sup>

Just two months later, in May 1878, a third wave of colonists arrived in Nicodemus from Georgetown, numbering as many as 125 persons.<sup>42</sup> Information on this group of emigrants is sparse but suggests that the third wave was smaller than the first two waves. Two nineteenth-century sources indicate that it may have consisted of between sixty to seventy-five new

<sup>39</sup> Some sources spell the first name Williana instead of Willina. "She Helped Settle 2nd Colony of Nicodemus," *Topeka Capital*, August 29, 1937, in *Negroes Clippings*, Vol. 7, KSHS.

<sup>40</sup> "She Helped Settle 2nd Colony of Nicodemus," *Topeka Capital*, August 29, 1937, in *Negroes Clippings*, Vol. 7, KSHS.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 11; and Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 8.

<sup>42</sup> Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 8.

colonists.<sup>43</sup> Historian Nell Irvin Painter claims that this third wave, which she estimated at around fifty settlers, may have come from Missouri.<sup>44</sup> In 1879, two other groups with a combined total of around seventy-five colonists arrived from Mississippi.<sup>45</sup> It is uncertain whether these settlers were part of the large mass migration out of the Gulf Coast states to Kansas, a group that became known as the Exodusters and is discussed further below.<sup>46</sup>

## ***Nicodemus and the Exodusters***

A year after the first waves of colonists settled Nicodemus, political and economic events in several Southern states precipitated another large migration of African Americans to Kansas. In 1879, thousands of black residents of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, a group that became known collectively as the Exodusters, left the South by whatever means possible to reach what they believed was a promised land in Kansas. Historians have described the exodus, in which “Kansas Fever” gripped blacks in particular townships and counties of the Deep South, as a “sudden, unplanned, and therefore disorganized,” as well as leaderless, movement.”<sup>47</sup> A series of political shifts, most notably the Democratic landslide in the Deep South during the Congressional elections of 1878, help explain the abrupt decision of African Americans to depart the South for Kansas. And as mentioned in the previous chapter, the political compromise that settled the 1876 presidential election included the Republicans’ agreement to remove federal troops from the Southern states, prompting a rise in violence against blacks in some areas. Less than two years later, anti-Reconstruction Democrats made sweeping political gains in Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and South Carolina. For black Kentuckians, the election results raised the possibility that they could lose their new-found civil rights, including suffrage, they had gained after the war.<sup>48</sup> When rumors of free transportation and free land for African Americans who traveled to Kansas spread through the South in late 1878, it provided the final impetus for roughly 15,000 blacks to make their way from the aforementioned states to Kansas between 1879 and 1881. Most of the Exodusters followed the Mississippi River Valley north to St. Louis, where they disembarked and headed for points west in Kansas.<sup>49</sup>

The main characteristics of the Exoduster migration—it was largely unorganized, leaderless, and nonselective—stand in sharp contrast to the settlement of Nicodemus, which was an organized migration initiated by a group of founders who targeted blacks in Kentucky that the leadership believed would make successful settlers. According to historian Helen Sheumaker, “Deliberately begun as a commercial venture, Nicodemus capitalized on the anxieties and desires of Southern blacks for freedom, land, and opportunity, and targeted the more established, middle class blacks.”<sup>50</sup> Many of the African American settlers of Nicodemus were farmers with some

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<sup>43</sup> *Ellis County Star*, May 30, 1878, quoted in “Nicodemus Fading As Town With Loss of Its Post Office,” *Hays Daily News*, November 8, 1953, 16, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; “Nicodemus. The Colored Colony in Graham County, Kansas,” *The Pioneer*, March 21, 1879, in *Graham County Clippings*, Vol. 1, KSHS.

<sup>44</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 150.

<sup>45</sup> O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 119; Harry Root, “Sixth District News Notes: Items and Reminiscences by An Old Timer with His Ear to the Grass Roots,” *Topeka Journal*, January 7, 1922, in Resource Files, NNHS.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the Exodusters, see Painter, *Exodusters*, esp. ch. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 173-83.

<sup>49</sup> Katz, *The Black West*, 178-79.

<sup>50</sup> Sheumaker, “Gravemarkers of Nicodemus, Kansas,” 17-18.



financial means (although not always enough to get by on once they arrived in the state), as well as specific plans to start farming anew on their homesteads. Conversely, many of the Exodusters were destitute and lacked particular objectives other than to flee the South and reach Kansas.<sup>51</sup> One observer who witnessed the first large group of Exodusters enter St. Louis in 1879 said they “seem to regard themselves as refugees from some impending calamity rather than as emigrants seeking new homes.”<sup>52</sup> Large numbers of Exodusters became temporarily stranded in St. Louis, until they could find enough money and sufficiently restore their health before resuming the journey to Kansas. Many arrived in such poor condition that the city’s black churches and aid societies stepped in almost immediately to provide shelter, food, and clothing.<sup>53</sup>

Because many Exodusters were poor and departed their old homes quite suddenly when they got caught up in the “Kansas Fever,” those who made the long journey to Kansas typically arrived unprepared for the conditions that greeted them. Having believed that the government would provide them with the land and means to make a new start, the Exodusters immediately faced a struggle to find shelter and sustenance, often depending on the aid of other blacks who were earlier arrivals to the region. Prompted by calls—from white and black communities—to provide assistance to the struggling new emigrants, the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association was established in 1879 and operated for two years distributing food and clothing to black communities in need throughout the state.<sup>54</sup> The Topeka Freedmen’s Aid Association, supported by the white and black communities, played an equally important part in providing basic necessities to the huge influx of mostly poor and underfed emigrants. Nonetheless, the continuing struggle to find work and sufficient food prompted hundreds, and possibly as many as several thousand, Exodusters to leave Kansas for Nebraska or Oklahoma in hopes of finding better living conditions in those neighboring states.<sup>55</sup>

At the peak of the migration in 1879, Exodusters also received political support from the Kansas governor, legislators, and some members of the Topeka business community, all of whom acknowledged that Kansas would provide asylum for the virtual army of “refugees.” Governor John St. John explained that “Kansas’s historic love of freedom” and long heritage of being “devoted to liberty” mandated that the state open its doors to the influx of Southern blacks.<sup>56</sup> The governor’s vocal support did not mean white, or even all black, Kansas residents uniformly approved of the Exodusters’ arrival. Painter suggests, “the massive influx of Blacks in 1879 had inspired some limited resentment among white Kansans. They feared that large numbers of Blacks would turn the tide of white migration from Kansas to Nebraska and Minnesota.”<sup>57</sup>

Nicodemus, like other African American colonies in Kansas and the West, likely served some role in subsequent black migrations to Kansas and gave groups such as the Exodusters an example of the possibilities available for blacks in Kansas. But the black individuals and families who took part in the exodus generally did not follow the colonization model and did not have the

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<sup>51</sup> William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 175.

<sup>52</sup> Senator William Windom, as quoted in Painter, *Exodusters*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 225-28.

<sup>54</sup> Entz, “Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairie,” 136.

<sup>55</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 259.

<sup>56</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 230-31.

<sup>57</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 259.

wherewithal to buy the land to create brand new communities.<sup>58</sup> However, the characteristics that distinguished the Nicodemus colonization from the Exodusters mass migration might obscure important shared elements among the various movements of Southern blacks to Kansas in the late 1870s. At the core of these diverse migrations was the common desire among a large number of blacks in former slave states to escape the poor living conditions, unemployment, restriction of civil rights, and racial violence of the post-Reconstruction South. Speaking of the Exodusters, Painter put it simply: “Terrorism and poverty lay at the root of the exodus.”<sup>59</sup> Some also fell victim to racial violence specifically because they were trying to leave the South, as white plantation owners were alarmed to see such a large chunk of their labor force leaving of their own volition.<sup>60</sup> These were the underlying conditions that confronted blacks throughout the South, whether they lived in Kentucky, Mississippi, or elsewhere. Historian Stephen Hahn reasoned that all of the postwar migrations out of the South, whether the destination was Kansas or Liberia, should be treated, “as manifestations of a more general and remarkably widespread impulse.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Problems in Early Settlement**

Despite steady population growth and hard work during the first two years of settlement, Nicodemus struggled. Many participants in the first waves of immigration often had just enough money to reach the settlement, with nothing left to spend when they arrived there.<sup>62</sup> The founders of Nicodemus had not anticipated the severe poverty that the earliest settlers encountered and had prepared inadequately for those circumstances. They did not realize that many of the colonists did not have enough money to buy even the most basic equipment necessary to break and cultivate the Kansas prairie earth.<sup>63</sup> This proved to be a stiff challenge to overcome in the early days of the settlement. Later colonists came to Nicodemus with more money and better supplies, with one individual alone bringing \$1,000 worth of supplies.<sup>64</sup>

The arrival date of the first group of colonists also reflected poor planning. Because they arrived in September, settlers were unable to plant and harvest a crop before winter descended on them. In addition, wild game that was abundant in spring and summer had migrated elsewhere by fall.<sup>65</sup> By February 1878, the *Hays City Sentinel* described the settlers of the Nicodemus colony as “without work, without subsistence, and with no prospect of reaping a crop for some time yet.”<sup>66</sup> Later colonists, arriving in spring, were able to plant a crop early enough in the year to reap a fall harvest.

Along with problems of subsistence, the settlers of Nicodemus also faced conflicts with their neighbors, some of which were racially motivated while others were typical of the range battles contested throughout the American West. Nicodemus settlers came to Kansas to farm the

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<sup>58</sup> Bryan M. Jack, *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 95.

<sup>59</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 190.

<sup>60</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 196-97.

<sup>61</sup> Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet*, 331.

<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, “The Origins and Early Promotion of Nicodemus,” 229.

<sup>63</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 11-12; and Painter, *Exodusters*, 151.

<sup>66</sup> “The Nicodemus Colony,” *Hays City Sentinel*, February 16, 1878, in Resource Files, NNHS.

prairie to raise crops, but the area's white cattle ranchers wanted the prairie to remain unplowed and open for their herds to graze. Regardless of the race of the farmers or ranchers, this conflict between agriculture and ranching was common on the Great Plains. When colonists first settled in Nicodemus, open range grazing was predominant, as barbed wire or other cattle-proof fencing was not widespread in this era. In 1878, Reverend Roundtree sent a letter to the governor to ask for help in keeping the cattle herds out of the fields of Nicodemus farmers, but it was to no avail.<sup>67</sup> Ranchers near Nicodemus raided the town six times in a two-week period in 1878, attempting to drive the Nicodemus farmers away.<sup>68</sup> Problems with cattle operators continued until the early to mid-1880s, when enforcement of county herd laws (which restricted free-ranging cattle) and the impact of several severe winters curtailed the power and prevalence of the cattle industry in western Kansas.<sup>69</sup> Conflicts with other white neighbors were more likely motivated by racial discrimination. During the colony's first year, for instance, a group of white residents in the town of Millbrook assaulted H. K. Hawkins, one of the partners in a recently founded Nicodemus real estate firm.<sup>70</sup>

Nicodemus colonists also encountered institutional racial discrimination in the form of the "Sundown laws" that existed in many western Kansas towns. The laws prohibited the presence of African Americans anywhere within a Sundown town after sunset. Oral tradition in Nicodemus suggests that communities in the area were so-called Sundowner towns, including nearby Stockton and Hays. As a result, colonists who walked the nineteen miles to Stockton to buy supplies frequently stayed the night in a dugout storehouse just outside of the town limits, since it was difficult to make the entire round-trip in a single day.<sup>71</sup>

## **Charitable Donations**

Although later colonists arrived with money, equipment, and at a better time for planting crops, these factors alone did not ensure survival or prosperity in the early settlement days of Nicodemus. To survive, Nicodemus's settlers relied on charitable donations sent from outside the town. In February 1878, one member of the colony was reported as being "on a begging excursion to Colorado."<sup>72</sup> Two months later, in April, the *Salina Journal* reported on a trip by two ministers, the Reverends W. A. Simkins and J. H. Lockwood, to Nicodemus. The men "found [the settlers] in better shape than we feared," but identified specific things that would assist the colonists. They proposed raising \$200 in donations to purchase two teams of oxen for plowing the prairie. Simkins and Lockwood also suggested sending provisions and clothing to benefit the colonists while they awaited the fruits of their agricultural labors. "Our aim shall be in all to give them only such help as they absolutely need, and help that will put them in shape to help themselves."<sup>73</sup> The colony established a system for distribution of aid, storing the received items in a commissary building and authorizing the town officers to distribute items as needed.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 152-53.

<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 13; and Painter, *Exodusters*, 152.

<sup>69</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 176-77.

<sup>70</sup> O'Brien, "With One Mighty Pull," 122.

<sup>71</sup> Angela Bates, personal communication with Paul Sadin, March 29, 2011; and "Possible Sundown Towns in KS," electronic document, <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/sundowntownsshow.php?state=KS>.

<sup>72</sup> "The Nicodemus Colony," *Hays Daily Sentinel*, February 16, 1878.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in "The Nicodemus Colony," *Hays City Sentinel*, April 6, 1878, NNHS.

<sup>74</sup> Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 17; and Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 14.

Nicodemus did not receive state or federal aid, as Governor George T. Anthony worried that, in the wake of Kansas's receipt of federal monies to recover from the grasshopper invasion of 1874, such aid "would deter wealthier white settlers from relocating to the state."<sup>75</sup> All charitable donations instead came from individuals or nongovernmental groups, both inside and outside of Kansas.<sup>76</sup>

By April 1879, according to a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* who had visited Nicodemus, the Nicodemus settlers held a public meeting and agreed to stop soliciting charitable aid. They feared some colonists had become too dependent on begging rather than working. They were also concerned that the availability of aid might attract Exodusters, who had arrived with little money and substantial needs, to the colony. The residents of Nicodemus made the decision that those who chose to settle in Nicodemus would be expected to work in order to provide sustenance for themselves and their families.<sup>77</sup>

### **Other Northwestern Kansas Towns and Other African American Communities**

As described earlier in this chapter, white Americans and immigrants from other countries also saw Kansas as an appealing place to start their lives anew. In the immediate vicinity of Nicodemus, three towns, mainly of white residents, had been established prior to 1877. Ellis, about thirty-one miles to the south, had been established ten years earlier, in 1867, as a Kansas Pacific Railroad stop that served as a shipping point for cattle headed to southern markets.<sup>78</sup> Although several other towns were closer to Nicodemus, former town resident John Buckner observed that Ellis was, "the main headquarters for the—oh, I don't know what you'd call it, livelihood of Nicodemus. My dad and them used to have to walk to Ellis and bring back the flour and . . . commodities, 'cause there was no stores or anything."<sup>79</sup> Sometimes a group would go to Ellis with a horse-drawn wagon to haul back supplies, while at other times individuals walked there and back carrying what they needed.

Closer to Nicodemus, cattle dealers founded the town of Stockton in 1872, aiming to take advantage of the town's location at the intersection of one trail that followed the South Fork of the Solomon River and another trail that ran between Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and Fort Hays, Kansas. Stockton was situated nineteen miles to the east of Nicodemus. In 1885, the Missouri Pacific Railroad laid a line to Stockton, thus boosting its future growth. The Plainville area, approximately twenty miles to the southeast, was settled in 1877 but not formally established as a town until 1888. Plainville, too, became a station on a branch of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1889.<sup>80</sup> Other towns appeared in the area soon after the first wave of colonists arrived at Nicodemus. W. R. Hill, one of the Nicodemus co-founders, also founded the town of Hill City,

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<sup>75</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 14-15.

<sup>77</sup> "The Negro Exodus," *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1879, typescript, Resource Files, National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, NE. See also Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 15-16; and Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 17.

<sup>78</sup> "Ellis Kansas," electronic document, <http://www.ellis.ks.us/>.

<sup>79</sup> John William Buckner and Loretta Faye Buckner interview with Jennifer Michael, August 2, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 4, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>80</sup> Esta S. Riseley, "The History of Rooks County Kansas," typescript, 1926-1927, 8, KSHS.

twelve and a half miles west of Nicodemus, in 1878.<sup>81</sup> In 1888, when the Union Pacific Railroad bypassed Nicodemus in favor of a location just southwest, the town of Bogue grew out of the railroad camp established at that location.<sup>82</sup>

The strong desire of many blacks to leave the South for Kansas and other western states ensured that Nicodemus would not be the only black town in Kansas or on the eastern Great Plains. Morton City, Kansas, an African American colony about 100 miles south of Nicodemus, was the closest black town. Settlers from Lexington and Harrodsburg, Kentucky, migrated to this area in 1877. They were able to take the Santa Fe Railroad as far as Kinsley, Kansas, but still had a walk of more than thirty miles to the northwest to arrive at the location of Morton City. However, Morton City never flourished, as the town's inhabitants soon realized that they were too far from other settlements to be economically feasible. Some Morton City settlers maintained individual homesteads, while others moved to Kinsley and made a living there, but the idea of an African American community of Morton City was abandoned. By 1950, only "vestiges" of Morton City existed on land that had become part of a large ranch.<sup>83</sup>

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Pap Singleton had a hand in founding two other black colonies in Kansas during the mid- to late-1870s. A small group of blacks from Tennessee established the first, but less successful, settlement near Baxter Springs some time in the mid-1870s, but it was struggling to survive and losing members by 1880–1881.<sup>84</sup> In 1878, Singleton initiated a second and more successful black colony in the town of Dunlap, in northeastern Kansas.<sup>85</sup> It was not an all-black community, as Joseph Dunlap, a white settler, founded the town in 1870. The black population of the town grew with the influx of approximately 200 Exodusters who came to the town in 1879–1880. The poor condition of the Exoduster "refugees" there drew the attention of the Associate Presbyterian Synod of Kansas, including one member who noted that the Dunlap blacks were also the "object of bitter jealousy and opposition on the part of the whites," in the town.<sup>86</sup> White members of the Presbyterian organization extended considerable relief efforts to the African American community, particularly to the newly arrived Exodusters. Presbyterian missionaries eventually helped establish the Dunlap Aid Association to help Exodusters' find land and employment, and the Dunlap Business and Literary Academy.<sup>87</sup> Dunlap's location in eastern, rather than western, Kansas helped it survive longer than some of the prairie communities, although it slowly diminished throughout the twentieth century and part of it is a ghost town today.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 2.

<sup>82</sup> "Bogue, Kansas—Solomon Valley / Hwy 24 Heritage Alliance," electronic document, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/orgs/svha/towns/Bogue.htm>. For more on the impact of Nicodemus being bypassed by the railroad, see chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>83</sup> Robert W. Richmond, "Ordeal for Early Negro Settlers," *Kansas City Times*, May 20, 1970, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 9, KSHS; Morris Turner III, *America's Black Towns and Settlements: A Historical Reference Guide*, Volume 1 (Rohnert Park, CA: Missing Pages Productions, 1998), 76.

<sup>84</sup> Entz, "Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairie," 136.

<sup>85</sup> Painter, *Exodusters*, 149.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Atchison, Secretary, Dunlap Aid Association, to Kansas Governor John P. St. John, August 22, 1881, Governor's Records, Kansas Historical Society, reproduced in "Kansas Memory: Andrew Atchison to John P. St. John" (Topeka: Kansas Historical Society, 2007-2010), <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/210609/page/1>.

<sup>87</sup> "Kansas Memory: Andrew Atchison to John P. St. John," <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/210609/page/1>.

<sup>88</sup> KSGenWeb Project, "Blue Skyways," <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1912/d/dunlap.html>.

Other successful Kansas African American settlements prior to 1879 were on the outskirts of major population centers, such as Kansas City and Topeka, rather than being on the plains. Even during the Exoduster movement, the lure of steady employment drew African Americans more often to larger cities than to small towns, and many of their communities were eventually incorporated into the cities near which they were originally sited.<sup>89</sup> One exception to this rule was a group of African Americans who had originally planned to go to Nicodemus but settled in Summit Township instead in 1879. This community was located about ten miles southwest of Salina, Kansas, near the Swedish-settled town of Falun. Summit and Falun later merged, but the town of Falun was abandoned by 1942.<sup>90</sup> Between 1878 and 1881, African Americans established a number of other agricultural colonies not associated with major population centers, along with two agricultural colonies near Kansas City and Topeka.<sup>91</sup> In 2006, the Center for African American Genealogical Research, Inc. presented results of a survey that identified a total of twenty-one black colonies that were established in Kansas between approximately 1877 and 1881.<sup>92</sup> Nicodemus was the only one of them that survived as an active community.

Beyond Kansas, all-black settlements or colonies appeared in numerous other western states, although there was a wide variance in the number of black towns in each state. In Nebraska, for instance, African Americans established few communities, and none of significance until 1885. Few blacks homesteaded in Nebraska, instead tending to settle in towns like Lincoln, where one-third of the black population in 1880 were barbers, carpenters, or cooks.<sup>93</sup> South of Kansas in Oklahoma, however, twenty-nine black towns sprung up, all but one between 1889 and 1907. As described in Chapter Two, Oklahoma was one the first western states with a sizable population of free blacks, many of whom had become members of the Five Civilized Tribes after release from bondage. Oklahoma became another popular destination for African Americans, particularly after the Exodus and during the 1889 land rush. Settled in the early 1890s, Douglas City, Oklahoma, was an example of a planned African American town in that state. The founders of Douglas City chose the town's location based on the proposed Midlands Railroad, but when the railroad's route changed, the town's success waned.<sup>94</sup>

Langston, Oklahoma, was another noted African American town, founded by a white real estate speculator in 1890, and promoted by two African Americans, William L. Eagleson and Edward P. McCabe. McCabe had been secretary of the Nicodemus Town Company, served as state auditor of Kansas from 1882 to 1886, and then "developed a plan to take advantage of the opening of Oklahoma to create an all-black state."<sup>95</sup> Eagleson and McCabe promoted Langston,

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<sup>89</sup> Turner, *America's Black Towns and Settlements*, 82-85.

<sup>90</sup> Turner, *America's Black Towns and Settlements*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Anne P. Hawkins, "Hoing Their Own Row: Black Agriculture and the Agrarian Ideal in Kansas, 1880-1920," *Kansas History* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 204. See also Savage, *Blacks in the West*, 101.

<sup>92</sup> AfriGeneas, "AfriGeneas Press Release," August 21, 2006, electronic document, [http://www.afrigeneas.com/press/2006\\_08\\_21.html](http://www.afrigeneas.com/press/2006_08_21.html). The Center for African American Genealogical Research, Inc. list of black colonies established in Kansas just before or during the Exoduster movement: The Bottoms, Burlington, Chautauqua, David City Colony, Dunlap Colony, Groove's Center, Hodgeman City Colony, Little Caney, Morton City, Mud Town, Nicodemus, Redmonsville, Richie's Addition, Scuffletown, Sedan, Singleton's Colony, Summit Township, Tennesseetown, Votaw Juniper Town, Wabusee Colony, and Wayside.

<sup>93</sup> Turner, *America's Black Towns and Settlements*, 107-10.

<sup>94</sup> Turner, *America's Black Towns and Settlements*, 133.

<sup>95</sup> Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge*, 254.

incorrectly, as “the only distinctively Negro City in America.”<sup>96</sup> White men similarly founded Boley, Oklahoma, relying on a black man, Tom Haynes, to promote the town after its founding in 1904. Boley differed from other railroad towns in Kansas and Oklahoma in that the founders waited until they were certain of the route of the Fort Smith and Western Railroad before establishing the town. Although the founders did not originally plan Boley as an African American town, the already established towns of Paden and Castle (also on the railway) attracted most of the white settlers who came to the area. According to Hamilton, “Attracting black buyers for lots, the townsite company reasoned, could be the quickest way to populate the town and the surest road to substantial profit from land speculation.” This community grew quickly to become the largest African American town in the Great Plains region during the early twentieth century.<sup>97</sup>

Much farther west, in 1908, African Americans led by Allen Allensworth founded the California town that bore his name. A stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad, Allensworth was an important shipping point through which Allensworth’s settlers could market produce and livestock in surrounding communities. The town flourished only for a brief time, declining after the death of its founder in 1914 and possible sabotage by nearby white farmers. The historic townsite of Allensworth is presently a California State Historic Park. While the town itself still persists, it is no longer exclusively African American.<sup>98</sup>

Many other western states also became the homes of African Americans who settled in all-black communities. There were nearly forty African American communities in Texas founded after the Civil War. New Mexico, the Dakotas, and Colorado all also had African American towns that were founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>99</sup> Norman L. Crockett gives the number of all-black towns founded between 1865 and 1915 as at least sixty, which appears to be a significant underestimate, since a total of at least sixty-eight black towns emerged in just three states—Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas—during this period.<sup>100</sup> Of these communities, Nicodemus was one of the earliest and most publicized, perhaps leading the *Atchison Weekly Champion* to note in 1881, “The Nicodemus question was a vital one. If Nicodemus succeeded, it settled the Southern question. If Nicodemus failed, it would darken the whole future of the colored race in this country.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Quoted in M. Jeff Hardwick, “Homesteads and Bungalows: African-American Architecture in Langston, Oklahoma,” in *Shaping Communities: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture VI*, ed. Carter L. Hudgins and Elizabeth Collins Cromley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 21. See also “M’Cabe’s Colony,” *Topeka Capital*, March 22, 1891, in *Negro Clipping*, Volume 6, Negro Immigration Selected Materials, 1878-1885, Resource Files, NNHS; and Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, chapter 3.

<sup>97</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 122-23, see also chapter 4 of this study.

<sup>98</sup> Turner, *America’s Black Towns and Settlements*, 27-30; Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, chap. 5; Shirley Streshinsky, “The Dream Dies Hard for a Black Utopia,” *Preservation* (July/August 1999): 53-59; and “Colonel Allensworth SHP,” electronic document, [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=583](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=583); “Allensworth, CA,” electronic document, <http://www.fredyt123.com/Allensworth.html>; and “Friends of Allensworth | About Allensworth,” electronic document, <http://www.friendsofallensworthsandiego.com/about.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> Katz, *Black West*, 186-87.

<sup>100</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, xii.

<sup>101</sup> “Through Northern Kansas,” *Atchison Weekly Champion*, July 23, 1881, in *Rooks County Clippings*, Volume 1, KSHS.

## ***Conclusion***

African Americans began settling Kansas around 1861, with increasing numbers of settlers and more communities developing as time progressed. Subsequent settlers came in waves and mainly hailed from Lexington and Georgetown, Kentucky. The early colonists struggled, and some chose to return home or move elsewhere, but by 1879, Nicodemus's residents were able to end their reliance on charity and sustain themselves through their own labors. While earlier and later African American settlements arose in the west, Nicodemus is unique as the only surviving African American locale settled between the end of the Civil War and the end of the Exoduster movement.



## Chapter 4: Town Settlement and Growth (1877-1888)

### ***Introduction***

During the eleven years after the founding of Nicodemus, the town grew from its humble beginnings. Colonists built or created new Kansas homes, crops, and commerce, while also continuing to honor and celebrate social and cultural values that provided continuity with their former lives in Kentucky and elsewhere in the South. During the colony's first years, Nicodemus settlers had to attend to the basics of survival in a new land, which entailed finding shelter, food, and work. As a result, the first structures in the town were simple affairs constructed from earth and sod, and any crops the settlers managed to grow went toward their own subsistence. After the initial period of economic hardship, Nicodemus began to flourish with bountiful crops and expanded business opportunities in the mid-1880s. Prosperity provided, by 1888, for the construction of several substantial and important buildings of wood or limestone, the opening of new businesses, and the opportunity to renew important traditions that fostered and supported the colonists' long-held religious, educational, and social values.

### ***Early Settlement Architecture***

#### **Dugouts and Sod Houses**

Prior to the westward expansion of the railroads in the late nineteenth century, building materials in the Central Plains were often limited to little more than the earth beneath a homesteader's feet. Timber was sometimes available along creek and river bottoms, but not in quantities sufficient to house the scores of settlers that found their way west. Some homesteaders probably used tents or their wagons for temporary shelter, but the high winds common to the region made such accommodations impractical for any length of time. Possessing little money with which to acquire and transport lumber, most pioneers were left with few alternatives other than utilizing the prairie sod.<sup>1</sup>

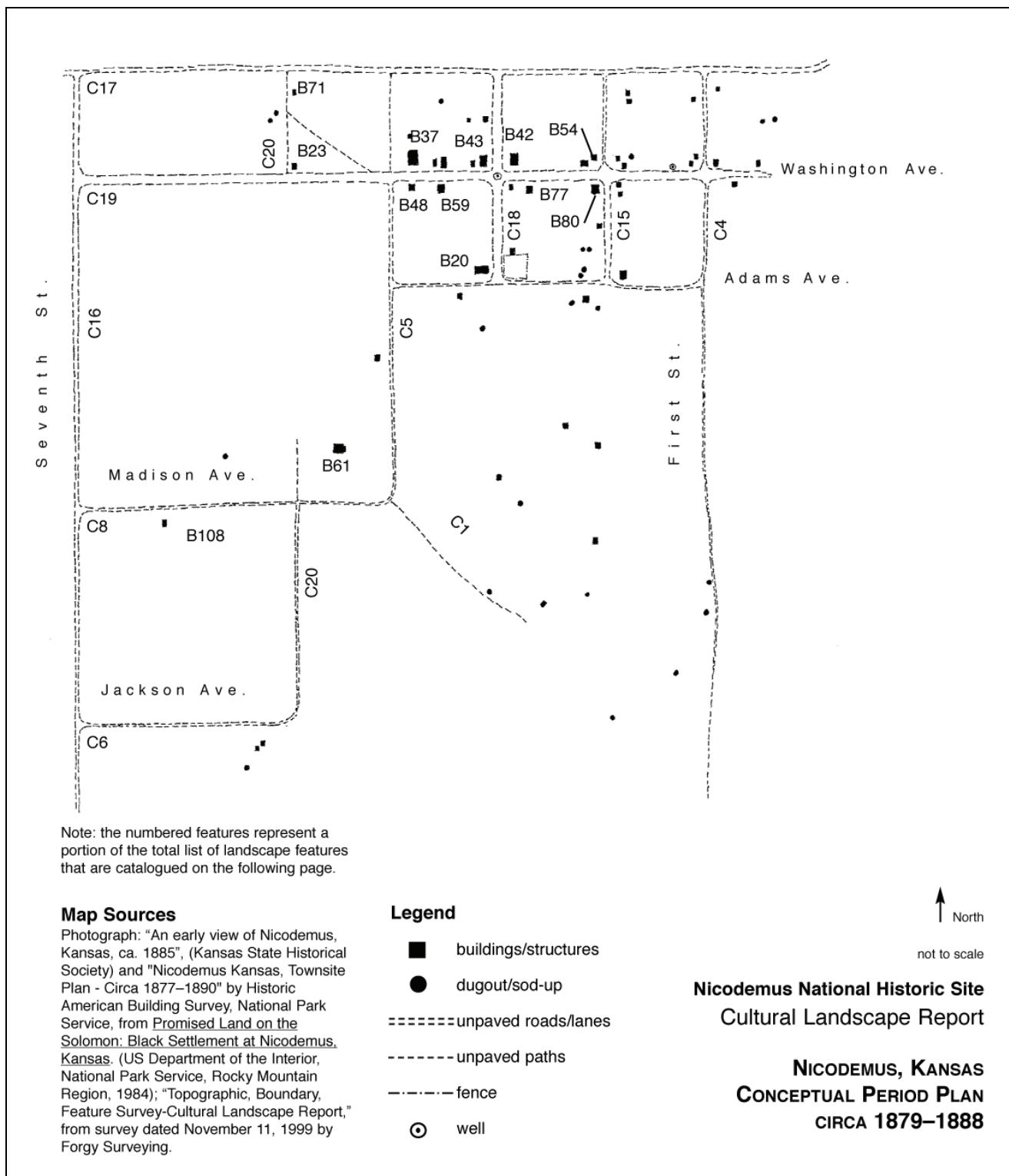
From as early as the 1840s, Euroamerican settlers in the grasslands of central North America built dugouts and sod houses to shelter themselves from the elements. The technique flourished on the treeless plains of Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and eastern Colorado.<sup>2</sup> Dugouts measured as small as about fourteen by fifteen feet and were excavated into a hillside, embankment, or straight into the earth to a depth of about six feet. Utilizing whatever timber they could find along creeks and rivers, the builder would first lay a ridgepole across the top of the dugout hole lengthwise, then add willow saplings, straw, or reeds over the ridgepole. A layer of dirt or sod was then laid atop these materials. Steps dug into the ground provided access to the dugout, whose floor often consisted of nothing more than packed earth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen G. Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone, Volume 1: Houses* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone*, 71.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon: Black Settlement at Nicodemus, Kansas* (n.p.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 1983), 37-38.



**Figure 19. Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1879-1888.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003), an adaptation of the Historic American Building Survey map. See Table 1 for a key to the features identified on this plan.

**Table 1.** Features identified on Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1879–1888.

Feature No.	Feature Name
B20	A.M.E. Church
B23	Barn
B37	First Baptist Church
B42	General Store
B43	General Store
B48	Joint Stock Store
B54	Masonic Hall
B59	Merchandise store
B61	Nicodemus District No. 1 School
B71	Residence
B77	St. Francis Hotel
B80	Store
B108	Residence (Lacey)
C1	Trails
C4	First Street
C6	Jackson Avenue
C8	Madison Avenue
C15	Second Street
C16	Seventh Street
C17	South Street
C18	Third Street
C19	Washington Avenue
C20	Fifth Street

Built low to the ground, dugouts stood up well against high winds. They also remained relatively cool in summer and warm in winter. However, they were cramped and lacked few if any windows, leaving them dark and poorly ventilated. The earth-covered roofs typically leaked for days after a rain, making the interior damp and dirty, if not entirely muddy. Inevitably, insects, rodents, and snakes found their way in through the roof or the earthen side walls.<sup>4</sup> Far from ideal, such accommodations were generally considered temporary. Some dugouts, however, remained in use well into the twentieth century. Over time, homesteaders added on to these dwellings, building kitchen extensions and extra bedrooms. For example, the Thomas and Zerena Johnson dugout, located north of Nicodemus, housed the Johnsons and their descendants until the spring of 1920. Archeological evidence indicates that the Johnson dugout included a limestone foundation, frame kitchen addition, and crushed magnesia limestone-plastered walls.<sup>5</sup>

Often, settlers built hybrid versions of the dugout, using bricks of sod to erect walls above grade level. If built into the side of an embankment or hill, the structures might include only one or two walls to complete an enclosure around the excavation. On the flat terrain that

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Sherda Williams, “Excavation of an Early Dugout Homestead at Nicodemus, Kansas,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 85.

characterizes the Nicodemus townsite, dugouts typically featured four sod brick walls that extended three or four feet above a shallow hole dug straight down into the ground. These half dugout-half sod houses sometimes included a few small windows at ground level, allowing much-needed natural light to penetrate the interior. But like all dugouts and sod houses, they remained damp and prone to insect, rodent, and snake infestation.<sup>6</sup>

True sod houses or “soddies,” as they were commonly known, were built largely above grade. These simple folk buildings relied on the tough, fibrous root networks within prairie sod to hold the earthen bricks together. Removed from the ground with a special plow, strips of sod were fashioned into bricks to make load-bearing walls and roof coverings. Lula Craig, a resident and historian of Nicodemus, described the process: “To build, the sod is sliced two to four inches thick and twelve to fourteen inches wide with a breaking plow. It is then cut into blocks two feet long and used as brick to build a wall. The wall is more substantial if mud mortar is used between the layers, but it may be built without mortar.”<sup>7</sup> Constructed with a double wall of sod bricks, these homes had substantial, insulated walls that kept interior temperatures stable throughout the year.<sup>8</sup> But like dugouts, sod houses were prone to leakage and pest infiltration. Over time, however, homesteaders often improved upon their soddies, building frame additions, adding windows, and installing shingle-covered, wood-frame roofs. Field investigations conducted for the 1963 Historic American Building Survey (HABS) of Nicodemus identified the former sites of roughly twenty-eight dugouts or sod houses constructed between 1877 and 1890.<sup>9</sup> Nearly all of the sod houses have long since disappeared, but a few of the improved buildings, with watertight shingle-covered roofs, remain in use in other communities today.<sup>10</sup>

In Nicodemus, the first settlers had few tools or draft animals with which to make sod bricks. Lacking specialized sod plows, they laboriously cut sod strips from the earth using spade shovels. For the roof, they used “a frame work of poles covered with a layer of willows, sunflowers, or stalks; over those was placed a layer of sod, and last magnesium lime was spread on the top.... The roof often leaked adding to the annoyance and inconvenience of the housewife, who would carry out the clothing and the bedding to dry after a heavy rain.”<sup>11</sup> After a few years, some residents whitewashed the exterior sod walls with crushed magnesia limestone. The whitewash provided a water resistant coating to an otherwise water absorbent building material. When finances permitted, homesteaders installed wood plank floors and replaced sod roofs with wood framing and tarpaper.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Dugout Homes Sod Built,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

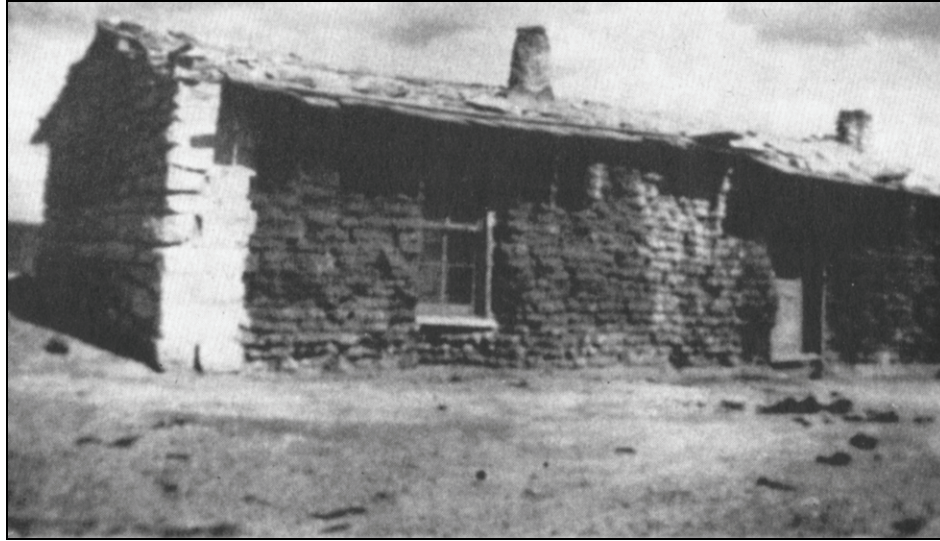
<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Historic American Building Survey (HABS), “Nicodemus Townsite Plan – 1877-1890,” HABS KS-49, Sheet 2 of 3, in *Promised Land on the Solomon: Black Settlement at Nicodemus, Kansas*, vii.

<sup>10</sup> McAlester and McAlester, *Field Guide to American Houses*, 86.

<sup>11</sup> Craig, “Dugout Homes Sod Built.”

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 38.



**Figure 20. Photograph of the Tuss-Lacey house incorporating sod and limestone construction, date unknown. From the private collection of Ernestine Van Duvall.**

Over time, many of the dugouts and sod houses in Nicodemus were replaced with stone or wood frame structures, while some were abandoned. Often, the succeeding buildings were built atop the foundation of the original dwelling. The evolution of settlers' houses, therefore, sometimes transitioned from dugout to sod house then to stone or frame construction, all on the same location. There are, however, numerous dugout or sod house foundations around Nicodemus that have no buildings on top of them.<sup>13</sup> These foundations have been filled with refuse and earth over time, leaving little more than subtle indentations upon the landscape.

In 2006, Margaret Wood and archeology students from Washburn University conducted an archeological investigation into one such site. They located the remnants of the Johnson-Williams dugout, which was constructed around 1877 and used by members of these allied families—some of Nicodemus's earliest residents—until 1920. Thomas and Zerena Johnson, their daughter Emma, her husband Charles Williams, and Henry Williams, the son of Charles and Emma, all lived on this homestead and likely used the dugout as a residence.<sup>14</sup>

The archeologists identified the location of the dugout by looking at the signs that such a construction left on the landscape—"as the roof decayed on what turned out to be the dugout cellar, the structure collapsed into a bowl-shaped depression."<sup>15</sup> The house portion of the dugout measured about forty by thirty-three feet, and was dug partially into the side of a hill. It had remnants of a partial limestone foundation, some sod walls, and the addition of a frame kitchen.

<sup>13</sup> National Park Service, *Nicodemus Historic District*, Historic American Building Survey (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1983), HABS KS-49, sheet 2 of 5.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, "Excavation of an Early Dugout Homestead," 85. See also Margaret Wood, "'Wake Nicodemus': African American Settlement on the Plains of Kansas," electronic document, <http://www.nps.gov/archeology/sites/npsites/nicodemus.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, "Excavation of an Early Dugout Homestead," 84.

The cellar, which was a space approximately nineteen and a half by twenty-three feet and five feet deep, had built in shelving for storage of preserved food.<sup>16</sup>

## Limestone Construction

Having settled in a region rich in limestone, some Nicodemus residents did not long suffer the inconveniences of dugout and sod construction. Located in the sides of bluffs only two miles from the settlement, stone quarries offered an abundance of inexpensive cut stone. Once it was removed and cut, workers hauled the stone to Nicodemus with wagons and sleds. Limestone required more skill and effort to tool, but the material was far more durable and attractive than the earthen walls that initially housed the settlers. Having come from a region with a rich limestone tradition, at least some Nicodemus settlers were likely familiar with such construction. Indeed, their community of origin, Scott County, Kentucky, is centrally located within the Bluegrass Region. Settled largely by Irish immigrants from Ulster, the landscape around Scott County was once laced with hundreds of miles of dry stone fences, made from field, creek, and quarried limestone. Irish stone masons instructed slave and free blacks in the art of limestone masonry.<sup>17</sup> Early Nicodemus settler Jonas Moore, for example, contracted for masonry work, indicating that he might have had previous experience with masonry, perhaps while living in central Kentucky.<sup>18</sup>

The transition from dugout to stone construction began within about two years of the community's founding. Nicodemus residents Reverend S. P. Roundtree and John Anderson are said to have built stone houses as early as 1877. In 1879, S. G. Wilson built a two-story limestone commercial building at the northwest corner of Third and Washington Streets. The following year, William Green also built a two-story stone commercial building, just across the street from Wilson's building. These buildings would have included timber framing made from lumber that was milled in Stockton, Webster, or Hill City. B. S. White opened a lumber yard in Nicodemus in late 1879, but he apparently carried a very limited stock.<sup>19</sup> Even after lumber became more readily available in the 1880s, local limestone remained a popular building material. Numerous examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century limestone buildings remain standing around Graham County.

## Wood-Frame Construction

Nicodemus never had a well-stocked lumberyard of its own, but by the boom of the mid-1880s, lumber was arriving in regular shipments from Stockton, Webster, and Hill City. Limestone remained the dominant building material for large commercial structures but wood framing became a more practical alternative for smaller commercial enterprises and residential construction.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear what these early wood frame buildings typically looked like, but given the need for immediate construction that characterized Nicodemus during its heyday, they likely resembled buildings in other boomtowns across the West.

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<sup>16</sup> Williams, "Excavation of an Early Dugout Homestead," 85.

<sup>17</sup> Carolyn Murray-Wooley and Karl Raitz, *Rock Fences of the Bluegrass* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 84.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 47.



The few surviving photos of local frame buildings suggest that at least some of these structures were utilitarian. The F. Williams General Merchandise store, built ca. 1885, provides one example of commercial wood-frame construction in Nicodemus. Williams' store consisted of a one-story, rectangular-shaped gable-front building with a false front on the primary façade. The building was a light framed box covered with wood planks. The smaller, gable-front building to the left of Williams' store appears to follow the same basic pattern. Buildings such as these would have been relatively inexpensive to construct and they could be erected quickly, while business remained brisk. Conversely, these structures were just as easy to disassemble and relocate to another site if business failed. Many of the town's residents did in fact move their frame buildings to Bogue and elsewhere after the railroad was constructed along the south bank of the Solomon River.

Typical residential frame structures may have been equally utilitarian, but at least one example displayed a more elaborately design. The Bates homestead reveals the type of lumber available to Nicodemus homesteaders during the 1880s or 1890s. The exterior of the house features a variety of dimensional lumber, as evidenced by the shingles, board-and-batten and clapboard siding, plank porch, and porch columns. The clapboard on the primary façade indicates that these residents did not have to settle for planks or board and batten on the entire house. Clearly, the builder had access to all of the basic wood members necessary to construct a comfortable frame dwelling. They also had access to panes of glass, as evidenced by the three windows located in the façade and side wall. Framed, gable-sided houses such as this one would have been relatively simple to expand as the need arose.



**Figure 21. Photograph of Nicodemus showing the original First Baptist Church and F. Williams General Merchandise, on Washington Street, between Third and Fourth Streets, ca. 1885. Reproduced from Kansas State Historical Society.**



**Figure 22. Bates family homestead, including porch addition (see Figure 18 for an earlier view of this house), date unknown. From the private collection of Irvin and Minerva W. Sayers.**

### ***Other Improvements***

In addition to the structures in Nicodemus, the early settlers also made other improvements to the town. Prior to 1879, settlers had to carry water from the Solomon River, about one mile away. In the fall of 1879, two white men, Sidney Palmer and John Wright, dug a well for the residents in the southeast part of the town. Lula Mae Sadler Craig reported that another well for the community was dug in 1881, but this second well was on a strong flow of water, which destroyed the well structure several times before the residents abandoned its use and filled in the hole. The second well was located west of the Masonic Hall on Washington Street between Second and Third streets.<sup>21</sup> The townsite plan for 1877–1890 shows a well at the intersection of Third and Washington, another to the southeast of that intersection, and a third just east of Second and Washington. These wells are not dated on this plan, and may have been dug later than the wells that Craig mentions.<sup>22</sup>

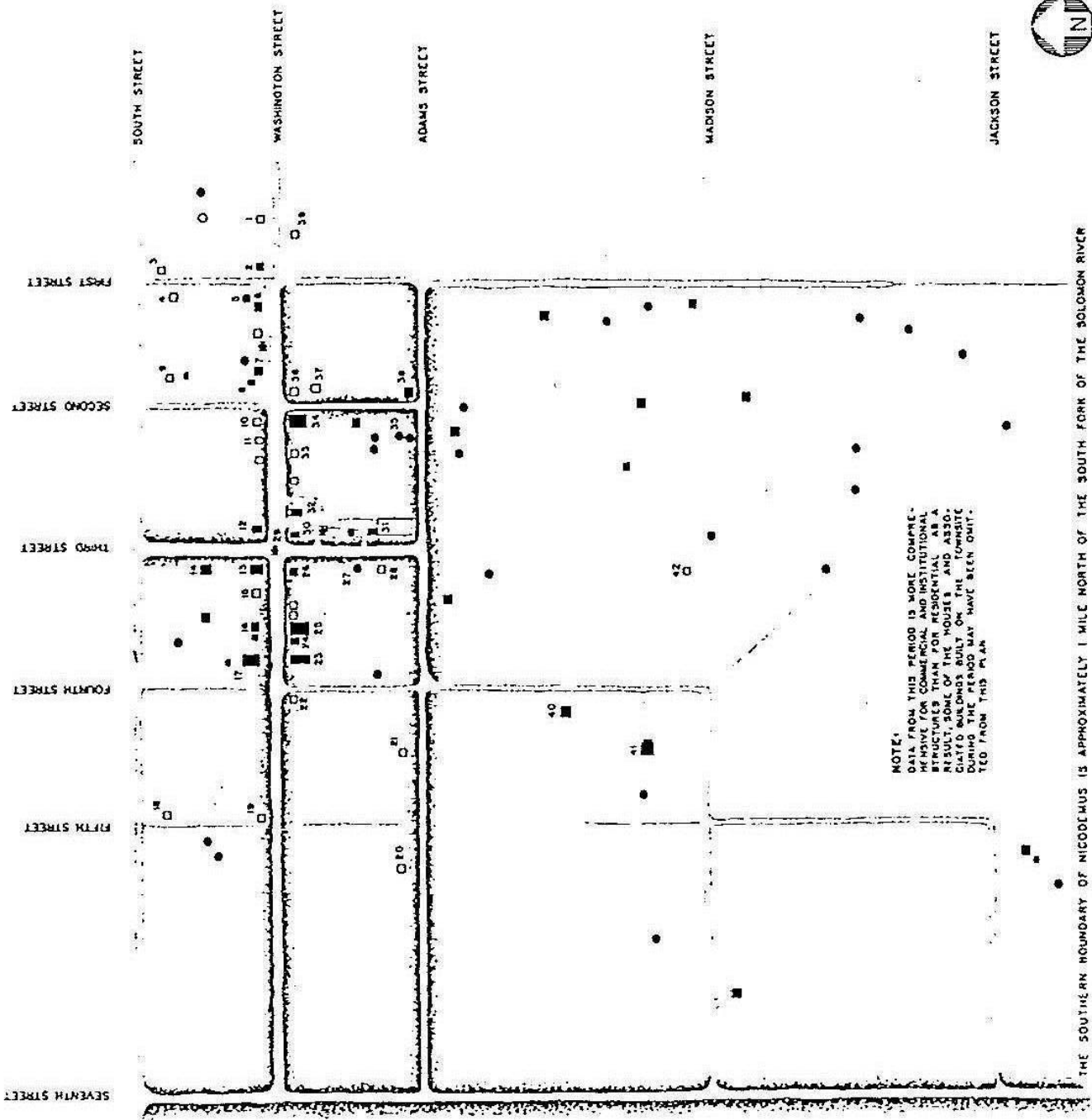
<sup>21</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Autumn 1879 Water,” typescript; and Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Community Well,” typescript, both in Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, vii.



# NICODEMUS, KANSAS

## TOWNSITE PLAN - 1877-1890



REFERENCE NUMBER	HABS PHOTOGRAPH INDEX CODE	FEATURE (EARLIEST CONFIRMED YEAR)	1983 STATUS
1	-	R.T. DUNCAN FURNITURE STORE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
2	-	J.W. REES LIVERY STABLE (1880)	NOT EXISTANT
3	-	C. REES LIVERY STABLE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
4	-	W.H. COTTON HOUSE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
5	-	O. CARPENTER HOUSE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
6	-	J.W. LEWIN FARM IMPLEMENT SHOP (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
7	-	S. BOWMAN & TAYLOR LIVERY STABLE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
8	-	S. OAKLAND & D. WALLANSON FARM MACHINERY CONTINENTAL INSURANCE COMPANY BLDG. OFFICE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
9	-	H. HAWKINS BARBER SHOP IN OAKLAND'S HARDWARE STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
10	-	J. RILEY HOUSE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
11	-	A. N. HAMPER HOUSE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
12	-	MASONIC LODGE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
13	-	H. HAWKINS "BLUE FRONT" RESTAURANT (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
14	-	W. GREEN DRY GOODS STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
15	-	C.H. NEWTH CITY DRUG STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
16	-	S.O. WILSON GROCERIES & GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORE (1879)	NOT EXISTANT
17	-	H.S. HENRIE GENERAL MERCHANDISE (1888); (RELOCATED ADHOC STREET LATER IN THE YEAR)	NOT EXISTANT
18	-	C.H. NEWTH HOUSE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
19	-	MRS. W.A. WARREN MILLINERY STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
20	-	WHS. W.T. FLETCHER MILLINERY STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
21	-	W.H. COTTON ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
22	-	F. WALLIS GROCERIES & GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORE & POST OFFICE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
23	-	FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
24	-	C.M. BURKHOLDER HOUSE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
25	-	H.S. HENRIE BARN (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
26	-	B. WOOLFE BLACKSMITH SHOP (1878)	NOT EXISTANT
27	-	B.P. MORELAND HARNESSEMAKER & SHOE REPAIR SHOP (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
28	-	J.C. LAWERY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
29	-	D. WALLANSON FARMERS JOINT STOCK COMPANY STORE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
30	-	DRAG & TURNER DRUG STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
31	-	SOVERNS & HAYS DRUG STORE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
32	-	S.E. HAYS "PEOPLES" DRUG STORE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
33	-	J.E. PORTER "PALACE" DRUG STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
34	-	R.M. BURNSIDE "PALACE" DRUG STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
35	-	H.S. HENRIE GENERAL MERCHANDISE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
36	-	W.R. HALL & C.M. BURKHOLDER GENERAL MERCHANDISE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
37	-	A.T. HALL GENERAL MERCHANDISE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
38	-	J.A. WEAVER GROCERY STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
39	-	YOUNG & CRAVEN GROCERIES, SHOES, & WOODEN WARE STORE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
40	-	CHAVEN & LOVELADY GROCERY STORE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
41	-	S. CHAG BUTCHER SHOP (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
42	-	O.W. JONES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
43	-	LOWERY & LIGHTFOOT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
44	-	"PUBLIC SQUARE" TOWN WELL	NOT EXISTANT
45	-	Z.T. FLETCHER GENERAL MERCHANDISE & POST OFFICE (1877); (BANK DRUG DEPARTMENT/REPLACED 1888)	NOT EXISTANT
46	-	A.L. MCPHERSON BANK OF NICODEMUS (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
47	-	Z.T. FLETCHER LIVERY STABLE AND FARM IMPLEMENT SHOP (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
48	-	Z.T. FLETCHER SAINT FRANCIS HOTEL (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
49	-	J. BROCK & J. LOREO CITY MEAT MARKET (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
50	-	J.B. CROWLEY GROCERIES & GENERAL MERCHANDISE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
51	-	Z.T. FLETCHER DUGOUT (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
52	-	ELIZA SMITH'S GIBSON HOUSE HOTEL (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
53	-	E. SMITH & H.R. CANTON COMMERCIAL HOUSE HOTEL (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
54	-	D. WALLIS & S. CANTON COMMERCIAL HOUSE HOTEL (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
55	-	N.M. MCANLAND'S FISHER HOTEL (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
56	-	ELIZA SMITH LIVERY STABLE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
57	-	A. ROLDS HOTEL (1878)	NOT EXISTANT
58	-	J.C. PARISH HARDWARE STORE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
59	-	J.T. YOUNG GROCERIES & GENERAL MERCHANDISE (1888)	NOT EXISTANT
60	-	S. CHAG HOUSE (1878)	NOT EXISTANT
61	-	DISTRICT NO. 1 SCHOOLHOUSE (1887)	NOT EXISTANT
62	-	FREE METHODIST CHURCH	NOT EXISTANT

**LEGEND:**

- KNOWN BUILDING
- LOCATION
- SHED ATTY
- BAR DRUG LOCATION
- KNOWN WELL
- PATH
- UNIMPROVED ROAD

**SCALE:** 0 175 350 525 feet 1" = 175'

**SOURCES:** NEWSPAPER ARTICLES, PRIMARILY FROM NICODEMUS CITY CLERK, WILLIAM STOLDS, NICODEMUS, ILLINOIS; LAND TRANSFER RECORDS FROM GRADHAM COUNTY CLERK AND RECORDS; ORAL INTERVIEWS WITH NICODEMUS RESIDENTS, 1983

Figure 23. Townsite map showing the location (circles) of roughly twenty-eight dugouts or sod houses constructed in Nicodemus between 1877 and 1890. "Nicodemus Townsite Plan - 1877-1890," Historic American Building Survey, HABS KS-49, Sheet 2 of 3.



## Commerce

As construction progressed in Nicodemus, so too did commercial interests. Nicodemus's newspapers during the period from 1886-1888 are filled with reports of new businesses opening, suggestions for needed businesses, and a general sentiment that Nicodemus was booming during the mid- to late 1880s. Even before this period, some of Nicodemus's businessmen did well enough to stick with their chosen occupations, and whites from outside the community moved to Nicodemus to open businesses.

Beginning around 1882, Nicodemus's settlers established a freight route between Ellis and Nicodemus so that supplies could be brought from Ellis on a regular basis. Prior to the establishment of the route, storekeepers in Nicodemus relied on passing teamsters to bring them goods, but this occurred at irregular intervals, so that "often their groceries were exhausted before anyone passed to bring them more."<sup>1</sup> Men with teams of oxen or mules would regularly make the two-day journey between Ellis and Nicodemus. Once the Central Branch of the Union Pacific Railroad was completed to Stockton, freight teams could receive goods from the eastern markets by going to Stockton, cutting the distance and time needed to secure goods in half.<sup>2</sup>

Both before and after this freight route began, Nicodemus was home to a number of stores. A man named Kenney, from Stockton, Kansas, moved to Nicodemus in the winter of 1877 and established the first store, stocked with groceries. By the end of the winter, he had very little stock remaining and sold it to Zach T. Fletcher. Kenney then left Nicodemus to help establish the town of Wakeeney, Kansas. The two white men who had built Nicodemus's first well also established a store in 1878. They received their merchandise from Ellis, but the store did not always have a full stock of items: "Once when a trip had been made to bring supplies, one neighbor told the other: 'Well the store has started up again.' When asked what all they had in the store, she replied 'Oh they have got blue soap and meal plenty.'"<sup>3</sup> Other members of both races started and sold their entire stores on a regular basis during Nicodemus's early years. By 1888, the *Nicodemus Cyclone* reported that Nicodemus had "four general merchandise stores, one hardware, . . . [and] one drug store," noting that "there is a decided need for a furniture store, implements, harness shop, shoemaker, hardware, photographer, silversmith, [and] first class physician."<sup>4</sup>

Some businesses other than stores had an early beginning in Nicodemus. William Scott, who arrived in Nicodemus in 1879, started the first blacksmith shop in Nicodemus, enabling the settlers to have repairs made locally, rather than having to take broken items to Ellis. Another blacksmith shop existed from 1884 to 1887, run by a white settler who eventually homesteaded elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> In May 1886, a list of Nicodemus's business identified only one blacksmith shop,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Freighting," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Craig, "Freighting."

<sup>3</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Stores of Nicodemus," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>4</sup> J. E. Porter, "Nicodemus and Her Advantages," *Nicodemus Cyclone*, March 9, 1888.

<sup>5</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "The First Blacksmith Shops," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>6</sup> "Last Friday we visited . . .," *Western Cyclone*, May 13, 1886.

and in June 1886, George Woofter, whose race is not identified, opened a blacksmith shop in Nicodemus as well.<sup>7</sup>

Around 1884, A. L. McPherson first visited Nicodemus, with an eye toward starting a bank at that location. The *Western Cyclone* announced McPherson's bank in late 1886: "We call you [*sic*] attention to the new 'ad' of the Bank of Nicodemus in another column. This is one of the finequiped [*sic*] and most reliable institutions of the kind in northwest Kansas, and is a [*sic*] enterprise that our people can justly feel proud of."<sup>8</sup> The advertisement boasted "Loans Negotiated and Interest Bearing Certificates issued. Deposits received Subject to Check at Sight. Farm Loans and Collections a Specialty."<sup>9</sup> The Bank of Nicodemus remained until 1888, when McPherson learned that the railroad would bypass Nicodemus. He moved his bank to Bogue for a short time before moving to Oklahoma, taking some of the Nicodemus settlers' money with him.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to several small hotels (which were often spare rooms in dugouts or sod houses), Nicodemus was also home to the Gibson House from 1885 to 1889. The Gibson House was a stone hotel with eighteen rooms, run by Eliza Smith, who had moved to Nicodemus from Denver, Colorado. As with many of Nicodemus's other businesses, Smith moved the Gibson House to Bogue when the railroad went to that location, but her hotel failed after the move.<sup>11</sup>

While many of the town's earliest businessmen were African Americans, several white men also established commercial endeavors in Nicodemus. The town's banker and doctor, the latter of whom arrived in 1879, were white. The town's first newspaper, the *Western Cyclone*, had a white editor. Several of these men remained in business in Nicodemus as late as 1886.<sup>12</sup>

## ***Farming and Agriculture***

The majority of Nicodemus's settlers worked at farming rather than other commercial pursuits. After the agricultural disappointments of the first years of the colony, the prospects of farming in Kansas gradually improved. The earliest farmers had little in the way of farming implements, which meant that they had to work with inadequate tools. They found that corn, while labor intensive, could be planted with their limited farming implements and grew well in Nicodemus.<sup>13</sup> The first biennial report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, published in 1878, reported the crops planted in Graham County: "There was estimated to be raised in 1878, 1,200 acres of winter wheat; 200 acres of rye; 2,500 acres of corn; 50 acres of oats; 25 acres of Irish potatoes; 3 acres of sweet potatoes; 10 acres of sorghum; 150 acres of millet and Hungarian, and a large quantity of garden produce. The soil is rather sandy, but very good."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Geo Woofter has started . . .," *Western Cyclone*, June 10, 1886.

<sup>8</sup> *Western Cyclone*, December 23, 1886.

<sup>9</sup> "Bank of Nicodemus," *Western Cyclone*, December 23, 1886.

<sup>10</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Nicodemus Bank," Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>11</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Boles Hotels," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries; and Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Gibson House," Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton, "Origins and Early Promotion of Nicodemus," 240; Schwendemann, "Nicodemus": 28; and U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 42, 47.

<sup>13</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Farming," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>14</sup> "Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, Graham County, 1878," electronic document, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1878/graham.shtml>.



Although these crops were planted throughout the entire county, it is likely that Nicodemus's farms were a part of these estimates.



**Figure 24. Photograph, wagon loaded with corn. Reproduced from Kansas State Historical Society.**

Rev. S. P. Roundtree was the first of Nicodemus's settlers to grow wheat. Craig reports that Roundtree planted the wheat in 1878 and had a crop to harvest by spring 1879.<sup>15</sup> Jerry Scruggs, who had lived in Ellsworth, Kansas, where he worked as a stone mason, moved to Nicodemus and successfully grew wheat, corn, and other unnamed crops, harvesting 400 bushels of wheat in 1884.<sup>16</sup> By 1886, some of Nicodemus's wheat fields were producing twenty to thirty bushels per acre, while corn outputs were as high as fifty to eighty bushels per acre. The corn harvest for the following year was lower, at forty bushels to the acre, and the wheat harvest was not reported.<sup>17</sup> These two crops, however, provided subsistence and some income for the farmers of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus's farmers also sought a cash crop, but attempts to grow traditional southern cash crops in Kansas were generally unsuccessful. Tobacco, which grew well in Kentucky and Tennessee, could only grow in "low, damp, sheltered nooks. The [Kansas] air was too dry, and too, the harsh wind shredded the leaves."<sup>18</sup> Cotton grew better than tobacco, but processing the cotton proved impossible without the appropriate machinery. Ultimately, wheat, corn, and sorghum were the most useful and profitable crops for Nicodemus's farmers.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the variability of crop harvests and the seasonal nature of farm work, Nicodemus men sometimes left the town or their homesteads for days or weeks at a time to seek work in outlying areas, in order to supplement their family's income. A number found work with the railroads in the Kansas towns of Bunker Hill, Ellsworth, Ellis, Salina, and nearby Stockton. Some traveled as far as eastern Colorado in search of additional work and a means to support their families.<sup>20</sup> In many of these cases the Nicodemus workers were burdened with the problem of racially discriminatory "Sundown laws" that forced them to find makeshift, and not always adequate, shelter outside of the towns where they had found temporary employment.

## ***The Fight for the County Seat***

During the period when Nicodemus was experiencing rapid growth, some in the town believed that Nicodemus would be an ideal candidate for the seat of Graham County. Even before Graham County was formally organized in 1880, Nicodemus resident Abram T. Hall, Jr., began considering the possibilities of Nicodemus as the county seat. Governor John P. St. John appointed Hall to conduct a census of what would become Graham County during the winter of 1879–1880, to ensure that there were enough inhabitants of the proposed county for organization.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "First Wheat," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>16</sup> "Gleanings from 1884 Graham County Kansas Newspapers," electronic document, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/graham/glean84.html>.

<sup>17</sup> "We hear of wheat fields . . .," *Western Cyclone*, August 19, 1886; and "The northern portion of . . .," *Nicodemus Enterprise*, August 24, 1887.

<sup>18</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Seeking a Money Crop," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>19</sup> Craig, "Seeking a Money Crop."

<sup>20</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 42.

<sup>21</sup> Charlotte Hinger, "'The Colored People Hold the Key': Abram Thompson Hall, Jr.'s Campaign to Organize Graham County," *Kansas History* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 43. See also A. T. Hall, "Organizational Census," 1879–1880, Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, KS.

Most communities desired to be selected as the county seat and worked tirelessly to promote their towns as the best choice. In the days prior to organization, the only way to receive consideration for this honor was to appeal to the governor. Governor St. John received petitions from many towns, and some signatures appeared on petitions for more than one town. Some of the signatories, particularly Hall and Edward P. McCabe, of Nicodemus, claimed fraudulent activities of others were to blame for their multiple signatures.<sup>22</sup>

On April 1, 1880, when St. John proclaimed the organization of Graham County, he named Millbrook as the temporary county seat. The county held a vote two months later to determine the permanent county seat, but none of the towns received a majority of the votes cast. Nicodemus was among the locales in the election, but it received the lowest number of votes at fifty-two. For the time, Millbrook remained the county seat. An election a year later narrowed the top choices to Millbrook or Gettysburg, and a run-off election solidified Millbrook as the permanent county seat in 1881.<sup>23</sup>

The issue arose again in 1886, when W. R. Hill began campaigning to have the county seat moved to Hill City. At that point, Nicodemus reentered the picture as a candidate for the county seat. According to historian Norman Crockett, “Leaders in Nicodemus hoped that the two leading contenders, Hill City and Millbrook, would reach a stalemate and turn to their town as a compromise, thus avoiding a divisive and costly campaign.”<sup>24</sup> Local newspapers played a significant role in this second county seat struggle. The *Western Cyclone* appeared as Nicodemus’s first newspaper in May 1886, under the editorship of Arthur G. Tallman.<sup>25</sup> While Tallman was not engaged in the county seat debate, by July 1886, Hugh K. Lightfoot had taken over as editor, and he was a strong proponent of Nicodemus as a compromise solution to this conflict. In May 1887, Hill purchased the *Western Cyclone*, which then began to support Hill City in the county seat contest.<sup>26</sup> In August 1887, Lightfoot, from whom Hill had purchased the *Western Cyclone*, launched the *Nicodemus Enterprise* as a second newspaper in Nicodemus.<sup>27</sup> The *Nicodemus Enterprise* opposed Hill City for county seat, indirectly assisting Millbrook in the contest. Ultimately, Nicodemus’s citizens realized that they could not win this contest and threw their support behind Hill City, which won the 1888 county seat election by a substantial majority.<sup>28</sup> By early 1888, the newspaper conflicts had also subsided, and the *Western Cyclone* and *Nicodemus Enterprise* became the *Nicodemus Cyclone*, under direction of M. C. Inlow and J. E. Porter.<sup>29</sup>

## **The Nicodemus Post Office**

Nicodemus’s post office opened in 1877, under the care of Postmaster Zach T. Fletcher. Fletcher initially located the post office in his dugout but later made a second dugout for the post

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<sup>22</sup> Hinger, “The Colored People Hold the Key,” 44-46.

<sup>23</sup> Hinger, “The Colored People Hold the Key,” 46.

<sup>24</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, 87. See also *Western Cyclone*, July 29, 1886.

<sup>25</sup> “Salutatory,” *Western Cyclone*, May 13, 1886.

<sup>26</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, 87; “Valedictory,” *Western Cyclone*, May 12, 1887; and “Salutatory,” *Western Cyclone*, May 19, 1887.

<sup>27</sup> “Salutatory,” *Nicodemus Enterprise*, August 17, 1887.

<sup>28</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, 88-91. See also “Election Returns,” *Nicodemus Cyclone*, March 9, 1888.

<sup>29</sup> “Salutatory,” *Western Cyclone*, November 25, 1887; and “Porter and Inlow have purchased . . .,” *Nicodemus Cyclone*, January 13, 1888.



office. Although the amount of mail going to and from Nicodemus was at first very small, twice weekly mail service from Ellis to Nicodemus had been established by 1881 and daily mail service from Millbrook to Stockton (including Nicodemus) by 1883. The post office was moved to a frame building in 1886.<sup>30</sup>

## **Education**

Before Emancipation, educational opportunities for African Americans were virtually nonexistent in the Southern states and severely limited elsewhere. After Emancipation, opportunities still varied widely by location, though there was overall improvement. Most the original Nicodemus colonists would have had only informal or minimal schooling, if they had any at all, since Kentucky did not open its first public schools for black students until 1875. Prior to that, former slaves who had some level of education “struggled almost alone to educate their children.”<sup>31</sup> Although the Freedmen’s Bureau took up the task of educating southern blacks during Reconstruction, the bureau did not install a superintendent for Kentucky schools until the end of 1866. Soon afterwards, the federal government sought to close down all of the state’s Freedmen’s Bureau functions. In Kentucky, according to Lucas, “the bureau arrived late and exited early, never meeting actual educational needs.”<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, black churches in Kentucky continued to provide basic educational opportunities for adults and children during Reconstruction, just as they had done in the years leading up to the war. As a result, “thousands” of African Americans in Kentucky “received a rudimentary education, though they were not always literate, in the Sunday schools of mixed or all-black churches.”<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to the absence of government-supported education for blacks in Kentucky, the Kansas territorial legislature passed a law allowing black children to attend schools in 1858, just three years after it established its first public school law for the education of white children. The state legislature passed a compulsory education law in 1872, which required children between the ages of six and sixteen to attend school for at least twelve weeks out of the year. Although this law was not strictly enforced, “it encouraged the building of rural schools and also caused better attendance of Negro children in school.”<sup>34</sup>

In the early days of Nicodemus, those children who received an education were taught in small groups but were not enrolled in a formal school program. Jenny Fletcher was the first teacher in Nicodemus, though her fulfillment of this role was prior to the organization of a school.<sup>35</sup> The settlers of Nicodemus organized a school for the town in July 1879. At this point, the school met in the home of John W. Niles, and the teacher was Lizzie Miles, a sixteen-year-old girl who had received a common school education in Kentucky before her family moved to

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<sup>30</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Early Mail Service in Demus,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>31</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 254, 255-56.

<sup>32</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 232.

<sup>33</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Nicodemus School Students,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>35</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 26.

Nicodemus. She completed a teacher's certificate after one year of teaching and left the profession after two years, when she married Niles and they moved away from Nicodemus.<sup>36</sup>

By 1886, Nettie Craig was serving as teacher of Nicodemus's students, and the school term had been extended to ten months out of the year.<sup>37</sup> In December 1886, Nicodemus residents met to discuss the need for a dedicated school building. The local paper lamented: "Here we are the oldest school district in Graham county and we have no building that we can point to as a school house."<sup>38</sup> In June 1887, the inhabitants of Nicodemus voted in favor of bonds for the new school house,<sup>39</sup> and in July, the school board issued a request for sealed proposals: "Bids will be received for the building of a school house 36x10 [?], 22 feet high two stories high with belfry."<sup>40</sup> By August, the school board had considered the bids and selected R. G. Walker for the job.<sup>41</sup> At that point, the *Western Cyclone* reported "an enrollment of 75 and an average attendanc[e] of 45."<sup>42</sup> After the school building was complete, the Nicodemus school board employed two teachers for a nine-month school term.<sup>43</sup> Children that lived on farmsteads farther distant from town attended two other schools in the Nicodemus Township: the Fairview School that was two miles north of Nicodemus, and the Mount Olive School, which was four miles west of town.<sup>44</sup>

## **Social and Cultural Life**

When the original Nicodemus colonists prepared to travel from Kentucky to Kansas in the late 1870s, the length and difficulty of the journey meant they had to leave behind many material possessions. But they carried the most significant elements of their former lives—family, religious faith, and cultural practices—to their new home in Kansas. Each of these provided essential support and meaning during the struggles of the colony's first few years and subsequently became the foundations of Nicodemus society.

Although the practices of chattel slavery often fractured black families, as spouses or children were sold to new owners in distant locations, most African Americans slaves went to great, sometimes heroic lengths, to maintain family bonds. Those families that were able to stay on the same property for lengthy periods developed tight-knit relationships that helped sustain them amid the harsh circumstances of slavery. One of their greatest fears was the possibility of losing family members through sale or hiring out to another owner. Marion Lucas explains that in spite of these difficulties and fears, "the slave family was probably the strongest institution among bondsmen, demonstrating a remarkable resilience throughout the antebellum period."<sup>45</sup> Even when slave sales produced large geographic dislocations, family ties remained strong.

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<sup>36</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Nicodemus School Organized July 1879," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>37</sup> "Arrangements are being made . . .," *Western Cyclone*, December 2, 1886.

<sup>38</sup> "A call has been issued . . .," *Western Cyclone*, December 16, 1886.

<sup>39</sup> "As we predicted . . .," *Western Cyclone*, June 2, 1887.

<sup>40</sup> "Sealed Proposal," *Western Cyclone*, July 29, 1887.

<sup>41</sup> "Contract Let," *Western Cyclone*, August 12, 1887.

<sup>42</sup> "After Five Years," *Western Cyclone*, August 26, 1887.

<sup>43</sup> Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 26.

<sup>44</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 47-48

<sup>45</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 28.

Slaves were known to escape from plantations as far distant as Mississippi in order to return to visit spouses or family left behind in Kentucky.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, slaves who fled to find freedom behind Union lines during the Civil War sometimes risked capture and severe punishment by returning to slaveholding Kentucky to locate family members left behind. After emancipation, southern blacks continued to cherish family connections that they had struggled to foster and maintain throughout their years of bondage. This was true of the colonists who left Kentucky to settle Nicodemus in 1877; there were a total of 130 families among the 300 new colonists that arrived in the first wave.<sup>47</sup> Assuming that the term “family” likely meant more than one person, at least 260 of the 300 colonists had arrived as part of a family unit. Given the likelihood that some families included more than two people, the total number of colonists traveling to Nicodemus as families would have been an even higher percentage of the total number of new arrivals.

In a small prairie community such as Nicodemus, the family home also functioned to meet the diverse sufficiency needs of both the extended family and the larger community. Because many health and social services were not locally available to Nicodemus residents, the family home had to stand in as makeshift local emergency room, birthing center, meeting hall, and funeral home. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, almost all Nicodemus births took place in the family home, with a female relative and/or community midwife attending the mother and newborn.<sup>48</sup> When a family member died, they were laid out in a separate room (if the family had one) of the home until the casket and grave were ready. Longtime Nicodemus resident Ora Switzer described how community members attended to a death in a family in the early decades of the twentieth century, which would have varied little from the earliest decades of the colony:

It used to be a long time ago before they got the undertaker, people would go and offer—like me—I rode out there many times. They’d call so-and-so, “Sister So-and-So died.” I’d go out there and help them and sit around with them, till the undertaker come. And he’d come and do his little embalming. I’ve seen the time when they’d just drive out to their house and . . . do their little bit, and lay him out on the cooling board . . .

The family would just go into another room and be sitting around and crying. You know how they’d be . . . If it was a small house, you know what you had to deal with. But if it was a larger house, why, you’d be in the back room and undertaker in [with] the body. And then they’d lay it on the cooling board, and then the next day you’d go to town and you’d pick out something [the casket] there, and they’d come bring it down and put it in, bring it on to the church or wherever they’re gonna have the funeral. . . . [After the funeral] we’d take food to the home—crawfish . . . and stuff, and

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<sup>46</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 27-28.

<sup>47</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 14.

<sup>48</sup> C. Bates interview, 5-6. Numerous other interviewees also mentioned homebirths.

then people would just sit up with the people, but it was hard on the family. They sat up with them till your funeral was over.<sup>49</sup>

In the words of historian Craig Miner, the isolation, weather extremes, and economic risks of pioneer life on the prairie meant that “all western Kansas settler families experienced unusual stress amid the uncertainty and danger of their situation.”<sup>50</sup> For the early Nicodemus settlers, family, church, and rituals surrounding birth and death helped provide the assurance, comfort, and company in the face of those stresses and dangers.

## Religion

Next to family, religious beliefs and church participation were the most meaningful elements in the lives of former slaves like those who emigrated to Nicodemus. In an article discussing Oklahoma’s African American settlements, George Carney described the church as “a powerful influence within each of the all-black towns,” in part because, “the church represented the one social institution over which blacks had total control.”<sup>51</sup> The importance of the church in the lives of Nicodemus residents harked to their family origins in the antebellum South. Although some slaves were forced to accompany owners to white church services, many slaves also attended all-black churches. Some of the practices and protocols of religious services mirrored those of the white churches; but the separate milieu also gave blacks the “opportunity to formulate their own expression of worship in both song and sermon.”<sup>52</sup> In his *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, Lucas asserts, “Next to the family, churches were the most important institution in black society. . . . black churches became, in addition to a religious sanctuary, the nucleus around which blacks organized their own social, educational, and cultural activities.”<sup>53</sup>

Once the early settlers persevered through the harsh first winter at Nicodemus, they wasted no time to establish places of worship. Colonists established the First Baptist Church, the first church in Nicodemus, in spring 1878. This congregation met in the dugouts of their members for the first year and constructed a sod house in which they held services in 1879. By May 1880, they had erected a limestone building at Fourth and Washington streets.<sup>54</sup> This is likely the building described by Noble Prentiss in an 1881 article in the *Atchison Weekly Champion*: “What promised to be a rather handsome stone church had been commenced, and partially finished.”<sup>55</sup>

The Free Methodist Church organized late in 1878, with a membership of about twenty-five. No information has been found regarding where this congregation met in the early days of Nicodemus, but in February 1881, this group purchased a stone residence to use as their church and as a mission school.<sup>56</sup> This church likely remained small, as there is little mention of its

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<sup>49</sup> Ora Switzer interview with Jennifer Michael, October 3, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 19, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>50</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 160.

<sup>51</sup> Carney, “Oklahoma’s All-Black Towns,” 155

<sup>52</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 145.

<sup>53</sup> Lucas, *History of Blacks in Kentucky*, 145.

<sup>54</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 26; and U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45-46.

<sup>55</sup> N. [Noble Prentiss], “Through Northern Kansas,” *Atchison Weekly Champion*, July 23, 1881, in *Rooks County Clippings*, Volume 1, KSHS.

<sup>56</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 26.

congregation in the sources about Nicodemus, but the congregation was still active in 1886, when they held a three-day-long meeting, inviting members and non-members alike to attend.<sup>57</sup>

The Baptists shared their church building with a third Nicodemus congregation, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. This small congregation had been organized in 1879 and did not hold regular services, but it occasionally used the Baptist church or the home of one of their members for their services. By August 1886, Rev. C. H. Brown, pastor of the A.M.E. Church, was preparing to erect a new building. The *Western Cyclone* noted, “this will give us three church buildings and one public hall in the town, more than any other town in the county can boast of.”<sup>58</sup> In May 1887, Brown raised \$30 after a sermon given at the Baptist church, and a few days later, he, along with several other men, went to Stockton to buy lumber for the church.<sup>59</sup> Later that month, the A.M.E. Church selected R. G. Walker to build the church, and also procured stone for the building’s foundation.<sup>60</sup> The building was completed enough by that July that the A.M.E. congregation could hold their quarterly meeting in their own building, though the building was not noted as completed until March 1888.<sup>61</sup>

Nicodemus churches played important roles throughout the lives of township residents, as they were the stage for many important rites of passage. Ministers of the various congregations presided over baptisms (often performing immersion baptisms in the South Solomon River), weddings, and memorial services, all of which brought the wider community together and strengthened the inter- and intrafamilial bonds that would help keep Nicodemus a vibrant place even after the town’s population and economic viability began to wane. When a community member died, they made their final passage from one of the churches (or sometimes from the family home) to one of three cemeteries outside of the town proper. Nicodemus Cemetery, located roughly one and a half miles to the northeast of town, was the final resting place for the largest number of deceased community members. Mount Olive Cemetery, adjacent to the Mount Olive Baptist Church that no longer exists, was also a common burial place. A smaller number were buried in the Samuels Cemetery, three miles south of Bogue.<sup>62</sup>

Former Nicodemus resident Loretta Buckner, who grew up on a farm just outside of town, described the important place that the Baptist church held in her family’s life, and the role that church services played in Nicodemus social life:

My grandfather Warren [Buckner], I remember he [*sic*] being a member of the First Missionary Baptist Church, and very active in the church, supportive of the church. He sung in the choir and made sure his family was there every Sunday. Weekends was what I remember most about Nicodemus. We would come up for the weekends and play in the streets and go to church. After church

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<sup>57</sup> “There will be a three days meeting . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, June 10, 1886.

<sup>58</sup> “The A.M.E. church organization . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, August 26, 1886.

<sup>59</sup> “Rev. C. H. Brown preached . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, May 5, 1887; and “A. L. McPherson, . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, May 5, 1887.

<sup>60</sup> “R. G. Walker . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, May 26, 1887; and “The stone for the foundation . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, May 26, 1887.

<sup>61</sup> “The A.M.E. Church . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, July 29, 1887; and J. E. Porter, “Nicodemus and Her Advantages,” *Nicodemus Cyclone*, March 9, 1888. See also Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “The A.M.E. Church,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>62</sup> Angela Bates, personal communication with Paul Sadin, March 29, 2011.

there'd be the dinners and the candy at the little old store that used to be there.<sup>63</sup>

Nicodemus First Baptist Church often held two services on Sundays, one in the morning and the other in the early evening. During the afternoon between the two services, the congregation gathered for a large dinner, period of community socializing, and playtime for children.<sup>64</sup> Just as Buckner described, many of the social activities of Nicodemus revolved around the town's churches—hosting festivals and providing the locations for lectures and concerts, in addition to regular services and religious meetings.<sup>65</sup> While some lectures focused on religious themes, others focused on topics such as slavery, while others were held as fundraisers.<sup>66</sup> Nicodemus residents established a lyceum group in 1887, which was organized and met at the Baptist church.<sup>67</sup> Although the first public hall in Nicodemus was built in 1884, it remained a public hall only until 1887.<sup>68</sup> Churches, then, were the only available public meeting spaces for much of this early period of Nicodemus's history.

Not all of the town's social life was linked to religion, however. Lula Craig reported that “there was about the same amount of amusement, and recreation that one would find in the average little western village. There was church and Sunday School for those who were religiously inclined; there were concerts and programs, including a social hour, band music, literary society, and dancing. There was baseball, foot racing, horse racing, and hunting and fishing for the men.”<sup>69</sup> In September 1887, the *Western Cyclone* exclaimed that Nicodemus had been the site of numerous entertainments in the previous week, including meetings, an extensive festival, and a dance went on for hours. The news article added: “What western town can say as much[?]”<sup>70</sup> Also in 1887, Nicodemus's residents formed a band and a baseball team. The latter was named the Western Cyclone Base Ball Club, and the editor of the *Western Cyclone*, Hugh K. Lightfoot, served as general manager and umpire. The list of players does not indicate their races, but historian Claire O'Brien indicates that about half of the players were black.<sup>71</sup>

## **Emancipation Day Celebration**

In addition to irregularly scheduled social events, Nicodemus's residents also celebrated several yearly events. The most important of these was Emancipation Day, held every August since the early years of the colony's founding. Emancipation Day celebrations, touched on briefly in Chapter Two, were rooted in African American Freedom Day events dating to the beginning of the nineteenth century in the northeastern states. Freedom Day celebrations, often held on July 14, melded a commemoration of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in

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<sup>63</sup> J. Buckner and L. Buckner interview, 5.

<sup>64</sup> C. Bates interview, 29.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, *Western Cyclone*, June 10, 1886 and November 18, 1886, which both mention several events at the local churches.

<sup>66</sup> “Lecture!” *Western Cyclone*, September 9, 1887.

<sup>67</sup> “The Nicodemus Lyceum is . . .,” *Nicodemus Enterprise*, October 12, 1887.

<sup>68</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “The First of August,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>69</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Living in Nicodemus,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>70</sup> *Western Cyclone*, September 16, 1887.

<sup>71</sup> “The Nicodemus Cornet Band . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, April 28, 1887; O'Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 122; “The Western Cyclone B.B.C.,” *Western Cyclone*, February 10, 1887; “The following are the names . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, February 24, 1887; and Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Sports,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

1808 with an even earlier tradition of annual July festivals, attended by both free and enslaved blacks.

In Nicodemus, both blacks and whites attended the celebration, and many of the attendees certainly came from nearby towns.<sup>72</sup> One early account of Nicodemus's Emancipation Day celebration reportedly went, "As an emancipation anniversary it meant very little, but for a rip-roaring, campmeeting sort of a celebration it was a howling success for many years, where at times there were, 'rahzers flying in the air.' Colored folk came from as far as Atchison and Topeka to attend these functions."<sup>73</sup> The 1886 Emancipation Day celebration featured as many as 5,000 attendees, who listened to musical performances and several speeches given on the occasion.<sup>74</sup> The activities were typical of Emancipation Day festivities of the time throughout the United States, which had by then evolved into a mixture of joyous celebration, artistic expression, civic display (such as parades), serious commemoration, and in some cases, political activism.

After the 1886 event, Hugh K. Lightfoot editorialized that either September 22, the date that President Abraham Lincoln had issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, or January 1, the date that the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect, "should be set apart as a legal holiday for the colored people."<sup>75</sup> But Emancipation Day in Nicodemus continued to be celebrated on or near the first of August, as was the case in black communities throughout the state.<sup>76</sup> According to Lula Craig, Mayor James L. Abernathy of Leavenworth, Kansas, proposed the August 1st celebration date because January 1st, the date of emancipation of the southern slaves, was too close to Christmas; "besides the weather at that time is not favorable for picnic or parade."<sup>77</sup> The committee of Leavenworth African Americans to whom he suggested this accepted his idea and began celebrating Emancipation Day in August in the 1870s.<sup>78</sup> Kansas African Americans in Lawrence, Topeka, Independence, and Atchison, also celebrated this holiday by the early 1880s and throughout that decade.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the one comment that as a celebration of emancipation, the event "meant very little," recent scholarship on post-Civil War black communities and celebrations suggests that Emancipation Day remained a meaningful event, though disagreements about the meaning had begun to surface in the aftermath of Reconstruction. By the 1880s, African Americans in some parts of the country had begun treating the traditions of Emancipation Day with some degree of suspicion and ambivalence, and in a few places, the tradition was ended altogether. Many blacks sought to discard as many of the vestiges of their time in slavery as possible, including the

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<sup>72</sup> Schwendemann, "Nicodemus," 28.

<sup>73</sup> W. L. Chambers, *Niles of Nicodemus*, [4], Resource Files, NNHS.

<sup>74</sup> "A Big Day," *Western Cyclone*, August 5, 1886.

<sup>75</sup> "On September 22nd, 1863 . . .," *Western Cyclone*, August 12, 1886.

<sup>76</sup> "Come Come Come Come Come Come To," *Western Cyclone*, July 29, 1887. The community of Barton, Kansas, did hold their Emancipation Day celebration on September 22 by 1891. See "Emancipation Day," *The Register* (Great Bend, KS), September 24, 1891, in *Negro Clippings*, Volume 6, Resource Files, NNHS.

<sup>77</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "August 1st Celebration," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>78</sup> Craig, "August 1st Celebration."

<sup>79</sup> Armitage, "Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free," 164; "Emancipation Day," *The Commonwealth* (Topeka), August 4, 1880, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 3-4, KSHS; "Emancipation Day," *Topeka Daily Capital*, August 27, 1886, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 5-6, KSHS; and "The emancipation celebration . . .," *Independence Kansan*, August 10, 1881, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 5-6, KSHS; "The colored people of Kansas . . .," *Atchison Daily Champion*, August 1, 1888, KSHS.



Emancipation Proclamation that announced their freedom from that bondage. According to historian Mitchell Kachun, “the indelible imprint of the slave past could not simply be erased by the fact of emancipation.”<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps to residents of Nicodemus, living in a new land far from the houses and fields where they had been enslaved and relatively free from the post-Reconstruction tyranny of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan, the Emancipation Day events still carried an important meaning. Emancipation Day provided Nicodemus residents an opportunity to connect with their past and celebrate the overcoming of the hardships they had endured during the years of slavery. Particularly during the successes of the 1880s, blacks in Nicodemus could find in the Emancipation Day festivities the chance to rejoice in what historian Kachun calls, “the perseverance and ultimate triumph over slavery . . . [and] progress since emancipation.”<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Emancipation Day events in newly established black communities in the American West, whether in separate colonies or neighborhoods in established towns and cities, provided more than a commemoration of black emancipation in the West Indies or the Confederacy. According to historian Leslie Schwalm, Emancipation Day events in recently settled black communities represented, “a persistent effort to shape and maintain a collective memory and historical consciousness of slavery and its wartime destruction. . . . the observances also point to the meanings and uses of the public sphere in black community life; they reveal expressive culture as both social and political practice.”<sup>82</sup> In their celebration of Emancipation Day, Nicodemus residents were defining the cultural and social landscape of their new world in Kansas.

## **Other Celebrations**

Nicodemus residents also celebrated the Fourth of July on an annual basis. In 1886, for instance, Nicodemus held a Fourth of July celebration that included speakers, a parade, a festival, and a concert. News accounts estimated that as many as 2,000 people attended the celebration that year.<sup>83</sup> The following year, the celebration program included a parade, music (played by the band and featured at a concert at the A.M.E. church), and toasts, along with “Base Ball. Foot races, greased pole, grand balloon ascension, at five o clock[,] fire-works at night, the most sublime ever witnessed.”<sup>84</sup>

Nicodemus celebrated the anniversary of its founding each year on September 17, the date when the first wave of colonists from Kentucky arrived in Nicodemus. Nicodemus residents first celebrated this event just four years after the founding of the town, in 1881.<sup>85</sup> So popular was this event that in 1886, planners for the Grand Army of the Republic reunion of Civil War veterans in Millbrook rescheduled their event, “knowing that a large number of the old soldiers and their friends will be desirous of attending the Nicodemus celebration.”<sup>86</sup> The anniversary

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<sup>80</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 150.

<sup>81</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 149-50.

<sup>82</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 225.

<sup>83</sup> “Celebration July Fifth,” *Western Cyclone*, June 17, 1886; and “The celebration passed off nicely . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, July 8, 1886.

<sup>84</sup> “Program,” *Western Cyclone*, July 1, 1887.

<sup>85</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 28.

<sup>86</sup> “Change of Date,” *Western Cyclone*, September 2, 1886.

festivities included music, speeches, and a dance, and afforded the opportunity for the *Western Cyclone* to reflect on the accomplishment in the first nine years of Nicodemus's existence: "we find to-day a happy industrious thriving class of farmers, frame houses are springing up on every hand taking the place of the most historical sod house and dug out, cities are springing up all around, church towers point heavenward, and the scream of the iron horse is heard in the distance."<sup>87</sup> The celebration of the following year featured similar entertainment, with less florid prose describing the town's successes.<sup>88</sup> Nicodemus residents also celebrated smaller holidays and festivals such as Arbor Day in April 1887. Originated in Nebraska in 1872, Arbor Day was more of a public service occasion; the event primarily involved planting "many a nice tree," which were a much appreciated addition to the windswept prairie landscape.<sup>89</sup>

## ***Natural Disasters and Conditions***

When the new colonists came to settle Nicodemus in 1877 through 1879, they could not know, and their founders could not have foreseen, that they had just arrived in an area of the Great Plains "that has consistently marked the onset of climate related emergencies, from the 1874 grasshopper devastation to the 1880 drought, to the 1930s dust bowl."<sup>90</sup> But it did not take long for them to find the challenges the prairie environment posed for them. Western Kansas was prone to numerous banes of the homesteader, including drought, wind, locust swarms, prairie fires, tornados, hailstorms, dust storms, and other lesser nuisances. Settlers in Nicodemus relied on their families, neighbors, and church communities to help them endure environmental, as well as social and economic burdens of life on the Plains.

Between 1879 and 1882, western Kansas experienced a significant drought along with "countless heavy, hot, dust-laden winds and often tornadoes."<sup>91</sup> For farmers already struggling with growing crops in a new climate, the drought years proved to be an initial barrier to the success of the colony. Even when the drought ended, Nicodemus still faced harsh weather conditions. Considered a good year for most of Kansas, 1883 brought blistering winds to Nicodemus.<sup>92</sup> Drought and wind were not the only climatic issues that farmers faced, as the severe winter of 1885 destroyed about 40 percent of Nicodemus's winter wheat crop.<sup>93</sup>

In April 1887, Graham County suffered two destructive fires in as many weeks. The first fire started about eight miles northwest of Nicodemus, and as the wind was blowing toward Nicodemus, the fire came near enough to threaten the town.<sup>94</sup> The second fire, less than a week later, began five miles west of Nicodemus and did not threaten the community. However, the fire caused extensive destruction to the area it burned, which likely included some of Nicodemus's outlying farms. The *Western Cyclone* reported that each of the two fires alone caused at least \$10,000 worth of loss in Graham County.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "The celebration of the 9th anniversary . . .," *Western Cyclone*, September 23, 1886.

<sup>88</sup> "The celebration Saturday . . .," *Nicodemus Enterprise*, September 21, 1887.

<sup>89</sup> "Arbor day was duly observed . . .," *Western Cyclone*, April 21, 1887.

<sup>90</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 129.

<sup>92</sup> Federal Writers' Project, *Guide to the Sunflower State*, 330; and Robert W. Fenwick, "Nicodemus, the Dream That Withered," *Empire Magazine* (October 17, 1965): 28.

<sup>93</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, 8.

<sup>94</sup> "A Big Prairie Fire," *Western Cyclone*, April 7, 1887.

<sup>95</sup> "A Big Fire," *Western Cyclone*, April 14, 1887.

In August 1887, a particularly intense storm, with wind, hail, and rain, caused substantial damage to the town and surrounding areas of Nicodemus. “All windows facing north were broken . . . . The hail storm did great damage to the farmers as some of their corn crops were completely ruined. We are thankful that it is as well with us as it is; as we have learned other parts of the county were literally blown to pieces.”<sup>96</sup> This storm reduced the town of Millbrook to rubble, and the wind blew down several buildings in Nicodemus, including the Free Methodist Church and the barber shop, and also removed the roof from the St. Francis Hotel.

## **Conclusion**

Between 1877 and 1888, Nicodemus began to look like a town. Settlers constructed several significant buildings, and both commerce and farming became important to the town’s financial well-being. Nicodemus residents concerned themselves with politics, education, and religion but also enjoyed themselves at social events, including their first celebration of Emancipation Day. Through all of these changes, Nicodemus grew as a community, and residents were hopeful for continued prosperity.

Despite several successful years of town growth and bountiful crops in the middle of the decade, the 1880s saw notable African American out-migration from Kansas, as earlier settlers and Exodusters alike looked for more favorable places to live. Many went to other western states, including Nebraska, Colorado, and California, rather than returning to the South or remaining in Kansas.<sup>97</sup> While some settlers certainly left Nicodemus during this time period, disheartened by the continual droughts, winds, crop failures, and other natural disasters that made survival by agriculture a bleak prospect, the town’s significant period of out-migration did not begin until the hopes for a railroad in Nicodemus were completely dashed in 1888.

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<sup>96</sup> “Destruction in the Wind,” *Western Cyclone*, August 12, 1887.

<sup>97</sup> Johnson and Campbell, *Black Migration in America*, 60.



## **Chapter 5: Regional Boom and Bust Cycles and the Growth and Decline of Nicodemus (1886-1929)**

### ***Introduction***

By the mid-1880s, most Nicodemus residents could foresee a promising future for their prairie community. Two years of healthy harvests, business growth, and the installation of new organizations and traditions lent a sense of permanence and optimism to the colony. For some, the best news of all was the anticipation that one or more railroad companies would include Nicodemus as a stop on their rail lines, which would connect the town to broader markets and create much easier transportation links for residents of the entire township. Between 1886 and 1888, the entire town was abuzz with the opportunities that would be available with the arrival of a railroad. When none of the railroads came through Nicodemus, and the Union Pacific Railway instead took a route through the nearby railroad camp of Bogue, the railroad dreams were dashed. Within a year of the “loss” of the expected railroad connections, the population of Nicodemus sharply dropped. However, the disappointing end to the railroad boom does not fully explain why Nicodemus’s population and commercial activity diminished in the years thereafter.

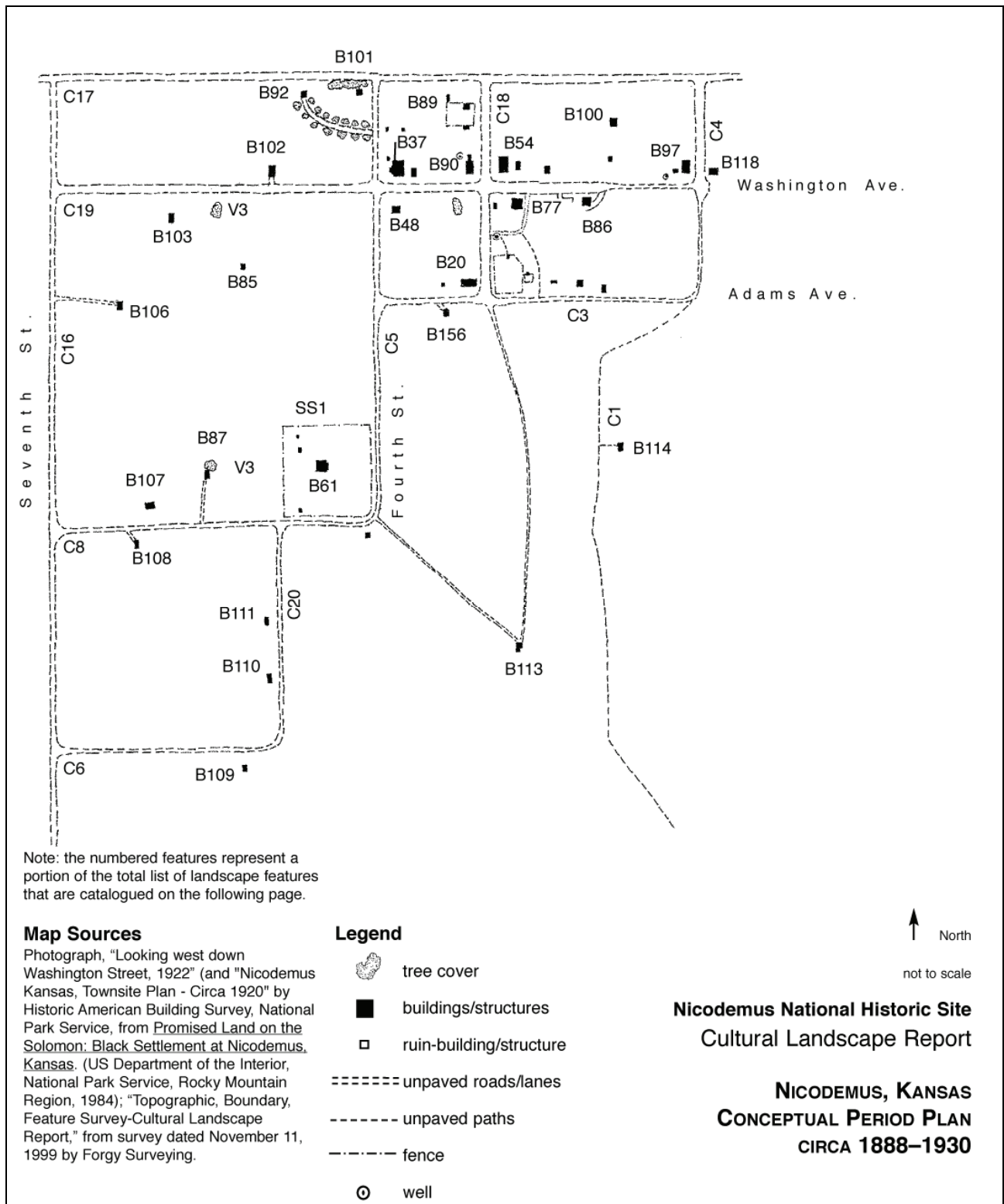
The plentiful rain and good crops that raised expectations for continuing economic growth in the mid-1880s proved to be simply a few “good years,” which were hardly representative of the harsh climatic conditions of the area. When average rainfall years arrived in the late 1880s, followed by a period of severe, persistent drought in the 1890s, Nicodemus residents (and other settlers throughout western Kansas) got a better idea of what they were up against. Not surprisingly, during this renewed period of hardship a number of community members left Nicodemus, many departing Kansas altogether, in hopes of finding better conditions or new livelihoods elsewhere. It is, perhaps, of greater relevance to examine how it was that Nicodemus survived at all, when so many other small towns and homestead settlements on the Great Plains were abandoned or gradually faded away.

### ***The Railroad Boom in Western Kansas and Nicodemus Civic Boosting***

The 1886–1888 period of railroad building, business expansion, and real estate sales in western Kansas was somewhat akin to the 1879–1880 “Kansas Fever” phenomenon that enticed thousands of black Exodusters to leave the South and travel to Kansas. In both cases, once the contagious idea of the golden opportunity took hold in the minds of everyday citizens, it became very difficult for any “victims” of the fever to think otherwise. There were some genuine reasons for the optimism: a boom in railroad construction between 1884 and 1888 more than doubled the total rail mileage in the state, increasing from 4,038 miles to 8,799 miles of track in that four-year span.<sup>1</sup> Kansas led the nation in railroad building and proposed new rail lines during that period. But the railroad fervor in western Kansas, like similar booms that occurred in Nebraska, Colorado, and other western states, was in part a promotional tactic of the railroad companies themselves, created to serve their bottom lines. It was in the railroad companies’ best interests to get every town in Kansas clamoring for a rail line, because the high demand essentially forced towns to compete with each other to gain the benefits of a rail link. Most railroad companies in

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<sup>1</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 190-91.



**Figure 25. Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1888–1930.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003), an adaptation of the Historic American Building Survey map. See Table 2 for a key to the features identified on this plan.

**Table 2:** Features identified on Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1888–1930.

<b>Feature No.</b>	<b>Feature Name</b>
B20	A.M.E. Church
B37	First Baptist Church
B48	Joint stock store
B54	Masonic Hall
B61	Nicodemus District No. 1 School
B77	St. Francis Hotel
B85	Barn
B86	Café
B87	Dugout
B89	Granary and pens
B90	Grocery store
B92	Mercantile store
B97	Recreation hall
B100	Residence (Baxter)
B101	Residence (Williams)
B102	Residence (Scott)
B103	Residence (Stewart/Goins)
B106	Residence (Napue)
B107	Residence (Sayers)
B108	Residence (Lacey)
B109	Residence (Reverend Smith)
B110	Residence (Smith)
B111	Residence (Buckner)
B113	Residence (Vaughn)
B114	Residence (Robinson)
B118	Residence (Riley)
B156	Residence (Lacey)
C1	Trails
C3	Adams Avenue
C4	First Street
C6	Jackson Avenue
C8	Madison Avenue
C15	Second Street
C16	Seventh Street
C17	South Street
C18	Third Street
C19	Washington Avenue
C20	Fifth Street
SS1	Fence
V3	Tree cover at Mathew dugout site



this era required frontier towns to help pay for the railroad expansion, and some requested both money and land.

Towns across the state, including Nicodemus, sought to offer the best possible “packages,” which often included agreements to pay for several miles of track as well as providing land in the town, in order to convince railroad companies to include their town on one of the proposed routes. Local newspapers, whose publishers often owned land in their respective towns and stood to profit when real estate values rose, gave full-throated support to virtually every railroad proposal in their vicinity. But Kansas civic and business leaders could not see, or chose not to believe, that many of the proposed rail lines belonged to companies that existed only on paper, including some that were purely speculative ventures. That did not stop Kansans from buying bonds issued by these “paper railroads,” many of which did not own a single engine or rail car. Outside investments and in-state bond issues eventually created a financial bubble of railroad building and real estate speculation that could not be sustained. The end of the boom came quickly. By 1889, dozens of railroad companies, real estate offices, and banks had gone bankrupt, and investment money stopped flowing into Kansas. In 1890, railroad companies built a mere eighty-five miles of new track, compared to almost 2,000 miles of new track in a twelve-month span in 1886–1887.<sup>2</sup> The sudden downward economic spiral led to plummeting real estate values and the closure of innumerable local businesses. When the bubble burst, many western Kansas towns suffered, including some of the settlements that had managed to obtain a rail line.

Nicodemus residents and business owners were not immune to Kansans’ exuberance about the railroad building boom. In *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865–1890*, historian Craig Miner explains that it was hard for residents of western Kansas, “to imagine that so much promotional rhetoric could come from so little substance or that towns with seven paper railroad prospects would be lucky to see rail from one.”<sup>3</sup> Nicodemus joined other western Kansas communities in the competition for a railway link, as town leadership believed it was the best way to attract more settlers and boost population and business opportunities. From 1886 to 1888, Nicodemus residents worked tirelessly to make their location attractive to various railroad companies. Concurrently, the Nicodemus Land Company and the Nicodemus Emigration Association, both founded in 1887, worked to draw more settlers to the community.<sup>4</sup>

During the fall of 1886, the *Western Cyclone* reported regularly on the Stockton, Hill City, and Western Railway, which was planned to connect Stockton to Hoxie, Kansas, by way of Webster, Nicodemus, and Hill City.<sup>5</sup> In late September, the newspaper reported, “We understand that a proposition will be submitted to this township in about four weeks to vote . . . [on] the construction of the Stockton, Hill City and western railroad [*sic*], this company endoutly [undoubtedly?] means business and are getting ready to make dirt fly by early spring.”<sup>6</sup> In December, the *Western Cyclone* reported that it had received a letter from the Stockton, Hill City, and Western Railway on “very neatly printed” letterhead, which asserted that, “it is our candid opinion that this is the only genuine railroad chartered for Graham county in the past six

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<sup>2</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 190, 218.

<sup>3</sup> Miner, *West of Wichita*, 190.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia L. Turner, “Nicodemus: Colored Colony in Kansas, 1877-1888” (Undergraduate research paper, 1968), 15, KSHS.

<sup>5</sup> “Stockton, Hill City & Western Railway,” *Western Cyclone*, September 9, 1886.

<sup>6</sup> *Western Cyclone*, September 30, 1886.

months.”<sup>7</sup> However, after this point, the Stockton, Hill City, and Western Railway disappeared from the pages of the *Western Cyclone*, replaced by stories about other, better-known railroads.

In December 1886, a representative of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, which had reached Stockton in 1885, contacted Nicodemus’s leadership with a request that the town pay the railway company about \$18,000, which was roughly equivalent to the cost of laying four miles of railroad track. The goal of the Missouri Pacific was to lay track that reached Denver, and Nicodemus was on one of the two proposed routes.<sup>8</sup> In January 1887, Nicodemus sent a committee of seven local businessmen, five white—A. L. McPherson (owner of the Nicodemus Bank), C. H. Newth (Nicodemus’s physician), S. G. Wilson (Graham County treasurer and owner of a general store in Nicodemus), R. E. Lewis (farm equipment store owner), and H. K. Lightfoot (editor of the *Nicodemus Enterprise*)—and two black—T. J. Fletcher and Z. T. Fletcher (owners of the Fletcher House Hotel)—to meet with Missouri Pacific representatives about the potential route through the area.<sup>9</sup> In March 1887, Nicodemus residents voted eighty-two to three in favor of a bond issue of \$16,000 to attract the Missouri Pacific Railroad to select the route through Nicodemus.<sup>10</sup> Two months later, Missouri Pacific Railroad surveyors arrived in Nicodemus to determine the railway alignment and depot location.<sup>11</sup>

By September 1887, however, Nicodemus citizens learned that the Missouri Pacific Railroad would be building via a different route to Colorado, rather than off the Stockton branch that would have taken the train through Nicodemus. The *Western Cyclone* entitled an editorial on the subject the “Great Blunder,” while the *Nicodemus Enterprise* reported on nearly \$200,000 of bonds voted on by towns along the route that included Nicodemus and lamented the fact that the Missouri Pacific Railroad had been unwilling to build along this route.<sup>12</sup> Although the *Nicodemus Enterprise* reported in November 1887 that the Missouri Pacific was still considering expansion by extending its south branch to the Solomon Valley, this, too, did not materialize.<sup>13</sup>

The next railroad to express interest in running through Nicodemus was the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, often referred to as simply the Santa Fe Railroad. Surveyors from this line visited Plainville in January 1887, and by February, Nicodemus’s leaders “reported that the Santa Fe Railroad proposed to run its tracks adjacent to the Solomon River westward by way of Stockton, Webster, and Nicodemus.”<sup>14</sup> These plans had not solidified by August of that year. Through the fall and winter, both the *Nicodemus Enterprise* and the *Western Cyclone* suggested that the Santa Fe still intended to build along this route, and hopes were still high as late as March 1888. Ultimately, however, the Santa Fe Railroad never built tracks through Nicodemus.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “We are in receipt of a letter . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, December 16, 1886.

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 29; and O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 121.

<sup>9</sup> “Railroad News,” *Western Cyclone*, January 20, 1887; O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 121; and Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> “Nicodemus!” *Western Cyclone*, March 24, 1887; and O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 123.

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 30; and O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 124.

<sup>12</sup> “Great Blunder,” *Western Cyclone*, September 9, 1887; “Nearly two hundred thousand . . .,” *Nicodemus Enterprise*, September 14, 1887. See also Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> “Rumor says that . . .,” *Nicodemus Enterprise*, November 16, 1887.

<sup>14</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 31; and “More Railroads,” *Western Cyclone*, January 13, 1887.

<sup>15</sup> “A railroad project . . .,” *Nicodemus Enterprise*, August 17, 1887; “If Nicodemus don’t get . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, August 19, 1887; J. E. Porter, “Nicodemus and Her Advantages,” *Nicodemus Cyclone*, March 9, 1881; Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 31; and O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 126.

In early 1887, it seemed possible that the Union Pacific Railway might also come to Nicodemus. The head of the westward extension of the Union Pacific Railway visited Nicodemus in the spring, which prompted the *Western Cyclone* to report, “we are almost certain of this road in the near future.”<sup>16</sup> Surveyors from the Union Pacific Railway were in Nicodemus in the early months of 1888, and the company formally requested a financial subsidy at this time.<sup>17</sup> Unlike previous promises of a railroad for Nicodemus, the Union Pacific actually worked to lay tracks in the town’s direction.<sup>18</sup> As had been the outcome of previous plans for a railroad to Nicodemus, however, the Union Pacific never reached the community.<sup>19</sup> Historian Glen Schwendemann has speculated that there was little chance the Union Pacific was ever likely to reach Nicodemus, “as the road would have to cross the Solomon river to reach Nicodemus.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, by 1888 the boom was already slowing and the complete bust of the railroad building phenomenon was close at hand.

When the Union Pacific Railway chose to run its tracks through the railroad camp of Bogue, six miles south of Nicodemus, the town’s hopes for a railroad-based bonanza ended. Some Nicodemus residents immediately moved to the newly formed town, including many business owners who moved their shops and stores to Bogue, in some cases taking entire buildings with them.<sup>21</sup> Historian Norman Crockett described the scene: “Some leaders looked on in disbelief as a number of frame buildings were torn down in sections loaded on wagons, and hauled to Bogue for reassembly. Even stone structures were moved, a block at a time.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Harry Root, a *Topeka Journal* news reporter, “In the best days of Nicodemus the town had two newspapers, bank, [lum]ber yard, stone hotel, and several [m]ercantile houses.”<sup>23</sup> In September 1888, the *Nicodemus Cyclone* editorialized, “We are sorry to see several of our businessmen making preparations to move to the proposed new town. We consider this a very unwise move and one they will regret. . . . For every one that goes now, we will get ten wide awake men next spring. Don’t get frightened. Hold on to your property and be ready to enjoy the real boom that will surely come.”<sup>24</sup> This editorial appeared in the final issue of the *Nicodemus Cyclone*; ironically, the editor, J. E. Porter, moved to Bogue soon after the paper ceased publication.<sup>25</sup> The year 1888 also saw the closing of the Bank of Nicodemus.<sup>26</sup> Around the same time, the Gibson Hotel, likely the stone hotel mentioned in Root’s article, was moved, building and all, to Bogue.<sup>27</sup>

With railroad prospects quashed and no new influx of settlers, the town’s population and economy gradually declined. During the railroad fervor years, the town’s population increased from approximately one hundred in 1886 to roughly 150 in 1888. By 1891, however, Nicodemus

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<sup>16</sup> “Col. Dean, head man . . .,” *Western Cyclone*, April 7, 1887.

<sup>17</sup> “The U.P.R.R. survey corps . . .,” *Nicodemus Cyclone*, February 24, 1888; and Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> “Track laying on the U.P. line . . .,” *Nicodemus Cyclone*, July 13, 1888.

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Schwendemann, “Nicodemus,” 29.

<sup>21</sup> O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 127.

<sup>22</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, 175.

<sup>23</sup> Root, “Sixth District News Notes.”

<sup>24</sup> *Nicodemus Cyclone*, September 7, 1888.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 52; and O’Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” 127.

<sup>26</sup> Craig, “Nicodemus Bank.”

<sup>27</sup> Craig, “Gibson House.”

was home to only about fifty persons, which remained the population size for the next two decades.<sup>28</sup> Like the town, the population of Nicodemus Township, which had grown steadily from 239 in 1884 to 407 in 1888, experienced a gradual decline. The township's population peaked either at 501 in 1907 or 595 in 1910,<sup>29</sup> and dropped to a low of 218 in 1918.<sup>30</sup> The U.S. census figures for the years 1880–1910 confirm these numbers. The African American population of Graham County increased between 1880 and 1910, declined by 1920, and increased only slightly by 1930. In 1880, the county had 484 African American residents, which increased to 529 in 1890, 531 in 1900, and 595 in 1910.<sup>31</sup> In 1916, 455 African Americans resided in Graham County, which did not rank near the top of Kansas counties in terms of African American population.<sup>32</sup> In 1920, the number of African Americans in the county had dropped to 413 and only increased slightly, to 429, by 1930. The percentage of African Americans relative to the whole population, however, decreased over time, as more whites made Graham County their home. While the percentage of African Americans in Graham County hovered around 10 percent of the total population from 1880 to 1900, it dropped dramatically in 1910 to 6.8 percent and then remained near 5.5 percent in 1920 and 1930.<sup>33</sup> As African Americans left Nicodemus in the down harvest years and in the wake of the failure to attract a railroad, whites purchased their farmland and moved into the area. By the 1940s, whites owned most of the land in Nicodemus Township.<sup>34</sup>

While some of those who left Nicodemus moved to Bogue, others went to towns and cities throughout Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, California, and a variety of other states. A number of settlers who left Nicodemus went to bigger cities, such as Denver, Colorado. Sam Garland, one of the early Nicodemus colonists, organized a small group of residents who sought to start another all-black colony. Garland led his and six other families across the border into Colorado, where they established the Manzanola Colony in 1913.<sup>35</sup>

## Commerce

The black townspeople who stayed in Nicodemus spent precious little time theorizing about their circumstances, since the burdens of day to day life consumed virtually all of their time and energy. After the railroad fever came and went, most members of the Nicodemus community continued to farm, while also working at small cottage industries in their homes to supplement their living expenses and pay their debts. With most of the local businesses gone, the

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<sup>28</sup> Untitled timeline included in miscellaneous unattributed notes on Nicodemus, KSHS.

<sup>29</sup> James Oliver Horton reports the latter number in his book, *Landmarks of African American History*, 116. This number also appears on Gia Lane, "Nicodemus Time Line," February 1998, Resource Files, NNHS.

<sup>30</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Population Changes," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries. Craig derived her numbers from the State Board of Agriculture Biennial Reports, and her figures from 1885-1900 have been verified by consulting the printed reports covering those years.

<sup>31</sup> "University of Virginia Historical Census Browser," electronic resource, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>.

<sup>32</sup> "Kansas Negroes," *Topeka Journal*, 1916.

<sup>33</sup> "University of Virginia Historical Census Browser," electronic resource, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/>.

<sup>34</sup> Crockett, *Black Towns*, 184.

<sup>35</sup> Turner, "Nicodemus: Colored Colony in Kansas," 12; Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 175; Jennifer Michael "Everyday Life in Nicodemus: A Report on Fieldwork Conducted by Jennifer Michael, Ph.D., for the National Council for the Traditional Arts and the National Park Service" (August 1999), 15.

residents had to either manufacture their own items or look elsewhere for the goods and services that they were unable to produce on their own. After 1888, the few merchants who remained in Nicodemus were invariably African Americans struggling to keep their shops in business.<sup>36</sup> Around the turn of the twentieth century, Sayers' General Merchandise Store, a café, a drug store, a bank, and a livery barn, still remained in Nicodemus. However, George Irvin Sayers remembered that the Sayers' General Merchandise Store, operated by his father, George M. Sayers, was a combination store and post office. The store catered to both the African American population of Nicodemus and whites who lived in the area and sold "meats, cigars and oranges—a little of everything."<sup>37</sup> Clarence Sayers and Yvonne Napue Sayers, George M. Sayer's grandson and his wife, recounted that the store sold clothing, groceries, lamps, and candy.



**Figure 26. Photograph, Sayers' General Merchandise Store, 1943. Reprinted from William J. Belleau, *The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas* (Hays, KS: [s.n.], 1943).**

By 1918, a visitor found only two businesses in Nicodemus, one of which was a rudimentary restaurant with only the barest essentials of makeshift furniture, and observed that most of the town's remaining residents lived in "dilapidated houses, few of which showed a sign of paint in recent years."<sup>38</sup> Although some of the external structures and economic opportunities in Nicodemus presented a somewhat shabby appearance to an outsider, the residents who remained in the town or outlying homesteads continued to brighten their lives and strengthen their community ties through relationships with family, church communities, and fraternal

<sup>36</sup> Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, 35; and U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, quotation on 18, see also 22.

<sup>38</sup> Quotation from Crockett, *Black Towns*, 176; G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 5; and Clarence Sayers and Yvonne Napue Sayers interview with Jennifer Michael, September 11, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 7-8, transcript on file at NNHS.

organizations. These internal connections based in long-held values of African American society were one of the variables that distinguished Nicodemus from the many Great Plains settlements that failed and were abandoned during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

## **Social and Cultural Life**

Family and church relationships and activities remained at the center of Nicodemus social and cultural life between 1886 and 1929. As the town gained a greater sense of permanence, several organizations—benevolent societies, fraternal groups, and voluntary associations (many connected to the churches)—became another significant element of life in Nicodemus. During the 1880s and 1890s, and into the twentieth century, African American social, cultural, and aid organizations throughout the country grew in number and importance in black society.<sup>39</sup> A number of the fraternal organizations established in Nicodemus had their beginnings during and immediately after the American Revolution, when the notion of “liberty for all” was a powerful social and political theme. Many of the same organizations grew in size and extended their societal reach during and after the Civil War, when so many newly emancipated blacks needed aid and support. African American fraternal organizations were based on an idea of mutual aid, much like analogous white organizations. In fact, throughout American society, both black and white, mutual aid organizations were “one of the cornerstones of social welfare in the United States until the early 20th century.”<sup>40</sup> The groups worked to provide benefits to their members in times of hardship, but they also provided a cultural connection between members through their secret rituals and practices.<sup>41</sup> The popularity and need for these organizations continued to grow to an extent that by 1910, at least one of every three American men was a member of some type of fraternal association. Women, too, were active participants in numerous fraternal and mutual aid organizations. Women who were members of these societies, “regarded themselves as members of fraternal rather than sororal societies. For them, fraternity, much like liberty and equality, was the common heritage of both men and women.” Fraternal and mutual aid societies “existed for virtually every major service of the modern welfare state including orphanages, hospitals, job exchanges, homes for the elderly, and scholarship programs.”<sup>42</sup>

African American fraternal organizations and voluntary associations also helped non-member African Americans in both direct and indirect ways. For example, African American women’s clubs frequently undertook philanthropic and educational activities to benefit lower-class black women, who were not a part of their organizations.<sup>43</sup> African American fraternal groups also were involved with campaigns to influence legislation related to increasing civil

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<sup>39</sup> Marilyn Dell Brady, “Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1900-1930.” *Kansas History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 19, 20.

<sup>40</sup> David Beito, “From Mutual Aid to Welfare State: How Fraternal Societies Fought Poverty and Taught Character” The Heritage Foundation, July 27, 2002, <http://heritage.org/Research/Reports/2000/07/From-Mutual-Aid-to-Welfare-State>. For the author’s complete work on the subject, see David Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Theda Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>42</sup> Beito, “From Mutual Aid to Welfare State.”

<sup>43</sup> Gerda Lerner, “Early Community Work of Black Club Women,” *Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 2 (April 1974): 158-67. See also Anne Firor Scott, “Most Invisible of All: Black Women’s Voluntary Associations,” *Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 1 (February 1990): 3-22.

rights and ending racial segregation, indirectly working toward greater freedoms for all African Americans.<sup>44</sup>

In *Festivals of Freedom*, historian Mitchell Kachun writes that by the early twentieth century, blacks were building “on nineteenth-century precedents in institution building,” to launch new national organizations that provided formal structures “to work for the reinstatement of blacks’ civil and political rights” and to provide education, aid services, and “preservation and dissemination of African American historical memory.”<sup>45</sup> Several organizations that would later play significant roles in black communities throughout the twentieth century had their start in this earlier period of black social and cultural empowerment. Some of the most noteworthy new organizations established in the early 1900s included the Afro-American League and Council, the Urban League, the National Advancement for the Advancement of Colored People, and the National Federation of Afro-American Women.<sup>46</sup> These new socio-cultural “institutions of memory and activism” became increasingly important in the 1910s and later, “when other traditional modes of disseminating knowledge and organizing activities among African Americans were beginning to crumble before the cultural changes of the twentieth century.”<sup>47</sup> New mass-culture recreational and leisure activities began to usurp the social territory previously centered on traditional black commemorations and celebrations, including Emancipation Day events that had begun to fade away in some parts of the country.

The first of Nicodemus’s fraternal organizations was the Benefit Society, founded in 1888. A charitable organization, the Benefit Society was also responsible for organizing the Emancipation Day celebration in 1888.<sup>48</sup> Nicodemus’s residents founded the Masonic Lodge in 1893, which was known as the Zerubbab Lodge No. 44.<sup>49</sup> African American participation in Masonic organizations dates back to the American Revolution and their lodges were part of the Prince Hall Masons, named after the organization’s founder. In some areas, membership in an African American Masonic Lodge was for fraternity as well as for protection of black neighborhoods and, after the end of the Civil War, organizing to secure civil rights.<sup>50</sup> The women’s auxiliary organization to the Masons was the Order of the Eastern Star, founded in Nicodemus in 1898. This organization allowed both male and female members, but the men served only in a sponsorship or supervisory capacity.<sup>51</sup> The Order of the Eastern Star, founded nationally in 1874, was organized for the protection of female relations of Prince Hall Masons. Members of this organization were involved with charitable work benefiting black women, as well as providing assistance to their male counterparts in the upkeep of Masonic temples.<sup>52</sup>

Later in the 1890s, men organized the Odd Fellows Lodge, and women organized an auxiliary organization that the Odd Fellows supported.<sup>53</sup> The Grand United Order of Odd

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<sup>44</sup> Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 258-59.

<sup>46</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 258.

<sup>47</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 259.

<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Toothaker and Ola Wilson, “Nicodemus,” for the Women’s Kansas Day Club, Old Opera Houses and Early Places of Amusement, KSHS.

<sup>49</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “The Masonic Lodge,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>50</sup> Robert E. Weir, “Prince Hall Masons,” in *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, ed. Nina Mjagkij (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2001), 592-94.

<sup>51</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Order of the Eastern Star,” typescript, Kansas Collection University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>52</sup> Angela Hornsby, “Order of the Eastern Star,” in Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 543-44.

<sup>53</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Odd Fellow Lodge,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.



Fellows, founded in the 1840s, had ties to the white fraternal organization of the same name in England, as opposed to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, with which white Odd Fellows in the United States were connected. Whites were able to join the black organization, but few did. African American Odd Fellows often had above average wealth compared to the black community, and the members concerned themselves with moral conduct in addition to fraternal and financial assistance in times of hardship. The African American Odd Fellows were typically more visible than other African American fraternal organizations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The women's auxiliary, founded nationally in 1857, was known as the Households of Ruth.<sup>54</sup> The Households of Ruth also provided insurance for members, in addition to engaging in charitable work and extending the work of their male counterparts.<sup>55</sup>

In 1911, men founded a Knights of Pythias Lodge.<sup>56</sup> Officially known as the Colored Knights of Pythias, and founded in 1880, this organization was based upon a white organization that did not permit African American members. The Colored Knights of Pythias offered insurance to its members, but the high cost and doubt over the validity of the insurance kept many members from purchasing it. While the Prince Hall Masons often attracted black intelligentsia, members of the Colored Knights of Pythias were more likely to be unskilled laborers.<sup>57</sup> In some black communities, the Knights of Pythias sponsored drill teams and bands, which performed at social functions. The bands “were often asked to perform during the funerals and processions for deceased lodge members.”<sup>58</sup> The same year, women formed a Court of Calanthe organization.<sup>59</sup> Also known as the Independent Order of Calanthe, this organization, founded nationally in 1883, was a women's auxiliary of the Colored Knights of Pythias.<sup>60</sup> Like the Households of Ruth, the Court of Calanthe's members engaged in benevolent work comparable to that of their related organization.<sup>61</sup>

Aside from fraternal organizations and voluntary associations, social life in Nicodemus did not change much between the early settlement period and the years after the railroad bypassed Nicodemus. Religion remained a constant in residents' lives, and events involving food and dancing were also popular. The latter activities followed a seasonal round, with fish fries in the summer, harvest festivals in the autumn, and a variety of indoor activities in the winter, when farming did not get in the way of people enjoying a late night of recreation.<sup>62</sup>

The Nicodemus baseball club, founded in 1887, also persisted through this era, and played games against other teams from nearby small towns. For at least a portion of this era, the team was known as the Nicodemus Blues.<sup>63</sup> African American baseball teams date back as early as the 1850s, though more organized teams began to emerge around 1867. The latter date also

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<sup>54</sup> David M. Fahey, “Grand United Order of Odd Fellows,” in Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 252-53.

<sup>55</sup> Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 71, 118.

<sup>56</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “The Knights of Pythias,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>57</sup> David M. Fahey, “Colored Knights of Pythias,” in Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 167-69.

<sup>58</sup> Charles E. Coulter, *Take up the Black Man's Burden: Kansas City's African American Communities, 1865-1939*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 219.

<sup>59</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Court of Calanthe,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>60</sup> Fahey, “Colored Knights of Pythias,” 168.

<sup>61</sup> Skocpol et al., *What a Mighty Power We Can Be*, 118.

<sup>62</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, “Pleasures of Frontier Life,” typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries; and Toothaker and Wilson, “Nicodemus.”

<sup>63</sup> Bernice Bates interview with HABS Oral History researchers, ca. July 1978, Nicodemus, KS, 6-9, transcript on file at NNHS; and G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 10-14.

coincides with the decision of the National Association of Base Ball Players to exclude from membership “any club which may be composed of one or more colored persons.”<sup>64</sup> The Nicodemus team, which had both white and black members at its founding, would have fallen under that exclusion.<sup>65</sup> African American waiters at the Argyle Hotel in Babylon, New York, formed the first professional African American baseball team in 1885, and other professional teams sprung up rapidly after that date. The first professional team in the West was the Lincoln Giants, of Lincoln, Nebraska, founded in 1890, and the first multiracial professional team, known as “All Nations,” emerged from Kansas City in 1912.<sup>66</sup>

Arthur W. Hardy, a professional African American baseball player with the Topeka Giants and the Kansas City Giants between 1906 and 1912, recalled his time playing in Kansas and Nebraska: “Well, now, we tried to book games all along the railroads. But sometimes, here off maybe twenty-five or thirty miles, was a little town with a team that had a tremendous following, and we would make that town. We’d have to make it by any transportation we could get.”<sup>67</sup> It is reasonable to speculate that the local team may have played against some of the touring, or “barnstorming,” professional African American teams during the early twentieth century. James Rudolph Bates remembers hearing that the Nicodemus team was “one of the best teams in this country,”<sup>68</sup> so professional teams may have made their way to Nicodemus even without the ease of a railroad line.

George Irvin Sayers played center field for the Nicodemus Blues around the 1910s through 1920s or 1930s. He recalled some of the other players on the team, including Harrison Williams (pitcher), Arthur DePrad (catcher), Rollie Stewart (shortstop), and Cas Bibbs (first baseman). Bernice Bates added the names of Charlie Vaughn and Bill Riley, but she did not name the positions that these players had. Sayers’ recollection was that, when he played for the team, the teams that they played were all white, while the Nicodemus team was all black. The team played nearly every weekend in various nearby Kansas towns and traveled as far as Nebraska for some of their games. Admission to the games was about a dollar, and the local teams played in a tournament for these proceeds at the end of the season.<sup>69</sup>

## **Emancipation Day Celebration**

By the early twentieth century, the significance and popularity of Emancipation Day events was waning in some parts of the country, particularly in the Northeast where the Freedom Day tradition had begun. Emancipation Day celebrations ceased altogether in a number of eastern cities. There were a number of reasons for the decline, among them the tendency within emerging black intellectual and cultural circles to look to the future rather than back at the past. The ongoing debates about the most appropriate date to hold the celebrations—January 1<sup>st</sup>,

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 16-17. See also Brian Carroll, *When to Stop the Cheering: The Black Press, the Black Community, and the Integration of Professional Baseball* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> O’Brien, ““With One Mighty Pull,”” 122.

<sup>66</sup> John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 1-2, 5; and Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 34, 38.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> James Rudolph Bates interview with Jennifer Michael, October 26, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 29, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>69</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 10-14; and B. Bates interview, 6.

August 1<sup>st</sup>, or September 22<sup>nd</sup>—created some divisiveness and lack of coordination among event organizers. And the lure of mass-culture entertainments and recreational activities may have diluted some of the interest in commemorative festivities, particularly in large urban areas. However, in Nicodemus and other small rural towns throughout the southern and western states, Emancipation Day events continued to play an important role in the life of the black community. Nicodemus residents looked forward to the gaiety and festivities of the celebrations, while the community leaders were likely aware that Emancipation Day gave them the means of building “a positive African American identity within an unappreciative American Society.”<sup>70</sup>

During the years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Emancipation Day celebration in Nicodemus took place at Scruggs Grove, over a mile from the Nicodemus townsite. Many older residents of Nicodemus recalled the “great big trees”<sup>71</sup> of Scruggs Grove, and Norma Switzer Jackson remembered that the walnut trees were, “spaced just so where they could set up carnival rides.”<sup>72</sup> The carnival rides, in particular, became a fond memory to those Nicodemus residents who were children during the early twentieth century. They likened the Emancipation Day festivities to a carnival or fair atmosphere. Others talked about the dances that were held on a platform assembled for the occasion, where attendees would dance to the music of a live band.<sup>73</sup> Ada Bates recalled that the “orchestras” that played for the dances started out small—“It was just a violin, and I think they had the guitar. Had the piano. Then they added to it, you know. And finally we got the saxophones and all that.”<sup>74</sup> George Irvin Sayers remembered one band called the Blue Flame Orchestra that came from Hutchinson, Kansas, to play at the Emancipation Day celebration several times.<sup>75</sup>

Orlo Van Duvall explained that “down in Scruggs Grove they had horse races, they had the baseball and the merry-go-rounds and the cornfields, and people came out from Kansas City and all around, like they do today. They didn’t have no place to stay, so they stay in the cornfields and sleep out the back. And the whole three days of the celebration.”<sup>76</sup> Bernice Bates remembered “Ferris wheels, and different kind of rides and all these stands that go with the carnival company. And then local people would have food stands there. And on the last day, they had a big program in the afternoon.” Bates also noted that “there was more whites there than there was [blacks]—just as many or maybe more, and they got along very nice.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 237.

<sup>71</sup> Ruth Elana Jones Dobson, Betty Jo Jones Scroggins, and Cynthia Daye Napue interview with Jennifer Michael, August 22, 1998, Sacramento, CA, 7, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>72</sup> Van Duvall and Jackson interview, 9. See B. Bates interview, 4; C. Bates interview, 81; and Leland Clark interview with Jennifer Michael, October 15, 1998, Hill City, KS, 34-35, transcript on file at NNHS, for mention of the trees of Scruggs Grove being removed later by a farmer who bought the land.

<sup>73</sup> Van Duvall and Jackson interview, 8-10; Sarah Moore interview with Anthony Seals, ca. 1977, Nicodemus, KS, 7, transcript on file at NNHS; G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 15-17; Clark interview, 34-37; and B. Bates interview, 13-14.

<sup>74</sup> Bates, Alexander, and Brogden interview, 29.

<sup>75</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 16-17.

<sup>76</sup> Van Duvall and Jackson interview, 8.

<sup>77</sup> B. Bates interview, 12.



**Figure 27. Photograph of a baseball game in Scruggs Grove. Reproduced from University of Kansas, Spencer Research Library, Nicodemus Historical Society Collection.**

### ***Agricultural Production***

While family, church involvement, and fraternal organization membership lay at the heart of Nicodemus social and cultural life, farming remained the central element of the town's economy and work life. When the railroad bypassed Nicodemus, most residents continued to farm their homesteads in the surrounding areas. The absence of a railroad station did not eliminate their hope and desire to build a successful black community on the Great Plains. Most Nicodemus colonists, after all, did not leave the South and journey to western Kansas simply because their sights were set on profiting from railroad building booms or real estate speculation. For the most part, they emigrated to Kansas in order to settle in a place where they could make a reasonable living and raise a family free from the racial discrimination and persecution they had experienced in Kentucky and other southern states. By contrast, some of the white business owners had opened stores in Nicodemus solely for the windfall profits they hoped to reap when the railroad line finally arrived. As a result, the failure of the railroad to materialize had a greater impact on the new commercial entrepreneurs than it had on colonist families. Those business owners had no reason to remain in Nicodemus once the town's growth and investment potential stalled. But the black residents of Nicodemus who had journeyed there to work, raise families, and participate fully in American citizenship did not lose these opportunities simply because the rails ran elsewhere. Unfortunately, the desire and determination of Nicodemus farmers to stay on

their homesteads and make a living from their prairie soils could not overcome the climatic and environmental conditions that confronted them over the next several decades.<sup>78</sup>

After several good years, most western Kansas farmers including those in Nicodemus experienced crop failures in 1889–1890 and 1893. In the late 1880s, rainfall had fallen well below the average annual precipitation of the mid-1880s, though the decrease was not yet to the extent of the severe drought still to come the following decade. But lower precipitation, hot drying winds in summer and fall, and extremely harsh winters combined to diminish crop yields and to drive more people out of the area. They were a harbinger of even worse years to come.

Nicodemus farms likely mirrored those throughout Graham County, in which the top two crops (by acreage) between 1889 and 1900 were corn and winter wheat, respectively. Other regular crops included spring wheat, oats, rye, barley, and sorghum. However, crop failures, such as the loss of nearly 20,000 acres of Graham County winter wheat in 1893, convinced Nicodemus and Graham County farmers that they needed to diversify their food production to get through lean years.<sup>79</sup>

As a result, in the late decades of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, many residents of Nicodemus turned to hunting, fishing, food gathering, and small gardens to supplement their diets. Hunting was both a means of providing sustenance and a leisure activity, and memories of the details were prevalent among Nicodemus residents interviewed between 1977 and 1998, some of whom were young children during this era. Jackrabbits, in particular, were hunted as food in the early days of Nicodemus. Wild birds, such as geese, pheasants, and prairie chickens were also a plentiful food source. Other animals, like skunks and coyotes, were hunted primarily for their hides, and, in the case of the latter, because they were a nuisance to the farmers' livestock.<sup>80</sup> Several longtime residents of Nicodemus recalled that deer were not in the area when they were younger and were not among the animals hunted in this time period.<sup>81</sup> Adult hunters used rifles and dogs for some hunting but also used group hunting techniques. Group hunting techniques, without rifles, were much more common when younger hunters were involved—the adults did not allow the children to carry guns as a safety precaution and often did not take guns when they hunted alongside their children.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 57; and Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "Decline of Nicodemus," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>79</sup> *Ninth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State, for the Years 1893 and 1894*, vol. 14 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Company, J. K. Hudson, State Printer, 1896), 76. See also *Seventh Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State of Kansas, for the Years 1889-1890*, vol. 12 (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, Clifford C. Baker, State Printer, 1891), 88-90; *Eighth Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State of Kansas, for the Years 1891-1892*, vol. 13 (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, Clifford C. Baker, State Printer, 1893), 88-90; *Tenth Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State of Kansas, for the Years 1895-1896*, vol. 15 (Topeka: Hamilton Printing Company, Edwin H. Snow, State Printer, 1895), 626-27; *Eleventh Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State of Kansas, for the Years 1897-1898*, vol. 16 (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture, 1899), 614-15; and *Twelfth Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture, to the Legislature of the State of Kansas, for the Years 1899-1900*, vol. 17 (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture, 1901), 730-31.

<sup>80</sup> Lester Valentine Napue interview with Jennifer Michael, December 3, 1998, Parker, CO, 19, transcript on file at NNHS; L. Van Duvall interview, 35; and Chester Williams and Melvina Riley Williams interview with Jennifer Michael, September 10, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 25, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>81</sup> Clark interview, 20-21; and L. Napue interview, 22.

<sup>82</sup> Donald Moore and Bertha Moore Carter interview with Jennifer Michael, September 14, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 18, transcript on file at NNHS; and L. Van Duvall interview, 35.



Donald Moore and Bertha Moore Carter remembered using broomsticks to round up rabbits, and Lester Napue recalled far more graphic details of clubbing jackrabbits with whatever blunt object was available.<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 28. Photograph of hunters with rifles and jack rabbits.  
Reproduced from University of Kansas, Spencer Research Library,  
Nicodemus Historical Society Collection.**

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<sup>83</sup> Moore and Carter interview, 16; and L. Napue interview, 21.

While hunting was primarily the province of boys and men, girls and women participated in fishing alongside men. The nearby Solomon River and smaller tributary creeks were convenient fishing locations, but Leland Clark recalled needing to hunt for good fishing holes. Wanda Adams remembered waking early in the morning to fish and would bring home fish for the family to eat for breakfast. While she did not enjoy eating fish, the rest of her family did, and she enjoyed fishing.<sup>84</sup> Ola Wilson recalled that fishing equipment could be very simple: “you could take a string and a, uh, pin or something like that and fix you a hook and catch fish.”<sup>85</sup> For catching larger numbers of fish in one expedition, Chester Williams explained seining for fish, using a large net held by several people to catch fish in ponds.<sup>86</sup>

Female residents of Nicodemus recalled supplementing the food supply for their families by gathering a variety of wild growing plants. Greens, including lamb’s quarters, dock, and wild lettuce, were the most common food gathered, but wild tomatoes and onions were also popular vegetables that interviewees remembered collecting. Thistle was also a wild plant that could be collected—when the plant was dry, it became tumbleweed, but when it was green it was included among the other wild greens.<sup>87</sup> Fruit was also plentiful in the area surrounding Nicodemus, particularly plums, grapes, peaches, and mulberries.<sup>88</sup> A number of those interviewed remembered picking herbs for medicinal purposes—wild sage, in particular, was used for tea, though Joetta Nevins, who mentioned this, was not specific about the purpose of the tea.<sup>89</sup> Closer to home, many Nicodemus residents grew small gardens, which they did not classify as “farming.” Potatoes, many types of beans, and watermelons were the most common crops for these household gardens, but interviewees remembered an extensive variety of garden produce that included tomatoes, cantaloupe, squash, pumpkins, okra, cucumbers, beets, corn, and greens.<sup>90</sup> A few people recalled their families growing sugar cane, which could be converted into molasses.<sup>91</sup>

Food preservation was important for this sort of lifestyle, as items that were in abundance at one part of the year could only be made to last through the winter months with techniques like canning of fruits and vegetables (and sometimes meat) and salting and smoking of meat. Many of those Nicodemus residents interviewed between 1977 and 1998 were familiar with canning techniques, and some of these individuals still canned fruits and vegetables. Fruits were often

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<sup>84</sup> Clark interview, 24; and Adams and Moore interview, 32-33.

<sup>85</sup> Wilson interview, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Chester Williams interview with Jennifer Michael, September 11, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 7-8, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>87</sup> C. Bates interview, 25, 57; Florence Moore Howard interview with Jennifer Michael, October 27, 1998, Oakley, KS, 32; Joetta Alexander Nevins and Wray Alexander Petrie interview with Jennifer Michael, October 10, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 14; and Joetta Alexander Nevins, Wray Alexander Petrie, and Florence Moore Howard interview with Jennifer Michael, October 10, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 4, all transcripts on file at NNHS.

<sup>88</sup> Van Duvall and Jackson interview, 19-20; C. Bates interview, 56; Howard interview, 29; and Audrie Groves McConnell interview with Jennifer Michael, November 12, 1998, Denver, CO, 24, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>89</sup> Nevins, Petrie, and Howard interview, 2; and Dobson, Scroggins, and Napue interview, 15.

<sup>90</sup> C. Bates interview, 66; Howard interview, 21-22, 30; L. Napue interview, 12; Virgil Robinson and Juanita Robinson interview with Jennifer Michael, September 15, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 27, transcript on file at NNHS; C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 26; G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 28; Rosa Jones Stokes interview with Jennifer Michael, September 15, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 9, transcript on file at NNHS; C. Williams interview, 15; and Wilson interview, 11-12.

<sup>91</sup> Adams and Moore interview, 26; and Howard interview, 23-24.



made into jellies, jams, butters, and wines.<sup>92</sup> Vegetables, such as green beans, tomatoes, corn, and cucumbers (for pickles), were the most common that were preserved for later use.<sup>93</sup> Some beans were dried rather than canned, by letting them remain on the vine until their shell dried out, and then placing them in sacks.<sup>94</sup> Potatoes and other root vegetables were sometimes left in the ground as a method of preservation. While canned meat was less common than other means of preservation for meat, Rosa Jones Stokes talked about her mother canning meat: “We would cut them into cubes about three—two-and-a-half or three inches. And sauté them.... While they’re hot, put them in the jar, put a little juice in the jar. Put them in this big container, and cook it for about sixty-five or seventy minutes, until it, you know, changed colors and you didn’t see any more blood.”<sup>95</sup> Charlesetta Williams Bates remembered that salt was rubbed into the outside of meat, but also that salt water was injected into hams to preserve them. When they wanted meat, she recalled that it “might have a little mold on it or something, and they’d cut that off and wash it and we’d go on—and they’d go on and eat it.”<sup>96</sup>

Nicodemus’s farmers also raised a variety of livestock that was used to supplement both food supplies and income. Livestock ranged from larger animals like horses, cows, and hogs, to fowl like chickens, turkeys, guineas, and geese. While hogs were always raised as food animals, cows and chickens were more frequently utilized for milk and eggs, respectively. George Irvin Sayers and Donald Moore both stated that few families butchered their cattle, because milk could be used by the family or sold in town. Minerva Wellington Sayers mentioned her family raised a large flock of chickens and sold the eggs to earn money to buy other necessary groceries.<sup>97</sup> Rosa Jones Stokes and Leroy Van Duvall recounted memories of breaking horses. In the case of the Jones family, the horses were broken and sold to the cavalry in Leavenworth, Kansas, while the Van Duvall family broke their horses to use or occasionally trade. Other families had only small numbers of horses, which they used as draft animals for farming.<sup>98</sup> Rather than maintaining pastures for their livestock, Nicodemus’s residents would put their cows and horses on picket lines, which limited the area in which the animal could graze, or they herded animals along the river on public lands.<sup>99</sup> Keeping animals as pets was apparently rare enough that none of the oral history informants reported having pets; it seems as though animals were recognized by Nicodemus’s residents to be sources of food, income, or labor rather than a luxury item or member of the family.

Turkey raising, in particular, was a lucrative means of supplementing one’s income. Several individuals who had lived in Nicodemus as children or teenagers recounted the turkey flocks that their parents raised, sometimes numbering as high as 200. Nicodemus residents fed their turkeys grains and seeds and also let the birds forage for food, leading to the need for

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<sup>92</sup> Dobson, Scroggins, and Napue interview, 15; C. Bates interview, 56; Helen Jones Dabney interview with Jennifer Michael, October 5, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 34, transcript on file at NNHS; Howard interview, 29-30; and Ernestine Van Duvall interview with Jennifer Michael, September 12, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 19-20, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>93</sup> Van Duvall and Jackson interview, 19-20; Howard interview, 30; Pearlina Moore interview with Jennifer Michael, September 30, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 23, transcript on file at NNHS; and Stokes interview, 20.

<sup>94</sup> Howard interview, 22.

<sup>95</sup> Stokes interview, 21.

<sup>96</sup> C. Bates interview, quotation on 24, 23-24.

<sup>97</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 27-28; and Moore and Carter interview, 15.

<sup>98</sup> Stokes interview, 6-7; L. Van Duvall interview, 34; and Harry Bates interview with HABS Oral History Researchers, ca. 1977-1978, Nicodemus, KS, 5, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>99</sup> H. Bates interview, 3; and Dabney interview, 22.

children to track down the turkeys when they wandered away. As Thanksgiving approached, the family members would round up the turkeys to send to grocery stores, sometimes as far away as Kansas City. Lester Napue noted that the last flock of turkeys that his mother raised sold to a grocery store for about twenty-two cents a pound, a rate which he stated was good for the time.<sup>100</sup> Raising turkeys was not without its difficulties, of course. Betty Jo Scroggins recalled disliking the turkeys, because “they were just ugly and stupid and made you work very hard.”<sup>101</sup> Rosa Jones Stokes echoed the lack of sense possessed by turkeys, stating that the turkeys would simply squat down in the rain rather than looking for cover. Florence Moore Howard remembered a hail storm that killed about fifteen of her mother’s turkeys, which amounted to almost one-third of the flock.<sup>102</sup>

Sick animals would often prove to be a major loss for those in Nicodemus who were raising livestock. Minor illnesses or injuries were often easy to treat, and some residents of Nicodemus learned how to treat their livestock’s wounds and sicknesses.<sup>103</sup> More serious illnesses, however, typically resulted in the loss of the livestock. Hog cholera wiped out George M. Sayers’ pig herd in the late 1920s or early 1930s, which his son, George Irvin Sayers, believed numbered about forty or fifty animals.<sup>104</sup> Health inspectors checked horses and cows for tuberculosis and took any animals that they believed to be infected with the disease. Leland Clark recalled “it’s always the best-looking animal you had. . . . You had one that’s looking so poor that look like he’s going to fall over at any time, and it was—it was healthy.”<sup>105</sup> Chester and Melvina Williams mentioned that the government was supposed to replace the livestock that they took away because of tuberculosis, but often this did not happen.<sup>106</sup> Illness in animals, therefore, sometimes meant that a family lost their source of food production or income that the animal represented.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Nicodemus farmers again benefitted from several years of increased rainfall and healthy crop production. When World War I ushered in elevated wheat prices, a brief agricultural boom transformed the Great Plains. Beginning in 1914, the unfolding events of the war in Europe resulted in a blockade of Russian seaports, which abruptly halted Russian grain exports. At the time, Russia, Canada, and the United States were the world’s three largest grain producers. With Russian wheat suddenly absent from the world markets, the price of wheat skyrocketed, going from approximately one dollar a bushel at the start of the war to \$2.20 per bushel four years later.<sup>107</sup> The U.S. entry into the war in 1917 and the consequent need to feed the allied armies gave the price of wheat an additional boost.<sup>108</sup> The rising price prompted farmers throughout the plains to plant as much of the acreage as possible, even marginal lands, in order to reap the profits to be made at those prices. It was more than greed, however, that drove the expansion. The U.S. Food Administration lectured the American farmers that “it was their patriotic duty to produce to the utmost” and

<sup>100</sup> L. Napue interview, 10; Nevins and Petrie interview, 7-8; and Dobson, Scroggins, and Napue interview, 24.

<sup>101</sup> Dobson, Scroggins, and Napue interview, 27.

<sup>102</sup> Stokes interview, 7; and Howard interview, 28.

<sup>103</sup> Dobson, Scroggins, and Napue interview, 24.

<sup>104</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 30.

<sup>105</sup> Clark interview, 6.

<sup>106</sup> C. Williams and M. Williams interview, 16-17.

<sup>107</sup> Ian Frazier, *Great Plains* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), 195.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Malone and Richard Etulain, *The American West: A Twentieth-century History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 18.

widely broadcast the agency's slogan, "Food Will Win the War."<sup>109</sup> But when the war reached a sudden conclusion in November 1918, Russian wheat was back on the market and U.S. overproduction had created a commodity glut. Prices began to plummet, with the price of wheat dropping from its \$2.20 per bushel high to \$1.01 per bushel in 1921.



**Figure 29. Photograph of farmers haying with a horse-drawn header wagon, date unknown. Reproduced from University of Kansas, Spencer Research Library, Nicodemus Historical Society Collection.**

The brief western agricultural boom was over. But there were two very significant consequences of the wheat boom that were much longer lasting than the boom itself. First, thousands of western farmers became heavily indebted because they had used all their available credit and mortgaged their farms in order to plant the additional acreage. Once the war ended and

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<sup>109</sup> Malone and Etulain, *The American West*, 18.

crops began returning only half as much money as they had two years earlier, many farmers could not pay their mortgage debts and lost their farms. Mortgage defaults started a credit crisis, driving many Great Plains banks out of business. The boom quickly “descended into a deep agricultural depression,” from which some areas of the Great Plains never recovered.<sup>110</sup> A reverse of the homestead land rushes ensued, and big sections of the prairie states became largely depopulated. The second long-term consequence was also a result of overplanting. In the rush to increase their acreage, farmers had plowed up even marginal lands that included the last sections of native prairie, which played a key role in maintaining soil stability and preventing moisture loss. When the 1920s ushered in a number of lower than average precipitation years, the prairie lands began to dry up and blow away. The stage was set for the ecological disaster called the Dust Bowl in the decade to follow.

While the temporary agricultural boom was still in progress, Nicodemus farmers, like their neighbors throughout western Kansas, enjoyed good yields that fetched high returns. Optimism returned to prairie farm communities, many of the residents began to think that their farms had finally become the financially successful ventures they had toiled so long and hard to achieve. In this period of optimism in the mid-teens, some of Nicodemus’s farmers began to participate in the Sunflower Agricultural Association, an organization of Kansas African American farmers that met annually in Topeka. The 1914 meeting included a presentation by Lon Alexander of Nicodemus and Israel Foucher of Great Bend, entitled “Growing a Thousand Acres of Wheat.” Although the newspaper article that mentions this presentation gives few details, it showed an example of one Nicodemus farmer succeeding with his crops.<sup>111</sup> The 1915 Sunflower Agricultural Association meeting included a presentation on “Holding the Young People to the Farm,” by W. L. Sayers, county attorney for Graham County, who was a member of a Nicodemus family.<sup>112</sup>

## **World War I**

In addition to turning the Great Plains agricultural economy completely askew, the First World War may also have played a part in the decline in Nicodemus’s population, although more research is necessary to provide details on the names of Nicodemus residents who served in World War I. Certainly, the three cemeteries associated with Nicodemus—Mount Olive (about five miles west), Nicodemus (about one mile northeast), and Samuels (about six and a half miles southwest) cemeteries—contain burials of war veterans, but these do not necessarily provide a comprehensive list of all of those from Nicodemus who served.<sup>113</sup> Leland Clark, who had been involved with Nicodemus’s American Legion Post, named four individuals, Scroggins, Griffie, Van Duvall, and Charles Clark, whom he recalled as having served in World War I.<sup>114</sup>

World War I may also have contributed to the decline in Nicodemus’s population not only by taking men from the town to serve in the war but also by drawing individuals and

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<sup>110</sup> Malone and Etulain, *The American West*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> “From Over State,” *Topeka Journal*, December 9, 1914, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 5-6, KSHS.

<sup>112</sup> “Is in Full Swing,” *Topeka Journal*, December 8, 1915, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 7, KSHS. Ironically, Sayers was originally from Nicodemus, but had left the town to pursue opportunities outside of farming.

<sup>113</sup> See “Mt. Olive Cemetery,” electronic document, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/graham/Cemeteries/mtolive.html>; and “Nicodemus Cemetery,” electronic document, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/graham/Cemeteries/cem-nicodemes.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Clark interview, 48.

families to locations where they could find steady employment. During the war, there was another of the periodic migrations of blacks out the rural south, as there had been during the Civil War and again in the 1870s, but on this occasion the majority left to enter the work force in urban industrial centers of northern and far western states. African Americans living in rural areas throughout the West likewise joined in the migration. With the increased industrial needs of the United States because of the war, factories and other manufacturers needed workers to meet the higher production. The availability of jobs in northern urban centers attracted many African Americans in the South to leave their rural homes and take on jobs in industry, and this may have been a draw for African Americans living in Nicodemus as well.<sup>115</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While the loss of the railroad to nearby Bogue was a great blow to Nicodemus, the community struggled to maintain a viable agricultural economy on the Kansas plains during the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century. Nicodemus's population decreased between 1886 and 1929, with outmigration heaviest in the year after the railroad bypassed the town. Despite these setbacks, the town maintained a rich cultural and social life, grounded in family relationships, church affiliation, and participation in chapters of several prominent African American organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

With the railroad boom and many of the town's businesses long gone, the Nicodemus economy and residents' livelihoods were based in agricultural pursuits. By the end of the 1920s, long-time Nicodemus farmers may well have surmised, after several decades of tilling the prairie soils and watching the Kansas skies, that they had seen it all. They had been through strings of two or three years with plentiful rain and bumper crops, bookended by droughts that lasted a half decade or more. They had witnessed the railroad boom and bust, and had seen the price of wheat soar and then plummet. They adopted new types of farming techniques and varieties of seed, and adapted to mechanized farm equipment. They had put in years of hard, sometimes backbreaking work, and gained a wealth of experience that they continued to put to good use. Nonetheless, their long presence on the land and intimate knowledge of the prairie could not provide them with the knowledge that the worst was yet to come.

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<sup>115</sup> See E. Marvin Goodwin, *Black Migration in America from 1915 to 1960: An Uneasy Exodus* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990), esp. 8-12; Gerald D. Jaynes, "Blacks in the Economy from Reconstruction to World War I," in *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present*, ed. William R. Scott and William G. Shade (New York: Routledge, 2000), 167-81; Carole C. Marks, "In Search of the Promised Land: Black Migration and Urbanization, 1900-1940," in Scott and Shade, *Upon These Shores*, 182-97; and Jennifer D. Keene, "Military Service, World War I," in *Encyclopedia of the Great Black Migration*, vol. 2, M-Z, ed. Steven A. Reich (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 547-60.

## Chapter 6: From Depression to Revival, Nicodemus in the mid-Twentieth Century

### ***Introduction***

During the middle decades of the twentieth century, Nicodemus continued to face hardships and struggled to remain intact in the face of new economic and environmental crises. The combined effects of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl in the 1930s bankrupted farmers and shuttered businesses throughout Great Plains, leading to the abandonment of thousands of small towns across Kansas, Nebraska, Montana, and the other hard-hit states. Like these other prairie towns and settlements, Nicodemus suffered a substantial population decline during the Depression era, and the number of townspeople continued to dwindle during and after World War II, until it reached a low of only sixteen inhabitants in 1950. However, 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. Toward the end of the 1970s, the construction of the Nicodemus Villa, along with reinvigorated Emancipation Day celebrations that also came to serve as a “Homecoming” for former residents and their descendants, slowly brought people and attention back to the small community.

### ***The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl***

Historian Donald Worster argues that while few people who study the Great Depression or the Dust Bowl have drawn parallels between the two, these overlapping eras in American history share more than just a common timeframe. In his view, “Both events revealed fundamental weaknesses in the traditional culture of America, the one in ecological terms, the other in economic.”<sup>1</sup> In the case of Nicodemus, where farming was key to the residents’ financial stability, the town was hit doubly by the Depression and the Dust Bowl.

October 29, 1929, the day the U.S. stock market crashed, marked the beginning of what would come to be known as the Great Depression. The crash caused financial losses for many Americans, which in turn led to reduced spending and a reduced willingness to take on debt. Commodity prices and wages dropped, further exacerbating the problem of consumers’ willingness to spend. The drop in commodity prices was particularly hard on farmers, who saw profits on their crop yields fall dramatically.<sup>2</sup> The farmers on the plains never fully recovered from the post-World War I crash of commodity prices and the consequent landslide of over indebtedness that followed. Thus by the time the Great Depression arrived, farmers in western Kansas, including Nicodemus, were already facing dire financial problems.

But the Dust Bowl era of the mid-1930s, which some historians call the largest ecological disaster in American history, was even more devastating than the Depression for Great Plains farmers and residents. As Worster put it, “The Dust Bowl was the darkest moment in the twentieth-century life of the southern plains,” an area that encompassed western Kansas, western

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<sup>1</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Svobida, *An Empire of Dust* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1940), 20.

Oklahoma, eastern Colorado, and the northern sections of Texas and New Mexico.<sup>3</sup> The darkness was both literal and figurative. After the over-plowing during the World War I wheat boom left hundreds of thousands of acres of prairie soil dry and unstable, a worsening drought that began in the 1920s and reached record severity during the 1930s turned the farmland throughout much of Great Plains to dust. When severe winds arrived, the dust was lifted into huge storm clouds that blackened the midday sky and dumped tons of fine dirt, the former farmland of America's "Bread Basket," across the plains, across the Mississippi, and during the worst storms, all the way to Washington, DC.

Western Kansas was one of the Dust Bowl's most severely affected areas.<sup>4</sup> The period of severe drought lasted from 1931 through 1936. Even worse, several years of very hot summers in the mid-1930s created even drier conditions across the plains, where the top two to three feet of soil contained no moisture at all. By 1939, a weather station near Hays, Kansas—less than fifty miles south of Nicodemus, had recorded a total rainfall deficit of thirty-four inches, which represented "almost a two-year supply in arrears." Prairie farmers had seen bad droughts before, although none as severe as this one, but they had never seen or even imagined the dust storms that the hot, dry, windy conditions and bare farm soils produced. The dust storms "were of such violence that they made the drought only a secondary problem—storms of such destructive force that they left the region reeling in confusion and fear."<sup>5</sup> The worst of the storms occurred in 1934 and 1935, some of them carrying as much as 350 million tons of dirt in columns that rose 7,000 feet above the earth and could last for days and sometimes more than a week. In western Kansas, there were twelve consecutive days of dust storms in March 1935. The worst storm of all—later named "Black Sunday"—came a month later, on April 14, 1935.<sup>6</sup> Thousands of Kansas residents were stranded wherever they were forced to pull off roads and find shelter. Thousands more were sickened, during this storm and others, by respiratory illnesses brought on by breathing in the fine dust.

Ola Wilson, who lived in Nicodemus during the 1930s, described the conditions: "Well, there was nothing to see. Just a cloud of dust, weeks on end."<sup>7</sup> Nicodemus residents interviewed in the late 1970s and late 1990s who had been in Nicodemus during the Dust Bowl years regularly referred to this time period as the "Dirty Thirties." Ada Bates recalled that "you could see the dust: you could see it miles and miles away before it'd get here. . . . And it'd get here, and it be just as dark as dark: just nothing but dirt."<sup>8</sup> Ora Switzer remembered the need to keep track of children: "They'd just get to playing—wasn't paying no attention. Say, 'Now when it gets dark, you kids come on down, because a dust storm is coming. And we don't want you to get out where we can't find you.'"<sup>9</sup>

The massive dust storms became a brutal challenge for those who stayed in Nicodemus, as the airborne dirt posed threats to their livelihoods and to life itself. As the dry soil of the Great

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<sup>3</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Svobida, *Empire of Dust*, 14; and Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 18-21

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Steinberg, "My Day in Nicodemus: Notes from a Field Trip to Black Kansas," *Phylon* 37, no. 3 (1976): 248.

<sup>8</sup> Bates, Alexander, and Brogden interview, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ora Switzer interview with Jennifer Michael, September 14, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 24, transcript on file at NNHS. See also Ora Switzer interview with HABS Oral History researchers, ca. 1977-1978, Nicodemus, KS, 12-13, transcript on file at NNHS.



Plains blew away in large clouds, the resulting dust storms deposited the fallout, sometimes several feet deep, which suffocated residents' crops and farm animals and posed significant health dangers to virtually everyone who lived in the area. Nicodemus interviewees recalled the need to hang wet sheets over doors and windows, and also covering a crib with a wet sheet to prevent a newborn child from breathing too much dust. Still others remembered the risks of dust pneumonia and having "a mouth full of grit" every time they talked.<sup>10</sup> Joetta Nevins remembered that dust storms also killed animals in the area, particularly turkeys.<sup>11</sup> Several Nicodemus residents remembered government commodities distribution, necessitated by the conditions brought on by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.<sup>12</sup>

Another government program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), gave a brief but much-needed boost to the local economy with the construction of Nicodemus Township Hall between 1937 and 1939. The WPA, one of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs, employed approximately twelve local residents during the building's construction (Figure 77).<sup>13</sup> After the hall was completed in 1939, the community used it to host dances, meetings, and elections.<sup>14</sup>

As if the dust and drought of the 1930s were not enough, Reverend Chester Williams recalled that 1939 was also a very bad year because a "cloud" of grasshoppers descended on Nicodemus. As Williams explained, "An hour later, we could look out and all of our crops was eaten, and the ground had turned brown."<sup>15</sup> These severe, almost unworldly, conditions drove many residents out of the town during the decade of the Dust Bowl, hoping to find better conditions outside of the Great American Desert, as the region most affected by the drought had long been known.<sup>16</sup> Nicodemus Township's population decreased from 344 in 1934, when the worst of the dust storms began, to a total of 222 in 1943, to 100 people in the township as a whole in 1950.<sup>17</sup> The harsh conditions of the Dust Bowl and Depression likewise reduced the town's population to only thirty-nine in 1944, with some Nicodemus families also "living in the country but not as many as formerly."<sup>18</sup> By 1950, the town of Nicodemus was home to only sixteen persons.<sup>19</sup> For those few that remained, everyday life was made somewhat easier by the arrival of residential electricity in 1950.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Billie Bates Brogden and Robert Brogden interview with Jennifer Michael, October 23, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 43, transcript on file at NNHS; L. Van Duvall interview, 12; Dabney interview, 23; and Dorothea Herndon interview with Jennifer Michael, October 12, 1998, Nicodemus, KS, 5, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>11</sup> Nevins and Petrie interview, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Howard interview, 48; C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 7; and Nevins and Petrie interview, 8.

<sup>13</sup> According to Angela Bates, all of the workers were town or township residents. A. Bates, personal communication, March 4, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 73-74.

<sup>15</sup> C. Williams and M. Williams interview, 23.

<sup>16</sup> G. Sayers and M. Sayers interview, 30; Clark interview, 18,; and Lloyd Wellington interview with HABS Oral History researchers, August 3, 1983, Nicodemus, KS, 3, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>17</sup> Craig, "Population Changes," Diana Louise Manning, *A Sketch Plan for Nicodemus, Kansas* (Master's project, Kansas State University, 1973), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Ola Wilson to "Dear Madame," May 27, 1944, KSHS; and Kathlyn Gay, *African-American Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations: The History, Customs, and Symbols Associated with Both Traditional and Contemporary Religious and Secular Events Observed by Americans of African Descent* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2007), 357.

<sup>19</sup> Horton, *Landmarks of African American History*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 98.



**Figure 30. Photograph, Washington Avenue, looking west, 1950. Reprinted from *Ebony*, October 1950.**

## ***World War II***

Based on records of enlistment and the draft, World War II appears to have had a much smaller effect on the population of Nicodemus than World War I may have had. Only four African American men from Graham County could be identified as having enlisted in the army between 1938 and 1946. One of these men, Merle C. Jones, was from Nicodemus (see below), and another, Richard L. Griffie, was likely from Nicodemus.<sup>21</sup> There were no men, white or African American, included in the April 1942 draft in Graham County.<sup>22</sup> Whether other African Americans from Nicodemus registered for the draft in other years is not clear from the available information.

Oral histories conducted in the late 1970s and late 1990s, however, revealed a larger number of men from Nicodemus who saw military service, which sometimes took them and their families away from Nicodemus for an extended period of time. Leland Clark, born in Nicodemus in 1925, recalled entering the army immediately after graduating high school in 1943. He served overseas in England, France, and Germany for three years before returning to Nicodemus.<sup>23</sup> Clark also noted that Merle Jones, Ralph Williams, Nathaniel Moore, and Calvin Sayers had served in World War II, along with others who he did not name.<sup>24</sup> Reverend Chester Williams was drafted around 1943, and served in the army for about two years, returned briefly to Nicodemus, and then left again to pursue other opportunities.<sup>25</sup>

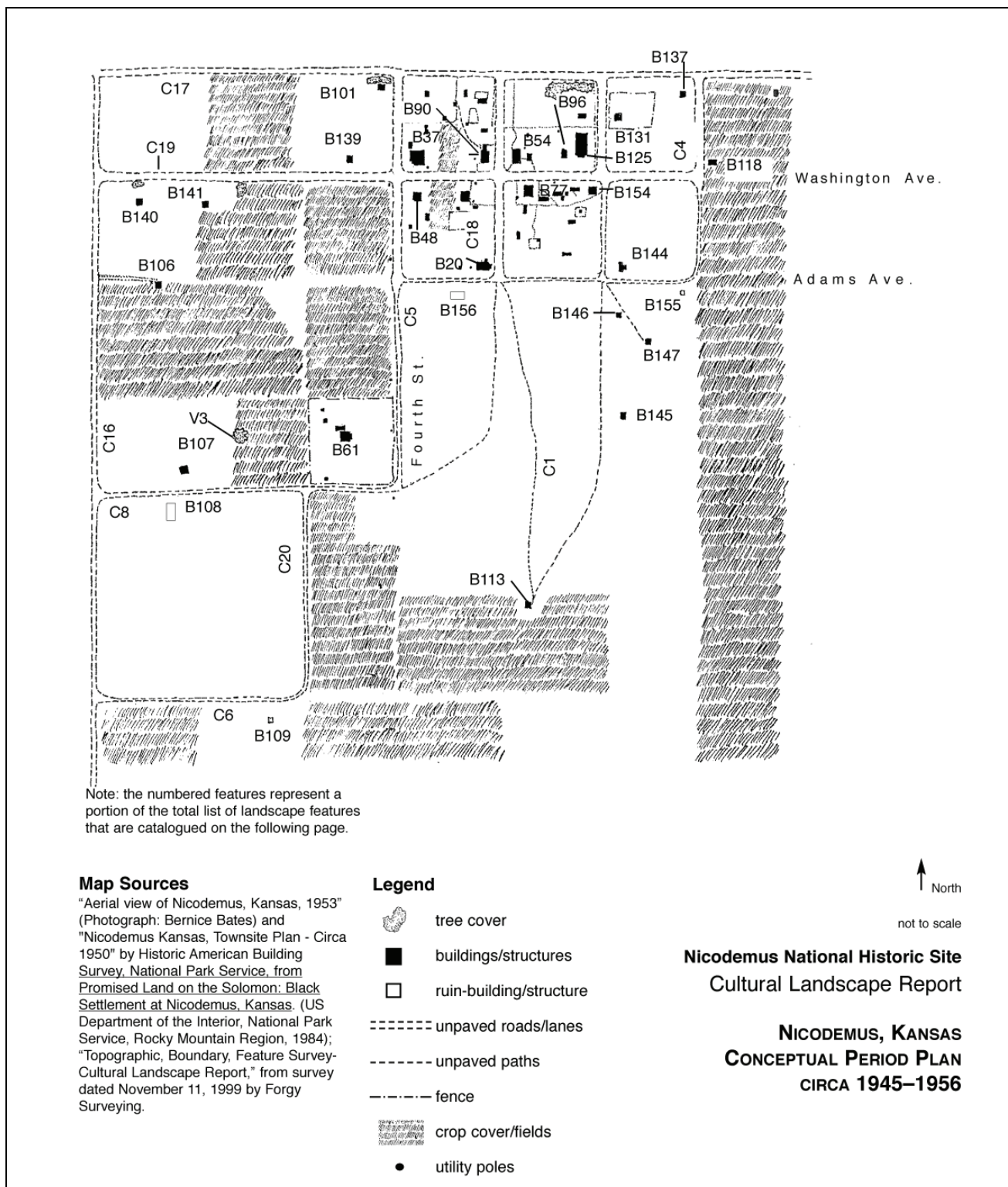
<sup>21</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, *U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946* (Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Ancestry.com, *U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942* (Provo, UT: The Generations Network, Inc., 2007). The April 1942 draft only applied to men between 45 and 64 years of age who were not already serving in the military.

<sup>23</sup> Clark interview, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Clark interview, 48.

<sup>25</sup> C. Williams and M. Williams interview, 6.



**Figure 31. Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1945–1956.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003), an adaptation of the Historic American Building Survey map. See Table 3 for a key to the features identified on this plan.

**Table 3:** Features identified on Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1945–1956.

<b>Feature No.</b>	<b>Feature Name</b>
B20	A.M.E. Church
B37	First Baptist Church
B48	Joint stock store
B54	Masonic Hall
B61	Nicodemus District No. 1 School
B77	St. Francis Hotel
B90	General store
B96	Priscilla Art Club
B101	Residence (Williams)
B106	Residence (Napue)
B107	Residence (Sayers)
B108	Residence ruin (Lacey)
B109	Residence ruin (Reverend Smith)
B113	Residence (Vaughn)
B118	Restaurant (Riley)
B125	Nicodemus Township Hall
B131	Methodist parsonage
B137	Residence (Reverend Smith)
B139	Residence (Robinson)
B140	Residence (Napue)
B141	Residence (Goins/Robinson)
B144	Residence (Scruggs)
B145	Residence (Moore)
B146	Residence (Sayers)
B147	Residence (Moore)
B154	Residence complex (Switzer)
B155	Residence ruin (Napue)
B156	Residence ruin (Lacey)
C1	Trails
C3	Adams Avenue
C4	First Street
C5	Fourth Street
C6	Jackson Avenue
C8	Madison Avenue
C16	Seventh Street
C17	South Street
C18	Third Street
C19	Washington Avenue
C20	Fifth Street
V3	Tree cover Mathew Dugout site

James Rudolph Bates remembered his father, Pearl Rudolph Bates, serving in the army before World War II and rejoining in 1942, though their family remained in Nicodemus while the elder Bates was deployed. Bates's goal in enlisting in the army was to widen the employment opportunities available to him, which ultimately led to his family moving from Nicodemus. However, his military service did not directly take his family from the area. James Bates turned eighteen during the time when the World War II draft was active, but since he had asthma, and also because he was the only son of a man already serving in the conflict, he was not drafted.<sup>26</sup>

Bernice Bates cited the draft as the reason for the loss of Nicodemus's baseball club. "A lot of boys were of age to go into the service, and, of course, that broke the ball team. And we haven't had a good ball team since."<sup>27</sup> Whether these young men left permanently or just during the war years is not entirely clear, but Guy and Juanita Redd commented on the trend toward younger generations leaving Nicodemus, particularly during and after their war service. When asked about the draft, Juanita Redd indicated, "Yeah, most of them came back. But as soon as they came back, why, they left again; they just drifted away."<sup>28</sup> Although details on the number of young men who "drifted away" are not available, the fact that these Nicodemus residents commented on this occurrence suggests that it was prevalent enough to make an impression on them.

## **Postwar Era**

In 1953, the *Hays Daily News* reported the population of Nicodemus as forty persons, in an article on the closing of the Nicodemus post office.<sup>29</sup> In 1950, Nicodemus Township had a population of only 116 persons, and the number of persons in the township hovered near that number through 1970,<sup>30</sup> so it is unsurprising that the town's population was so low. To save costs, the U.S. Post Office Department argued that the low population justified plans to close the Nicodemus post office in late 1953 and create a Star Route instead, contracting out mail delivery services, to serve the town's residents.<sup>31</sup> While Star Routes were common in rural areas with low populations, Nicodemus residents (and others from nearby towns) petitioned the governor to retain their post office, emphasizing that Nicodemus was "the Only all-Negro Post Office in Kansas."<sup>32</sup> Kansas Governor Edward F. Arn appealed in turn to the U.S. Post Office Department, asking that it reconsider the decision to close the post office, but these appeals ultimately had no effect and the Nicodemus post office closed as scheduled.<sup>33</sup> During the mid-1960s, Anetta Nevins purchased the post office building for use as a restaurant. She relocated the building from its original location on the north side of Washington Street, just east of Third Street, to one block

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<sup>26</sup> J. Bates interview, 16-21.

<sup>27</sup> B. Bates interview, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Guy Redd and Juanita Redd interview with HABS Oral History researchers, ca. 1978, Nicodemus, KS, 12, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>29</sup> "Nicodemus Fading as Town with Loss of Its Post Office," *Hays Daily News*, November 8, 1953, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>30</sup> Manning, *A Sketch Plan for Nicodemus*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> "Nicodemus Fading"; and "Unusual Kansas Town Declines," *Kansas City Star*, November 14, 1953, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>32</sup> "Negro Town Fights To Keep Post Office," *Topeka Capital*, November 26, 1953, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>33</sup> "Governor Against Closing Postoffice in Nicodemus," *Topeka Journal*, December 1, 1953, Resource Files, NPS-MRO; and "Nicodemus, Kansas Negro Oasis, Fading," *Wichita Evening Eagle*, December 3, 1953, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.



north, along the south side of Highway 24.<sup>34</sup> The building remained standing as late as 1983, when the National Park Service conducted the Historic American Building Survey of Nicodemus, but the building has since disappeared.

A key reason for population decline in Nicodemus after World War II was the wider availability of work elsewhere in the United States. By migrating to California and other far western states, former Nicodemus residents found more and better jobs available to them.<sup>35</sup> Often, one child from each family would remain in Nicodemus to run the family farm, but the others regularly left the area in search of work. Although in some cases, work was available near enough to Nicodemus that workers could return home on the weekends, not all Nicodemus residents had this option. With the exception of farmers and those who had a specialized skill needed in Nicodemus, jobs in post-World War II Nicodemus were rare.<sup>36</sup>

The lack of educational opportunities in Nicodemus may have been another contributor to the town's post-World War II population decline. Nicodemus's school district only provided an education through the eighth grade. As increasing numbers of students wanted to continue their education, Nicodemus's students attended high school in Bogue or Hill City, though some moved farther from Nicodemus to improve their educational opportunities.<sup>37</sup> At this stage of their education, Nicodemus's younger residents had the chance to participate in competitive organized sports. In some cases, these teenagers discovered an aptitude for sports that then led them farther still from Nicodemus in pursuit of opportunities. One of Nicodemus's best-known sports success stories is Veryl (Joe) Switzer, who was only the third African American to receive a scholarship to Kansas State, where he played football and ran track in the early 1950s. Switzer signed with the Green Bay Packers in 1954 and played for two years before joining the Air Force, then went on to play



**Figure 32. Photograph, Verna Napue entering Nicodemus post office, ca. 1943. Reproduced from University of Kansas, Spencer Research Library, Nicodemus Historical Society Collection.**

<sup>34</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 104.

<sup>35</sup> Michael, "Everyday Life in Nicodemus," 15. See also, for example, Chauncey Jones interview with Jennifer Michael, December 7, 1998, Denver, CO, 9, transcript on file at NNHS; and S. Moore interview, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Michael, "Everyday Life in Nicodemus," 26.

<sup>37</sup> Orval L. McDaniel, "A History of Nicodemus, Graham County, Kansas" (Master's thesis, Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1950), 238-39.

in the Canadian Football League after an injury during his military service.<sup>38</sup> By 1978, Switzer had become Dean of Minority Affairs at Kansas State, with the “job of recruiting primarily urban blacks to the university.”<sup>39</sup> In Switzer’s case, his intellectual and athletic ability took him beyond Nicodemus and opened possibilities for a future outside the town.

Despite the declining population and loss of the post office, many of Nicodemus’s citizens continued to believe that the town had a viable economic future. In fact, the town began to experience a resurgence as early as the late 1950s. Prior to 1958, US 24 ran three miles north of Nicodemus and connected Stockton to Bogue. In 1958, the relocation of this highway brought more traffic and attention to the town.<sup>40</sup> In the early 1970s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) tentatively approved construction of a housing project for Nicodemus. At the time, about 100 people (approximately thirty-three families) resided in Nicodemus. In part, the impetus behind the housing project stemmed from the desire of sixteen more families to return to Nicodemus.<sup>41</sup> The project evolved into a housing project for elderly residents, as it was mainly older people who wanted to return to the town, but in 1974, a delay in approval of funding for the housing project caused some Nicodemus residents to question whether discrimination was involved.<sup>42</sup> By 1975, the housing project was under construction, and plans were already in the works for an additional application for funds to expand.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Humble K-State Sports Star Given Brotherhood Citation,” *Lawrence Journal-World*, February 16, 1954, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 8, KSHS; “Packers Say Switzer Signs For Good First-Year Salary,” *Topeka Capital*, February 25, 1954, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 8, KSHS; and Gib Twyman, “Switzer is Synonymous with Kansas State, Competitive Spirit,” *Hill City Times*, April 29, 1982, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>39</sup> Chuck Offenburger, “Nicodemus: A Dream that Would not Die,” *Des Moines Sunday Register*, February 12, 1978, KSHS.

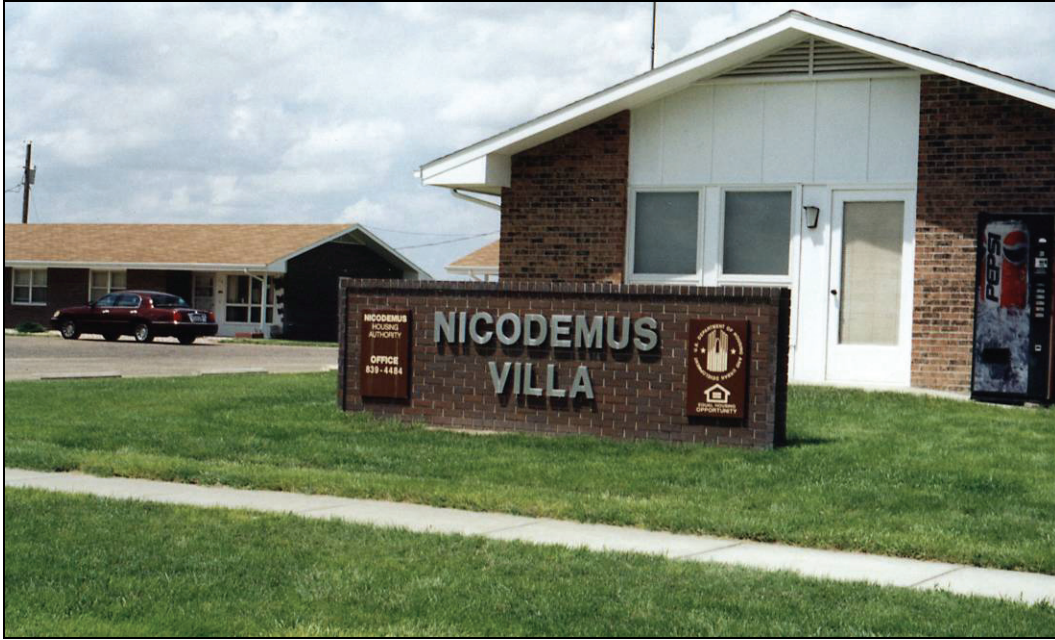
<sup>40</sup> “Nicodemus’s Future Brightens,” *Topeka Capital*, May 11, 1958, Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, KS.

<sup>41</sup> “Spirits on Rise in Nicodemus,” *The Wichita Eagle and The Beacon*, March 24, 1971, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries; and “Nicodemus Residents Hopeful: Seeks Urban Renewal?” *Norton Telegram*, July 6, 1971, in *Graham County Clippings*, [Volume 2], KSHS.

<sup>42</sup> “Black Town Cries ‘Discrimination’ in HUD Project Snag,” *Wichita Eagle*, June 19, 1974, in *Graham County Clippings*, [Volume 2], KSHS. See also “Town’s Hope in Its Young, Elderly,” *Kansas City Star*, May 26, 1974, in *Graham County Clippings*, [Volume 2], KSHS.

<sup>43</sup> “Only All-Black Community in Kansas Building Anew,” *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, October 5, 1975, in *Graham County Clippings*, [Volume 2], KSHS. For additional information on this housing project, please see the Nicodemus Villa section, below.





**Figure 33. The “Villa,” date unknown. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**

## ***Farming***

After the disastrous years of the Dust Bowl and Depression, the few Nicodemus farmers who remained in the area saw somewhat improved agricultural conditions during the war and the postwar period. In 1940, with record snowfall early in the year, farm production increased dramatically in comparison with previous years, though weather conditions were essentially normal for the remainder of the year. Bumper crops marked the years of World War II, despite fluctuating weather conditions between 1941 and 1945, including record-breaking flooding and high summer temperatures, sometimes both in the same year.<sup>44</sup> The flooding in this decade, however, paled in comparison to the Great Flood of 1951, which caused heavy flooding throughout the entire state of Kansas. Communities near rivers, like Nicodemus, were particularly vulnerable, as nearly all of the rivers in Kansas overflowed their bounds that year, flooding fields that surrounded the rivers. A fairly dry year followed in 1952 and severe drought from 1953 to 1955.<sup>45</sup> Climatic conditions for the years after 1955 have not been found in the scope of this research, with the exception of sporadic references to poor conditions throughout the time period, not specific to any single year, throughout oral history interviews conducted in the late 1970s and late 1990s.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ernest B. Bader, “Kansas: 1940-1945,” in *Kansas: The First Century*, John D. Bright, ed., 2 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1956), 2:444, 455.

<sup>45</sup> John D. Bright, “Kansas at Mid-Twentieth Century,” in Bright, *Kansas*, 2:487, 494-95.

<sup>46</sup> Oral history interviews conducted by HABS Oral History researchers in the late 1970s and Jennifer Michael in the late 1990s are on file at NNHS.

Statewide wheat crop yields often reflected the changing climatic and other conditions. In 1942, Kansas produced more than 200 million bushels of wheat. Production dropped to 144 million bushels in 1943, then increased to 187 million in 1944 and nearly 208 million in 1945.<sup>47</sup> The highest wheat crop yield for the state (to that date) came in 1947, with 287 million bushels, followed by a new record of 306 million bushels in 1952.<sup>48</sup> Although specific figures for Nicodemus are not available, its crop yields likely followed state trends.

By 1949, absentee white landowners controlled almost two-thirds of the land in Nicodemus Township.<sup>49</sup> The 1949 farm directory for Graham County lists only two farmers with their post office at Nicodemus, but as many as thirty-six of the individuals listed in the farm directory had farms within the township.<sup>50</sup> By 1968, fifteen years after the Nicodemus post office closed, all of Nicodemus's farmers (approximately sixteen) received their mail at Bogue. Four rented their farmland, while the rest owned the land that they worked.<sup>51</sup> The directories do not indicate the race of these farmers, though many of the names are recognizable as African American family names from Nicodemus.

## Commerce

As discussed previously, business in Nicodemus dwindled prior to 1929. Commerce fared little better after 1929. Dorothea Herndon remembered her family running a small store throughout the 1930s that also included a service station and restaurant.<sup>52</sup> In 1939, a Federal Writer's Project researcher found a single tavern in Nicodemus and also noted that electricity was reserved for the churches, while the nearest telephone was in Bogue.<sup>53</sup> By about 1950, when Orval McDaniel completed his thesis on the history of Nicodemus, there were only two businesses in Nicodemus—a café that opened only on Sundays, and a repair business that fixed both motor vehicles and small electronics.<sup>54</sup> By 1973, all commercial activity had disappeared, at least for a time, in Nicodemus.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bader, "Kansas: 1940-1945," 2: 455.

<sup>48</sup> Parrish, "Kansas Agriculture after 1930," in Bright, *Kansas*, 2:151.

<sup>49</sup> Van B. Shaw, "Nicodemus, Kansas: A Study in Isolation" (PhD. diss., University of Missouri, 1951), 121.

<sup>50</sup> *Farm Directory, Graham County, Kansas, 1949* (Mitchell, SD: Dakota Directory Services, 1949). The imprecise number of farmers is because the Solomon River serves as the southern boundary of Nicodemus township, and some farmers listed in the southern line of sections of Nicodemus township might have been farming land in northern Bogue township.

<sup>51</sup> *Farm Directory, Graham County, Kansas, 1968* (Algona, IA: Directory Service Company, 1968). The farm directory for this year specifies the townships in which each farmer operated.

<sup>52</sup> Herndon interview, 5-8.

<sup>53</sup> Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 176-77.

<sup>54</sup> McDaniel, "History of Nicodemus," 83.

<sup>55</sup> Manning, *Sketch Plan*, 23, 26.



**Figure 34. Photograph, Henries gas station, 1943. Reproduced from University of Kansas, Spencer Research Library, Nicodemus Historical Society Collection.**



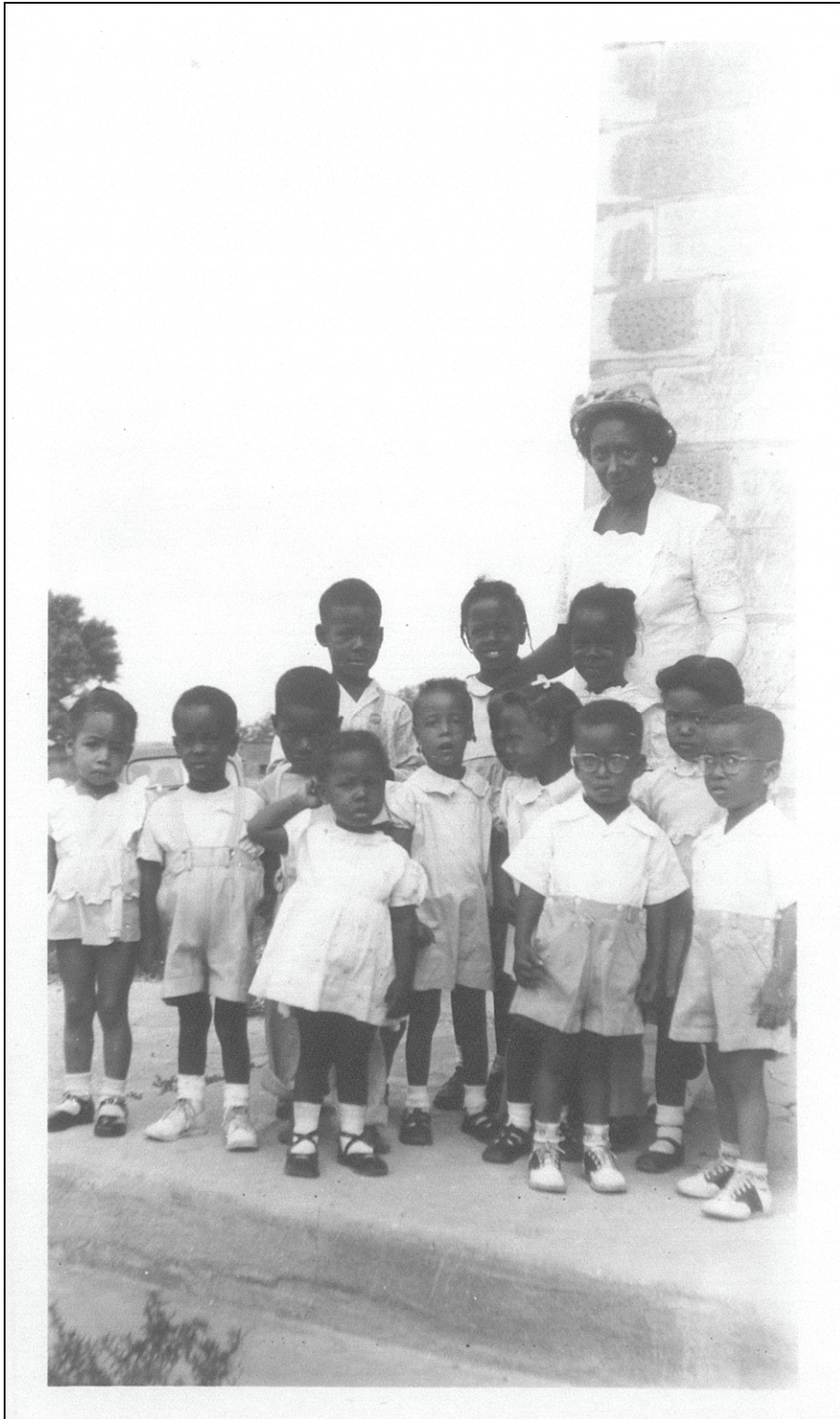


**Figure 35. Bird's eye photographic view of Nicodemus townsite, 1952. From the private collection of Bernice Bates.**

## ***Social and Cultural Life***

Economic and environmental hardships dominated the lives of Nicodemus residents through much of the 1930s and 1940s. In the midst of those challenges, they sought solace and occasional entertainments through participation in their church congregations, fraternal orders, and traditional cultural activities. While most African American fraternal organizations were on the decline nation-wide during the mid-twentieth century, two fraternal organizations, the Prince Hall Masons and the Eastern Star Lodge, still maintained significant roles in the Nicodemus community into the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> New social clubs, most notably the Priscilla Art Club, took on some the mutual-aid activities that had been performed by fraternal orders earlier in the century. The importance and frequency of Emancipation Day celebrations were also diminishing across most of the country, but the event continued to be an important date on the Nicodemus calendar.

<sup>56</sup> Fahey, "Colored Knights of Pythias," 169; Nevins and Petrie interview, 20; C. Bates interview, 38; and Herndon interview, 13.



**Figure 36. Photograph Sunday school class, 1949. Reprinted from Van B. Shaw, "Nicodemus, Kansas: A Study in Isolation," Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, 1951. Available at Kansas State University.**

According to historian David Beito, “By the 1930s, fraternal societies had entered a period of decline from which they never recovered. While this trend was caused by several factors, including increased competition from commercial insurance and the lure of competing forms of entertainment, such as radio and movies, it was fundamentally due to a transformation in the nature of fraternalism,” the ideals of which were no longer valued to the extent they had been previously.<sup>57</sup> Beginning in the Progressive Era and expanded extensively during the Depression, government-run social services eliminated the need for many of the functions mutual aid societies had long supplied. In Nicodemus, membership in the Knights of Pythias, Odd Fellows, Households of Ruth, and Court of Calanthe’s fraternal lodges declined significantly or ended altogether, while the Prince Hall Masons and the Eastern Star Lodge continued to function in their traditional manner and remained significant in the lives of community members.

As in earlier decades, these two Masonic lodges gave their members a sense of belonging and identification with African-American Freemasons nationwide, as well as providing utilitarian benefits such as affordable insurance policies and assistance in paying for funerals.<sup>58</sup> Beito points out that Freemasons shared “a desire for fraternity, secrecy, and ritual; but an important element of the commitment to the lodge was a pledge of mutual aid to fellow members in times of need.”<sup>59</sup> Perhaps because of the Freemasons bond of secrecy, former and current Nicodemus residents participating in oral history interviews shared few specific details about Freemason activities of the town’s lodges, other than mentioning that family members or relatives had been participants. However, most had heard of the community social activities—dances, meetings, and elections—held in the Masonic Hall during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>60</sup> When the Nicodemus Township Hall was completed in 1939, the town shifted most of the social activities to the new building.

During this period, several new social clubs emerged in Nicodemus. The membership requirements and organizational principals of the social clubs were less formal than the older fraternal societies, but the clubs continued the mutual-aid tradition of the older orders by providing individual uplift and charitable work for community members.<sup>61</sup> Of particular note was a women’s organization called the Priscilla Art Club. L’Ray Scott recalled that this organization began during World War II and that the members rolled bandages as their first activity.<sup>62</sup> Several women who had lived in Nicodemus during the middle decades of the twentieth century remembered the Priscilla Art Club as one in which the members worked on crafts and sold some of them to raise money. The money was then used to put up a building in which the club could meet, which some women remembered as having been an old schoolhouse that was moved into the town for the club’s use.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Beito, “From Mutual Aid to Welfare State.”

<sup>58</sup> David T. Beito, “Thy Brother’s Keeper: The Mutual Aid Tradition of American Fraternal Orders,” *Policy Review* 70 (Fall 1994): 59.

<sup>59</sup> Beito, “Thy Brother’s Keeper,” 55.

<sup>60</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 73-74.

<sup>61</sup> Michael, “Everyday Life in Nicodemus,” 23.

<sup>62</sup> Scott interview, 50.

<sup>63</sup> Herndon interview, 13; O. Switzer interview, September 14, 1998, 18-19; E. Van Duvall interview, 22-23; and C. Bates interview, 32-38. See also C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 38.





**Figure 37. Photograph, Masonic Hall, 1943. Reprinted from William J. Belleau, *The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas* (Hays, KS: [s.n.], 1943).**

In a 1998 oral history interview, Charlesetta Williams Bates recalled her mother's activities in the Wednesday meetings of the Priscilla Art Club during the 1930s:

They'd have quilting rods big and long as this table. And all the women would set around—they'd get their [quilting] lesson first. And then I remember . . . they'd take a little lunch or something and share. And then they'd all get around and quilt. They would be sewing these little bitty stitches on the quilt. . . And each one would be moving different places and sewing.

Each one would make a block with their name on it. And put it together like that. . . . So they'd each make a block and then the quilt would be for somebody in the [community].<sup>64</sup>

Club members then raffled off the quilts to raise money for a particular cause or presented them to community members as gifts for graduations, marriages, and the like.

The fraternal orders and social clubs mentioned above were primarily adult organizations, although children would attend the sponsored public events. Nicodemus youth gained their own organization in approximately 1940, when Blanche White established and ran the town's first 4H Club. Thereafter, White devoted herself "to teaching members of the club—male and female—

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<sup>64</sup> C. Bates interview, 33, 37.



how to raise and care for animals, raise crops, garden, prepare meals, and beautify their townsite.”<sup>65</sup> The 4H Club was open to youth from the ages of about eight to eighteen years old, and provided them with social connections and practical skills, particularly helpful for those who planned to work on the family farm.

## **Religion**

During the nineteenth century and early-twentieth centuries, the mutual aid organizations of black communities (whether fraternal orders or social clubs) shared strong spiritual and public service connections with black churches. In addition to providing their members with similar benefits, including charity, emotional support, social activities, and a sense of belonging, black churches and fraternal/social organizations both served as “resources for black autonomy and barricades against white racism.”<sup>66</sup> These resources were obviously important for African Americans while they toiled in bondage, during the upheavals of the Civil War, and through Reconstruction. Black churches and aid societies remained critical sources of support for black men and women as they negotiated the changing racial landscape of twentieth-century America. It was likewise in Nicodemus, where church participation and religious faith continued to play an essential role in the lives of Nicodemus residents and their relatives. As in earlier decades, the churches and religion were central to important rites of passage from birth until death. Each baptism, wedding, and memorial service brought the wider community together and strengthened family bonds, one of the essential elements that helped keep Nicodemus a vibrant town into the twenty-first century.

Though only the First Baptist Church stayed active during this time period, it had always been the church attended by much of Nicodemus’s population. The Baptist congregation remained strong enough that during the 1970s, the church raised enough money and acquired enough volunteer labor to construct a new \$30,000 church.<sup>67</sup> Despite strong Baptist membership in Nicodemus, not all of the churchgoers in Nicodemus were adherents to that faith. Some people went to other towns to attend services held by other denominations, including Catholic and Jehovah’s Witness.<sup>68</sup>

Church attendance continued to be a major social event in residents’ lives during the postwar years, as Nicodemus filled with people from the surrounding township on Sundays, during and after services at the First Baptist Church. After services, people remained in the town to socialize with their friends and family, eating meals prepared by one of the congregation or at a restaurant, when Nicodemus still had restaurants to patronize.<sup>69</sup> The church itself also organized entertainment, including plays and a yearly Christmas program.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 75.

<sup>66</sup> David G. Hackett, “The Prince Hall Masons and the African American Church: The Labors of Grand Master and Bishop James Walker Hood, 1831-1918,” *Church History* 69 (December 2000): 778.

<sup>67</sup> Errol Wuertz, “Nicodemus Reborn,” *Kansas!* 4 (1977): 18; and Aileen Mallory, “Nicodemus: Born Again Christian Town,” *Kanshistique* 5, no. 5 (September 1979): 5. See also the section on the New First Baptist Church, above.

<sup>68</sup> Michael, “Everyday Life in Nicodemus,” 25. See also, for example, B. Brogden and R. Brogden interview, 10; and L’Ray Scott interview with Jennifer Michael, November 1, 1998, Tacoma, WA, 22, 31, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>69</sup> Dabney interview, 30; and Nevins and Petrie interview, 21.

<sup>70</sup> C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 37.

## Recreation and Leisure Activities

Many Nicodemus residents remembered gathering in each other's homes to listen to the radio, whether they listened to boxing matches, programs like "Amos 'n' Andy," or music.<sup>71</sup> Billie Brogden remembered that the radios were run on batteries and the "battery would kind of go down. You'd hear good, and then pretty soon it'd be barely—and pretty soon you couldn't hear it at all." Her husband, Robert Brogden, added, "they had to shut it off and let it build back up a few minutes."<sup>72</sup> Although the range of social activities in Nicodemus in this era was likely smaller than that of a bigger town or a city, most Nicodemus residents fondly remembered those activities that were available.

Sports, particularly baseball, continued to be a common pastime, though the organized Nicodemus team waned in this era. Bernice Bates believed that the team had all but stopped playing during World War II, when many of the town's eligible players were drafted. But Bates's niece, Sharyn Alexander, recalled her father, Buddy Alexander, playing on a Nicodemus baseball team in the 1950s. Virgil Robinson pitched for this team after World War II. The team played local teams from towns like Stockton, Hill City, and Plainville. Robinson remembered that after he moved to Denver, the team asked him to come back to Nicodemus to continue to play, even though the team no longer was a tournament-winning team. Other members of the team in this era included Clarence Sayers (catcher), Weyman Williams (first baseman?), Harold Switzer (first baseman?), Don Moore (outfield), Leatrice Napue (no position given), and LeeEverett Switzer (sometimes catcher). Pearl Rudolph Bates may also have played



**Figure 38. The entrance to the Priscilla Art Club.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).

<sup>71</sup> V. Robinson and J. Robinson interview, 24; and C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 19.

<sup>72</sup> B. Brogden and R. Brogden interview, 44.

third base for Nicodemus during this time frame, and his son, James Rudolph Bates, recalled that some members of the Kansas City Monarchs worked in Nicodemus during the summers so that they could play on the Nicodemus team.<sup>73</sup>

Nicodemus area residents could travel to Bogue to watch movies projected on the outside of the grocery store, or they could attend dinners and dances in Nicodemus.<sup>74</sup> The dances were often referred to as “pay parties,” as those who attended paid a fee for these events at the Township Hall. Most of the Nicodemus residents interviewed in 1998 by Jennifer Michael, an ethnographer studying folk life in Nicodemus, recalled that music was played on a wind-up record player, but some older residents also recalled dances with live bands playing the music.<sup>75</sup> In addition to dances at the Township Hall, Leatrice Napue, a former resident, “recall[ed] roller-skating and attending fish fries, cake walks and other social events at the town hall. One night, Omaha jazz musician Preston Love performed at a dance there. ‘About every Saturday night we had something going on here,’ said Napue.”<sup>76</sup> Roller skating was a popular memory among those who grew up in Nicodemus during this time period. Once a week, a man from Bogue would bring roller skates that clipped onto shoes to Nicodemus, and the children could rent the skates and skate in the Township Hall.<sup>77</sup>

### ***Emancipation Day/Homecoming Celebration***

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Emancipation Day celebrations had diminished in importance or ceased altogether in many parts of the county, as other social and cultural attractions, especially in urban areas, prompted African Americans to leave behind some traditional activities that they no longer viewed as meaningful or engaging. Nonetheless, Nicodemus continued to celebrate Emancipation Day, though the festivities, along with the name of the event, changed over time. In 1940, the *Hill City Times* remarked

that usually the Nicodemus celebration is well attended by politicians seeking county offices at the primary election. This year, for the first time in many years, there is not a county contest on either ticket for primary voters. The only contests are in districts or townships. But don’t get the idea that the Emancipation Day celebration will be a flop just because of no politics. Oh, my no.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> B. Bates interview, 5, 8; V. Robinson and J. Robinson interview, 21; and J. Bates interview, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Moore and Carter interview, 30.

<sup>75</sup> Howard interview, 57; C. Bates interview, 55; and C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 20-21.

<sup>76</sup> Niz Proskocil, “Kansas Roots,” *World Herald* (Omaha, NE), August 4, 2000, Resource Files, NPS-MRO. The cake walk originated from an African American dance form popular beginning in the 1850s, which parodied the dance styles of slave-owners and white high society. For more background on this dance form, see Robin Marie Wilson, “Diasporic Dance,” in *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, ed. Colin A. Palmer, vol. 2, C-F (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 574; and Sally Sommer, “Social Dance,” in *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, ed. Colin A. Palmer, vol. 5, Q-Z (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 2096-97.

<sup>77</sup> C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 27; Howard interview, 57-58; and V. Robinson and J. Robinson interview, 27-28.

<sup>78</sup> “Nicodemus Celebration: Annual Event Will Be Held for the 53rd Time,” *Hill City Times*, July 25, 1940, typescript, Resource Files, NNHS.

# **52nd EMANCIPATION Day Celebration NICODEMUS, KANSAS JULY 31-AUGUST 1, 1939**

AS USUAL THE CELEBRATION WILL BE HELD IN THE SCRUGGS GROVE ONE MILE ~~SOUTHWEST~~  
OF TOWN.

**MASTER OF CEREMONIES . . . . . EARL ALEXANDER**

## **ENTERTAINMENT**

There will be Home Shoe Pitching each day. A purse will be given if you enter, for first and second place winners. All wishing to enter, see H. H. Clark for further information.

BAND MUSIC, Hill City High School.

### **BASEBALL GAMES**

The teams that have entered: Hutchinson Colored Monarch, Norton League, Bogue, WaKeeney, Nicodemus Old Hickory.

**3 - BIG DAYS - 3**

JULY 30-31 and AUGUST 1

Fast, Classy Games Each Day.

### **BOXING MATCHES**

Three Matches Each Day

McCurdy and Jackson and others.

Members of the Golden Glove Contest.

### **PLATFORM DANCE EVERY AFTERNOON AND EVENING**

#### **FLOOR SHOW BY DIXIE MELODY ENTERTAINERS**

(Mixed Group of Ten Colored Dancers) WILL BE GIVEN AUGUST 1 AT 1 p. m.

**SPEAKERS OF THE DAY - AUGUST 1** Jerry Driscoll, Russell, Edward J. Kirchner, Topeka, Ex Senator  
Simon J. Fishman, Tribune

**COMMITTEES** Jerry Scruggs, Roy Vandyke, **PROGRAM** Edna R. Scruggs, **BASEBALL GAMES** Andrew Alexander, **DANCE MANAGER**,  
C. W. Wilson, **PRAYER** led by Rev. M. H. Houston.

For Further Information, write or see R. B. SCRUGGS or J. D. WILSON.

Figure 39. Emancipation Day announcement, 1939. Unknown source.



The festivities planned for 1940 included speakers, dancing, baseball, and horseshoe pitching.<sup>79</sup> Ruth Dobson remembered an overabundance of food: “fried chicken, chicken sandwiches, and pies, homemade ice cream,” and also “horse racing, foot racing, horseshoes, baseball, magicians, [and] carnival [rides].”<sup>80</sup> Clarence Sayers remembered a need to hold his mother’s hand because of the crowds that attended the event.<sup>81</sup> Charlesetta Bates recalled two platforms for dancing, one for blacks and one for whites, from the Emancipation Day celebrations of her youth, but also noted that in later years, there was a single, shared dance platform.<sup>82</sup>

In 1946, the event’s organization committee renamed the Emancipation Day celebration, calling it the Nicodemus Annual Homecoming Celebration. After 1950, the celebration included a reunion theme, while maintaining its meaning as cultural commemoration. These changes were, in one sense, in keeping with the long tradition of Emancipation Day and Freedom Day festivals dating to the antebellum period. That is, throughout the country and in Nicodemus as well, the celebration evolved over time to fit the needs and circumstances of the black community at any particular juncture. Times had changed in Nicodemus, and the external structure of the Emancipation Day celebration was altered to reflect that reality.



**Figure 40.** Ca. 1940s photograph of Scruggs’s Grove. Reprinted from *Nicodemus News Review*, Summer 1996.

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<sup>79</sup> “Nicodemus Celebration.”

<sup>80</sup> Dobson, Scroggins, and Napue interview, 8.

<sup>81</sup> C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 12.

<sup>82</sup> C. Bates interview, 78.

From 1895 to 1950, the celebration took place in Scruggs Grove, southwest of the Nicodemus townsite.<sup>83</sup> After R. B. Scruggs's death, the land he owned was sold and the trees were removed. The festivities moved to the Nicodemus townsite itself, and longtime residents recalled that many of the more carnival-like elements, including food stands and carnival rides, ceased to be a part of the celebration.<sup>84</sup> In 1955, the *Hays Daily News* remarked on this change: "They did things with more verve and abandon back in the old days, when Scruggs Grove outside the town was the traditional meeting place."<sup>85</sup> In 1959, Kittie Dale, too, commented on the earlier celebration of Emancipation Day, remarking that "Emancipation Day is a memory fondly recalled, but perhaps not beyond reviving."<sup>86</sup> At some point after the move from Scruggs Grove, Township Hall became the center of Emancipation Day/Homecoming festivities.<sup>87</sup>

By 1965, Homecoming in Nicodemus included "a dance, a softball game, church services, a picnic, and earlier, some beer supplied by the American Legion Post. But mostly there was just talk among residents of the township in Northeast Graham County and a handful of persons who had journeyed back to what they call home."<sup>88</sup> One of the highlights of that year's Homecoming was a visit to the Mount Olive Cemetery near Bogue. Newspaper reports of the event focused more on the history of the community than large celebrations.<sup>89</sup> L'Ray Scott, a brief resident of Nicodemus who returned regularly for Homecoming, referred to the event as "a giant family and community reunion."<sup>90</sup>

Although the celebration had become more subdued in comparison to earlier years, its strength to attract a crowd was not diminished. In 1977, Nicodemus's 100th birthday drew a large crowd of past and present residents for a combined Homecoming and birthday celebration. Just before the celebration, which spanned four days, the *Kansas City Kansan* noted that up to 1,000 African Americans had attended Homecoming in past years and that the crowd for 1977 was expected to be larger. Events included dances, musical performances, a tour of the recently completed Nicodemus Villa, a parade, a picnic, and church services at the incomplete New First Baptist Church.<sup>91</sup> Later reports noted that as many as 750 people attended the celebration, which emphasized Homecoming festivities more than the 100th birthday celebration.<sup>92</sup>

The continued popularity of Nicodemus Emancipation Day celebrations, particularly among those former residents and descendants who returned year after year, speaks to the

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<sup>83</sup> "The History of Nicodemus: Black Pioneering In the Promised Land," conference pamphlet, July 27 and 28, 1979, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>84</sup> Michael, "Everyday Life in Nicodemus," 24.

<sup>85</sup> "Everyone Wants to Write bout Nicodemus, Only All-Negro Community in the State," *Hays Daily News*, July 31, 1955, in *Graham County Clippings*, Volume 1, KSHS.

<sup>86</sup> Kittie Dale, "Nicodemus' Big Days Are Just a Memory Now," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, August 2, 1959, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>87</sup> B. Bates interview, 12.

<sup>88</sup> James J. Fisher, "Memories Keep a Kansas Town Alive," *Kansas City Times*, August 2, 1965, Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, KS.

<sup>89</sup> Fisher, "Memories Keep a Kansas Town Alive."

<sup>90</sup> Scott interview, 20.

<sup>91</sup> "Nicodemus Population Swells for Celebration," *Kansas City Kansan*, July 27, 1977, in *Graham County Clippings*, [Volume 2], KSHS; Paul Mobiley, "Legendary Nicodemus to Celebrate 100th birthday," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 24, 1977, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Dashjian, "Nicodemus Salutes Past and Future," *Hays Daily News*, July 31, 1977, Resource Files, NPS-MRO. See also Wayne Slater, "Descendants Celebrate Nicodemus Centennial," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, July 31, 1977, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

enduring strength of family connections in the community's history. Angela Bates explained that the "large, extended multi-family, family [was] much greater than the physical remains of Nicodemus."<sup>93</sup> Family, as Bates used it here, did not mean simply immediate family, but "encompasses everyone back to our ancestors—whether we are related to them or not." While the Emancipation celebrations are "the catalyst" that brings the disparate relatives together, the real connection was already present in their family bonds.<sup>94</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Though Nicodemus's population and economy continued to decrease through the years of the mid-twentieth century, the remaining residents maintained their sense of community through social events and religious participation. The closing of the post office echoed the decline of Nicodemus, while the construction of the Nicodemus Villa pointed to a possible resurgence. The Emancipation Day celebration, renamed "Homecoming," gave current and former Nicodemus residents, as well as many descendants who had scattered throughout the United States, the opportunity to gather together annually to remember and rejoice in the town's and the community's more vibrant past. Today, the celebration continues to commemorate Nicodemus's importance as an African American community in the past, present, and future.

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<sup>93</sup> Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011

<sup>94</sup> Angela Bates, personal communication with Paul Sadin, March 29, 2011.





## Chapter 7: Returning to Nicodemus (1970s-present)

### Introduction

By the 1970s, although the population of Nicodemus had dropped lower than ever before, the community's sense of identity and pride in its history still flourished. Descendants of Nicodemus's families returned to the town either permanently or for Emancipation Day events and played a role in the community's farming endeavors, social activities, and the designation of Nicodemus first as a National Historic Landmark and later as a National Historic Site.

In 1980, Lois Alexander stated that "counting children, dogs and lost cats, the population [of Nicodemus] is back up to 100."<sup>1</sup> By 1981, the town's population was around eighty persons.<sup>2</sup> When newspapers reported population figures for Nicodemus for the remainder of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the total population hovered between about fifty-five and seventy-five, but by 1997, the papers rarely reported a population of greater than thirty for Nicodemus, a trend that continued as late as 2006.<sup>3</sup>

The predominant reason given for the dwindling population of Nicodemus was the absence of job opportunities in the area. Vance Robinson, a former Nicodemus resident who had moved to Denver, cited job opportunities as his chief reason for leaving the area after high school.<sup>4</sup>

One author characterized Nicodemus during the 1980s as "a retirement home for black families."<sup>5</sup> Charlesetta Bates, born in Nicodemus in 1929, and her husband returned to Nicodemus from the Los Angeles area after their children were grown and married, and after they had both retired. Charlesetta's health issues, exacerbated by pollution in California, were also a factor in bringing her and her husband back to Nicodemus, and Clarence and Yvonne Sayers moved back to Nicodemus for similar reasons. The Sayers family also returned to the area

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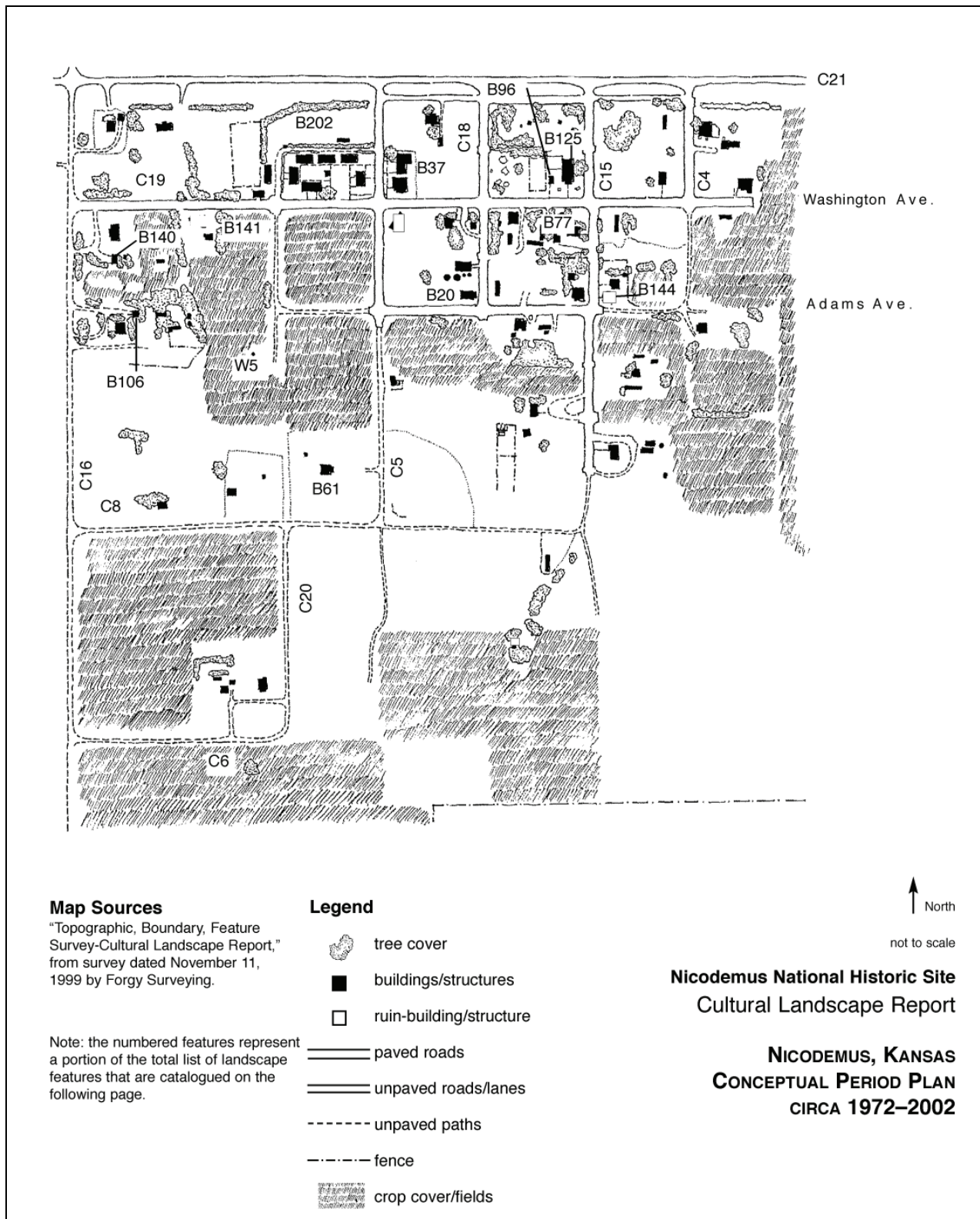
<sup>1</sup> Richard H. Growald, "Nicodemus: The Kansas Town that Started on a Youthful Plunge Will Live On in Retirement," *Hutchinson News*, April 13, 1980, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>2</sup> Cindy Schwartz, "Historic Black Town Seeks to Incorporate," *Hutchinson News*, March 4, 1981, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 10, KSHS.

<sup>3</sup> Jack McNeely, "Town of Nicodemus is Making a Comeback," *Hill City Times*, September 1, 1983, Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, KS; Deborah Frazier, "Tiny, Fading Kansas Prairie Town Was Home to Former Slaves," *Houston Chronicle*, January 27, 1985, Resource Files, NPS-MRO; and Jan Biles, "Looking to Survive," *Hutchinson News*, June 7, 1992, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; Beccy Tanner, "Historic Nicodemus Awaits the Next Move," *Wichita Eagle*, February 17, 1997, Resource Files, NPS-MRO; Bill Blankenship, "Nicodemus: The Graying of an All-Black Town," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, February 28, 1999, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; Joy Leiker, "Historian Chronicles Nicodemus," *Hays Daily News*, April 15, 2001, Resource Files, NPS-MRO; Beccy Tanner, "Nicodemus is Placed on National Diversity List," *Wichita Eagle*, May 22, 2005, Resource Files, NNHS; Michael Wilson, "A Legacy of Freedom is Teetering with Age," *New York Times*, July 3, 2005; Malcolm Garcia, "For Black Visionaries, Site Still Place of Promise," *Kansas City Star*, November 27, 2005, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; and Amy Wilson and Beccy Tanner, "Nicodemus: Adventure, Opportunity, Destiny," *Wichita Eagle*, July 30, 2006, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>4</sup> Vance Robinson interview with Jennifer Michael, December 8, 1998, Denver, CO, 7, transcript on file at NNHS.

<sup>5</sup> John W. Ravage, *Black Pioneers: Images of the Black Experience on the North American Frontier* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997), 102.



**Figure 41. Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1972–2002.** Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003) . See Table 4 for a key to the features identified on this plan.

**Table 4:** Features identified on Nicodemus, Kansas, Conceptual Period Plan, ca. 1972–2002.

Feature No.	Feature Name
B20	A.M.E. Church
B37	First Baptist Church
B61	Nicodemus District No. 1 School
B77	St. Francis Hotel
B96	Priscilla Art Club
B106	Residence (Napue)
B125	Nicodemus Township Hall
B140	Residence (Napue)
B141	Residence ruin (Goins/Robinson)
B144	Residence (Jerry Scruggs)
B202	Villa (HUD housing)
C4	First Street
C5	Fourth Street
C6	Jackson Avenue
C8	Madison Avenue
C15	Second Street
C16	Seventy Street
C18	Third Street
C19	Washington Avenue
C20	Fifth Street
C21	Highway 24
W5	Water tower

because of long-standing family ties to Nicodemus.<sup>6</sup> Overall, however, even with people returning to live in Nicodemus, the population of Nicodemus during the past thirty years has dwindled slowly. There are very few town lots available for sale, as many former residents and others with ties to Nicodemus have retained their ownership of property in the town.

## Commerce

By the later 1970s, few commercial ventures persisted in Nicodemus. Ernestine Van Duvall moved her restaurant, “Ernestine’s Barbeque,” from Pasadena, California, to Nicodemus in 1975 and continued to run this business until 1985.<sup>7</sup> As Van Duvall explained, “It got too big, and I just—it just kept growing till it outgrew me, and I just had to quit.”<sup>8</sup> While Van Duvall came back to serve food during the Emancipation Day festivities, she did not remain in Nicodemus for more than a single weekend at a time.<sup>9</sup> In 2002, Angela Bates, Van Duvall’s niece, opened a restaurant in Bogue. The Bogue restaurant closed after one year, but Bates

<sup>6</sup> C. Bates interview, 15; and C. Sayers and Y. Sayers interview, 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> E. Van Duvall interview, 16; and Marti Attoun, “The Spirit of Nicodemus,” *American Profile* (January 26, 2003), <http://www.americanprofile.com/article/2912.html>.

<sup>8</sup> E. Van Duvall interview, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Doug Weller, “Ernestine Comes to Visit,” *Hays Daily News*, July 31, 1986, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

reopened the enterprise in the Nicodemus Priscilla Arts Club building, where it served customers from 2003 to 2005.<sup>10</sup> In 2000, the Nicodemus Livery Company was established to provide horse drawn wagon history tours of Nicodemus and educational programs to tourists, school groups, and other organizations.<sup>11</sup> The Livery Company was still in operation as of 2011.

## **Farming**

While commercial activities in Nicodemus were few and far between from the 1970s onward, farming, primarily wheat crops, remained a key part of the town's financial well being, at least for individual farmers. Some farmers faced difficult times in the early 1980s, dealing with foreclosures and the sale of their land and equipment at auction.<sup>12</sup> In the early 1990s, brothers Gary and Dale Alexander farmed 160 acres, but both men held full-time jobs outside of Nicodemus and farmed only part-time.<sup>13</sup> Veryl Switzer, one of Nicodemus's most famous residents, farmed in Nicodemus part-time while living in Manhattan, Kansas. Switzer has referred to his farming endeavors as "my retirement."<sup>14</sup>

In 2000, several Nicodemus farmers explored alternative means of profiting from their crops. Gil Alexander, Sharyn Dowdell, Veryl Switzer, Wilburt Howard, and Rod Bradshaw founded the Nicodemus Flour Co-op, which produced Promised Land Flour from wheat grown by the five founders. Their first crop amounted to 250 three-pound containers of flour, which sold out rapidly. By 2003, the co-op had a small mill and continued to sell Promised Land Flour, realizing profits on each bushel of wheat milled that were over four times the profit that could be made on the wheat itself. The co-op also made Nicodemus Pancake Mix, which has become the primary focus of their products.<sup>15</sup>

Gil Alexander also had the distinction of being the only full-time black farmer in Nicodemus by 2004, which earned him lengthy newspaper articles about his farming operation that offer some detail on farming in Nicodemus in the twenty-first century. More than farming, however, it was oil that allowed Alexander to continue his agricultural pursuits after a few particularly dry seasons and limited crops. "'If it wasn't for that,' he said, 'I probably wouldn't be farming now.'"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011; and Attoun, "The Spirit of Nicodemus."

<sup>11</sup> Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Corn, "Graham County Farmers Fighting Foreclosure," *Hays Daily News*, July 13, 1983, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; "Crowd Jeers at Auction of Nicodemus Farmland," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, October 4, 1983 in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 11, KSHS; and Mike Corn, "Bates's Equipment Sold, AAM Quiet," [*Hays Daily News*, January 29, 1984], Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>13</sup> "Going It Alone . . . Together," unidentified paper, no date (ca. 1992), Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Biles, "A Town's Survival," *Capital-Journal*, July 16, 2006, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>15</sup> "Flour Mill Proves It Was Worth Waiting For," unidentified paper, [ca. 2002], Resource Files, NNHS; Roxana Hegeman, "Farmers Hope to Fulfill Dream for Kansas Mill," *Capper's*, June 25, 2002, Resource Files, NNHS; Laurent Belsie, "Little Farms on the Prairie Bow to a Wal-Mart Era," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 12, 2003; and Biles, "A Town's Survival."

<sup>16</sup> Mike Corn, "Farming Is Way of Life for Alexander," *Hays Daily News*, November 14, 2004, vertical file: Nicodemus, KS, Graham County Public Library, Hill City, KS; and Mike Corn, "Farming while Black," *Hays Daily News*, November 14, 2004, vertical file: Nicodemus, KS, Graham County Public Library, Hill City, KS. Although oil wells were a common sight on the landscape surrounding Nicodemus, the town had not been prospected for oil as late as 1998. Some Nicodemus residents felt that prejudices against the African Americans in Nicodemus was

In 2005, some Nicodemus farmers experimented with small plots of teff, an Ethiopian grain with a low gluten content. Ultimately, however, the farmers felt that traditional wheat should remain the primary crop, with teff providing only supplemental income.<sup>17</sup>

## **Religion**

After constructing the New First Baptist Church in 1975, the First Baptist Church's congregation remained small but active. The congregation faced issues including financial difficulties and disagreements between the congregation and their pastor.<sup>18</sup> The congregation sought donations in 2001 "to assist them in the remodeling of their *present day* sanctuary at Nicodemus."<sup>19</sup> As in previous years, some residents of Nicodemus were not Baptist and continued to attend religious services outside of the town.

## **Social Activities**

As the population of Nicodemus shrank, so did the number and variety of social activities that took place in the town. While some social activities, like dances, continued into the late 1970s and beyond, these were increasingly less common. The American Legion provided dances at "The Joint," located near the Township Hall, which were attended even by people from outside of Nicodemus, who would come to "drink some beer and hang out."<sup>20</sup> Even as late as 1998, Nicodemus played host to a similar establishment as "The Joint," located in the Priscilla Art Club Building. Angela Bates related that she had been "kind of twisted into cooking" at this location, where people gathered because "they wanted to do something, so they don't mind going up, listening to jazz, you know, buying a beer and just sitting there jaw-jagging."<sup>21</sup> In both cases, these social hangouts were open one or two nights on the weekend and not during the week.

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behind this believed lack of oil in the area. See, for example, Lois Alexander interview with HABS Oral History researchers, ca. 1977-1978, Nicodemus, KS, 13, transcript on file at NNHS; Wellington interview, 15; and Scott interview, 63.

<sup>17</sup> "Nicodemus Farmers Look to Ethiopian Crop for Niche Market," *Hays Daily News*, November 20, 2005, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS. Nicodemus Historic Site Superintendent Mark Weaver explained that "research by state universities and the local extension office continues to explore the environmental and economic viability of teff as a consumable flour and as forage for horses and other livestock." Mark Weaver, written comments to with authors, February 17, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Lomartire, "Nicodemus Hears Quiet Call to Glory," *Wichita Eagle and Beacon*, February 1, 1987, Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, KS; Linda Mowery-Denning, "Preacher's Style Wears Thin with Nicodemus Congregation," *Salina Journal*, July 6, 1997, Resource Files, NNHS

<sup>19</sup> "Nicodemus Church Plans Remodeling," *Hill City Times*, September 19, 2001, Resource Files, NNHS

<sup>20</sup> B. Brogden and R. Brogden interview, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Angela Bates Tompkins interview with Jennifer Michael, October 1, 1998, Bogue, KS, 25, transcript on file at NNHS.





**Figure 42. Photograph, Emancipation Day parade, Washington Ave., Nicodemus, 1996. Courtesy of the National Park Service.**

## ***Emancipation Day Celebration***

Emancipation Day has continued to attract people to Nicodemus from all over the United States for one weekend a year. Some attendees still refer to the event as “Homecoming,” though the events are more extensive than those of a reunion. While many attendees are descendants of Nicodemus’s early settlers, others come to the event without the sense of returning to one’s ancestral “home.” In 1979, Nicodemus’s Emancipation Day celebration included a Black History Symposium entitled “The History of Nicodemus: Black Pioneering in the Promised Land.” Participants included academics from Kansas State University, Ohio State University, and the University of Kansas; descendants of early settlers; and residents of Nicodemus. The event featured speakers, discussions, and film screenings. In addition to the symposium, which organizers hoped would become a regular part of the Emancipation Day event, the weekend included a disco, musical performances, food, and church services, much like the festivities of previous and subsequent years.<sup>22</sup> Another symposium took place in 1980, this time called “The

<sup>22</sup> “The History of Nicodemus: Black Pioneering in the Promised Land, July 27 and 28, 1979,” program, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries; “Black History Symposium to Highlight Homecoming,” *Hill City Times*, July 19, 1979, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 10, KSHS; “[--] Pace Nicodemus Fun,” *Hays Daily News*, July 29, 1979, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

History of Nicodemus: Its Implications for the '80s," but such an event does not appear to have been a part of later Emancipation Day celebrations.<sup>23</sup>

For those who grew up in this historic town, this was a chance to see old friends and talk over old times."<sup>24</sup> Former and current residents placed emphasis on the idea of returning home to Nicodemus as they participated in this celebration of the community's history. Emancipation Day events during this decade generally included food, entertainment, sporting events, and Sunday church services.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1990s, attendance at Emancipation Day celebrations increased slightly, particularly as the possibility of a National Historic Site designation for Nicodemus loomed.<sup>26</sup> The town marked the 1998 official dedication of the site, which coincided with the 120th annual celebration of Emancipation Day, with many celebratory aspects from previous years, along with the National Park Service dedication ceremony for the site. In this year, visitors by the bus load swarmed to Nicodemus, the parade featured groups from as far away as Atlanta, Georgia, and the organizers brought back some of the more carnival-like aspects of early Emancipation Day celebrations. Emancipation Day events also included recording of oral histories, copying of historic photographs, and a commemorative postmark to celebrate the history of Nicodemus. As many as 2,000 people attended the Emancipation Day celebration in 1998.<sup>27</sup>

In 2003, the town marked the 125th anniversary of their Emancipation Day celebration with a variety of new events, including "the Children's Exploration Camp (highlighting history, geography and science), . . . an Academic/Political Forum, a tribute to Lorenzo Fuller (with the showing of a documentary from television), and a traveling exhibit from the National Park Service."<sup>28</sup> Festivities remained much the same, carrying on some of the Emancipation Day traditions begun a century earlier. They included "a parade, wagon rides and tours, horse rides for children, a Buffalo Soldiers exhibition, a fashion show, food and craft vendors, dances, church services, and gospel music."<sup>29</sup> Emancipation Day celebrations always dramatically increased the number of people in Nicodemus, with the event drawing as many as 600 attendees in some years.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Nicodemus to Celebrate," *Topeka Capital*, July 25, 1980, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Volume 10, KSHS.

<sup>24</sup> Chick Howland, "Nicodemus Homecoming Like a Reunion," *Hays Daily News*, August 1, 1982, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>25</sup> Stan Finger, "Nicodemus Calls Own back Home," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, July 28, 1985, in *Negroes, Clippings*, Vol. 11, KSHS; and Weller, "Ernestine Comes to Visit."

<sup>26</sup> Mike Berry, "Homecoming Revives Dreams in Nicodemus," *Wichita Eagle*, August 1, 1992; and Alan Wilds, "Nicodemus Feels Renewal of Its History," *Hays Daily News*, August 2, 1992, both in Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>27</sup> "Nicodemus Site Is Dedicated in Style," *Hill City Times*, August 5, 1998; and Beccy Tanner, "Celebrating Its Roots," *Wichita Eagle*, August 2, 1998, both in Resource Files, NPS-MRO. See also Horton, *Landmarks of African American History*, 116; and P. Moore interview, 11.

<sup>28</sup> "The Spirit of Nicodemus' Continues on with Event," *Hill City Times*, July 9, 2003, Box 1, Melvina M. Williams Collection, 1998-2006, MS815, KSHS.

<sup>29</sup> Gay, *African-American Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations*, 358.

<sup>30</sup> Jack McNeely, "Town of Nicodemus Is Making a Comeback," *Hill City Times*, September 1, 1983, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; and Horton, *Landmarks of African American History*, 107.



**Figure 43. View of the Emancipation Day parade, 2000. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**

## ***Pioneer Days***

In 1993, Nicodemus hosted its first Pioneer Days, initially organized by Angela Bates. An article the next year distinguished between this celebration and the Emancipation Day celebration: “The town has held an annual Emancipation Day for 116 years that draws back descendants and visitors from across the country, but that venue emphasizes family and homecoming reunions and has not really dealt with the historic aspect of the settlement, . . . The desire to focus more on the historical aspects of the town led to the establishment of Pioneer Days.”<sup>31</sup> The event included historical presentations, historical reenactors, televisions showing documentaries about Nicodemus, and historical photograph displays. The event also offered a variety of recreational events, as evidenced by the 1996 Pioneer Days, with “everything from country line dancing lessons, horseshoe pitching and gospel music to a 44-mile bike tour to keep visitors busy.”<sup>32</sup> Crafts, food, and demonstrations, including things like horse shoeing, rope making, and soap making, have also been a prominent part of Pioneer Days.<sup>33</sup> The Pioneer Days

<sup>31</sup> Adele Shaver, “Pioneer Skills Shaped Nicodemus,” *Hays Daily News*, October 9, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> Mike Berry, “Nicodemus Celebrates,” *Wichita Eagle*, October 13, 1996, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS. See also Adele Shaver, “Nicodemus Residents Seek to Save History,” *Hays Daily News*, October 13, 1996, Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS.

<sup>33</sup> Van Duvall and Jackson interview, 16; and Bates-Tompkins interview, 3-4.

celebration continues to take place each October in Nicodemus and is now organized and sponsored by the Nicodemus Historical Society.<sup>34</sup>

## ***National Historic Landmark Designation***

During the 1970s, outside consultants, former and current residents, and state legislators began to work with the National Park Service to obtain national recognition and preservation of Nicodemus as a historic site. The American public is most familiar with the National Park Service's role as the “keeper” of the large national parks, national monuments, and national recreation areas around the country. But since the agency's inception in 1916, the Park Service has been assigned the primary role within the federal government for the preservation of important archeological, cultural, and historic sites in all fifty states. When Congress first established the NPS within the Department of Interior, the legislative language of the founding act mandated that the new government agency protect not only the scenery, but also “the natural and historic objects and the wild life” in each national park service area. At that time, the first NPS Director, Stephen Mather, and his staff directed most of their energy to promoting and developing the large national parks and most famous national monuments that had become known as the “crown jewels” of the national park system. But they also held the authority over smaller sites that preserved or commemorated the nation's most significant archeological and historic sites.

Prior to 1930, the park system included few historic sites and the NPS did little in the way of recognizing or interpreting historical sites. But when the NPS underwent a complete reorganization in 1933, the national park system embraced a variety of other types of operating units, including national memorials, national battlefields, national military parks, national capital parks, and national historical sites. At the continued urging of Park Service Director Horace Albright, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order transferring jurisdiction of fifty-two areas from other federal departments to the NPS, forty-four of which had primary significance because of their cultural or historic attributes.<sup>35</sup> Most of the military/battlefield sites were transferred from the War Department to the NPS during the summer of 1933. That year the NPS also implemented the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the first significant historical documentation program, subsequently joined by the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) in 1969 and the Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS) in 2000.

Shortly thereafter, Congress passed the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which declared “a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance,” and instructed the Secretary of the Interior and the NPS to survey historic and archeological sites to decide which had “exceptional value” in United States history. The law also allowed the United States to acquire any historic property deemed “satisfactory to the Secretary.”<sup>36</sup> As the Historic Sites bill moved through Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt promoted the legislation, arguing that the preservation of historic sites called for in the bill would “enhance the respect and love of the citizen for the traditions of his country, as well as strengthen

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<sup>34</sup> Nicodemus Historical Society, “Calendar,” <http://www.nicodemushistoricalsociety.com/calendar.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Barry Mackintosh, “The National Park Service and Cultural Resources,” *CRM* 22, no. 4 (1999): 41–42.

<sup>36</sup> Historic Sites Act of 1935 (49 Stat. 666).



his devotion to defend unselfishly the hallowed traditions and ideals of America.”<sup>37</sup> The 1933 reorganization and 1935 Historic Sites Act provided the framework that enabled the Park Service to incorporate additional historic sites, including Nicodemus National Historic Site, into the national park system.

In 1966, the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) ushered in a new era of cultural resource management for federal agencies and the NPS. The law introduced new policies for federal agencies that would support the preservation of significant cultural and historic resources. The National Historic Preservation Act established the National Register of Historic Places to list all “districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture.” The law also created the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and authorized the council and individual State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) to oversee the National Register nomination process in a federal-state partnership. Sites on the National Register that “possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States” are eligible for National Historic Landmark status, which require more extensive care and the involvement of the national advisory council.<sup>38</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1970s, Nicodemus residents and descendants, in collaboration with historic preservationists, utilized several of these federal preservation mechanisms to take the necessary steps to document the historic significance of Nicodemus and move toward the eventual authorization of Nicodemus National Historic Site. The key collaborator was the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, which Robert and Vincent DeForrest established in 1970. The two brothers had worked in black community action and urban development organizations in the 1960s, then came together in Washington D.C. to begin their new endeavor. The DeForrest brothers had long shared an interest in history, but had noticed that existing preservation agencies were overlooking numerous black historic sites with the potential for national register and national historic landmark status. Moreover they were troubled by seeing “urban black communities that were being razed by developers,” and by the large number of rural historic structures that were rapidly disintegrating. The DeForrests created the nonprofit Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation with the objective of “locating landmarks throughout the United States that reflect the history, culture and contributions of African-Americans.” Vincent DeForrest explained that they wanted, “to maintain those structures which are the essence of [black] culture. Black people need to be able to touch and see their history, which we literally walk past in our communities every day.”<sup>39</sup>

In the early 1970s, there were few sites preserved solely to commemorate America’s black history. Only three structures in the country—the former homes of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver—had been listed on the NPS National Register of Historic Sites as places dedicated exclusively to preserving the history of African-Americans. In his history of the national historic landmarks program, NPS historian Barry Mackintosh called the absence of landmarks commemorating black history, “an embarrassing circumstance at that time of increasing black awareness and empowerment. Robert Utley [then

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<sup>37</sup> Mackintosh, “The National Park Service and Cultural Resources,” 41-42.

<sup>38</sup> NPS, National Historic Landmark Program webpage, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nhl>.

<sup>39</sup> “Preserving America’s Black Historic Landmarks,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Barry Mackintosh, *The Historic Sites Survey and National Historic Landmarks Program: A History* (Washington D.C.: NPS History Division, 1985), 72, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh4/nhl.pdf](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh4/nhl.pdf).

chief historian of the NPS] was sensitive to the omission and aware that the NPS, without blacks on its professional staff, would lack credibility in the black community were it to undertake a study of black sites on its own.” The NPS decided to contract out for an African-American historic sites survey, eventually choosing the DeForrests’ Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation because that organization had “the best ties to black scholars and was most suited to the task.”<sup>40</sup>

Twenty years later, there were twenty times as many national black history landmark sites, in large part due to the work of the DeForrest brothers. Between 1973 and 1976, the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, using the upcoming U.S. Bicentennial celebration as a funding and organizational springboard, worked with the NPS and with historian Charles Wesley to engage in a country-wide study to identify potential national landmarks of black history, one of which was Nicodemus. After the 1976 centennial, the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, which subsequently was renamed the Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development, continued to work toward the recognition and preservation of black history sites. By 1989, Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation sponsored studies had resulted in the NPS designation of sixty-one national historic landmarks throughout the country.<sup>41</sup>

In 1974, as part of the DeForrest’s original bicentennial study, Marcia M. Greenlee, Historical Projects Director for the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, worked with area resident Ira Hutchinson to complete a National Register of Historic Places inventory nomination for the Nicodemus Historic District.<sup>42</sup> The proposed district included nine structures in Nicodemus and a dugout house two miles east of the town. The structures in the district were Sayer’s General Store and Post Office, the First Baptist Church, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Township Hall, the site of the Masonic Hall, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, the Fletcher residence, an original town residence (unknown ownership), an historical roadside marker, and the Dr. D. L. Stewart residence. The nomination suggested the following about the significance of Nicodemus:

it is the only remaining town established by blacks of the “Exoduster” movement which was organized mainly through the efforts of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton. It is the site of the oldest reported Post Office supervised by blacks in the United States. Nicodemus is also symbolic of the pioneer spirit of blacks who dared to leave the only region they had been familiar with, in a search for personal freedom and the opportunity to develop their talents and capabilities.<sup>43</sup>

Although the nomination incorrectly associated Nicodemus with the Exoduster movement and Singleton, it did successfully earn Nicodemus a place on the National Register of Historic Places and subsequent designation as a National Historic Landmark. The Advisory

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<sup>40</sup> Barry Mackintosh, *The Historic Sites Survey and National Historic Landmarks Program: A History* (Washington D.C.: NPS History Division, 1985), 72, [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/mackintosh4/nhl.pdf](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh4/nhl.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> “Preserving America’s Black Historic Landmarks.”

<sup>42</sup> Marcia M. Greenlee, “Nicodemus Historic District and Dugout House, Two Miles East,” National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, Resource Files, NPS-MRO; and Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Greenlee, “Nicodemus Historic District and Dugout House, Two Miles East.”

Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments (retitled the National Park System Advisory Board in 1978), the administrative body in charge of recommending sites for National Historic Landmark status, considered the Nicodemus nomination during the board's 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting held October 6 through 8, 1975. The Advisory Board recommended National Historic Landmark status for Nicodemus and for sites in twenty-eight other states and the District of Columbia. In the meantime, Nicodemus resident Veryl Switzer led the local effort to drum up additional support for the national landmark nomination.<sup>44</sup> In a memorandum dated January 7, 1976, Secretary of Interior Thomas Kleppe, acting on the Advisory Board's recommendation, designated the Nicodemus Historic District as a National Historic Landmark.<sup>45</sup> Designation as a NHL property also automatically listed the Nicodemus Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>46</sup> Nicodemus became the sixteenth National Historic Landmark in Kansas and one of 201 sites in the state on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>47</sup>

In the meantime, a group of preservation-minded local residents formed the Nicodemus Historic Preservation Committee to promote the tangible task of protecting some of the town's quickly deteriorating historic structures.<sup>48</sup> Although the designation of Nicodemus National Historic District National Landmark provided the town with much needed recognition, national landmark status did not convey funding for preservation and protection of historic structures. Accordingly, the committee's goal was the "preservation of those structures which have been designated worthy of recognition and create an attractive historic atmosphere within the district," through the tasks of physical restoration and meaningful utilization of historic structures.<sup>49</sup> The committee contracted with the Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission to complete a historic preservation and development study, with hopes of obtaining funding for renovation under the Kansas State Historical Preservation Plan. Funding was not immediately forthcoming and local stewards were left to manage preservation work as best they could for the next ten years.

Nicodemus residents and descendants took another important step to preserve their heritage through the establishment of the Nicodemus Historical Society, which opened an office in the Priscilla Arts Club building in 1989. Angela Bates, a historian and a descendant of early Nicodemus settlers, began working with Veryl Switzer, other town residents, and Nicodemus descendants spread around the country to build support for the creation of a historical society. The historical society was officially incorporated in 1988, and the following year Bates moved to

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<sup>44</sup> "Spearheading Efforts for Nicodemus National Site Designation," *Nicodemus News Review* (Summer 2008): 2.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Kleppe, Secretary of the Interior, to Director, National Park Service, January 7, 1976, SHPO Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>46</sup> Cornelius Heine, Chief, NPS Historical and Architectural Surveys Division, to Nyle Miller, Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society, January 14, 1976, SHPO Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>47</sup> "Nicodemus Community Named National Historic Landmark," *The Historical Society Mirror* (Topeka) 22, no. 2 (March 1976): 1; and "Nicodemus in Historical Register," *Hays Daily News*, undated [Winter 1976?], Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, KS.

<sup>48</sup> Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission, "Nicodemus: Historic Preservation and Protection Study," 1976, 1, File: 222 Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission, Nicodemus files, archives, Graham County Historical Society, Hill City, Kansas

<sup>49</sup> Northwest Kansas Planning and Development Commission, "Nicodemus: Historic Preservation and Protection Study," 52.



Nicodemus from Denver to become president of the organization.<sup>50</sup> Bates said the historical society was sorely needed at that time because, “we were losing the architectural fabric of the community.” Numerous building, artifacts, and documents required immediate repair or suitable storage before they were lost. In 1991, the historical society made an important step in working with the property owners to have the historic Nicodemus AME Church donated to the historical society.<sup>51</sup> Historical society staff contacted community residents and descendants to obtain photographs and other materials to use in museum exhibits that would increase public interest in the town’s history.<sup>52</sup> The donated images and documents now make up part of the historical society’s photograph and archives collection, which is housed at the Spencer Research Library on the campus of Kansas University.<sup>53</sup>

### ***National Historic Site designation / National Park Service***

Nicodemus Historical Society staff and members also played a critical role in obtaining Congressional authorization for a Nicodemus National Historic Site. While Bates and the society’s volunteer staff “accommodated a continuous stream of visitors to Nicodemus,” they were also busy collaborating with newspapers “about our efforts to become a national park.”<sup>54</sup> Bates and JohnElla Holmes “collaborated with the Park Service, community leaders, historic property owners, Kansas Senator Robert Dole, and [Representative] Pat Roberts to secure legislation that was presented to Congress.”<sup>55</sup> Bates coordinated the community-wide survey sent to residents and distant family members to gather feedback and support for the NPS designation. A number of the people surveyed expressed reservations, or in some cases, outright resistance to the idea of a national park unit in their home town. Bates herself knew “that we would be giving something up,” if they obtained national historic site status, but believed that the community would have much to gain by becoming “part of the national experience” of black history.<sup>56</sup>

By the early 1990s, public support for designating Nicodemus as a National Historic Site was on the rise. An editorial in the *Wichita Eagle* espousing this sentiment argued, “It would be tragic if Nicodemus suffered the same fate of other High Plains towns that no longer have an economic purpose: oblivion. As long as it continues to exist, the town will symbolize the best of the black experience.” This editorial emphasized that National Historic Site designation, which would bring federal funds for the preservation of buildings to Nicodemus, was the best way to preserve Nicodemus’s “unique vestige of black history.”<sup>57</sup>

It was an opportune time for the final push to add Nicodemus to the national park system, because in 1991 the NPS was also considering commemorating another Kansas piece of the nation’s African American history by setting aside Monroe Elementary School in the city of Topeka. The school was part of the setting for the landmark civil rights Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The Brown decision put an end to racial segregation in

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Wellington, “Celebrating Our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Collecting, Preserving, and Interpreting Our History,” *Nicodemus News Review* (Summer 2008).

<sup>51</sup> Angela Bates, personal communication with Paul Sadin, April 4, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011.

<sup>53</sup> “Our Collections,” *Nicodemus News Review* (Summer 2008), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> “Spearheading Efforts for Nicodemus National Site Designation,” *Nicodemus News Review* (Summer 2008), 2.

<sup>56</sup> Angela Bates, personal communication with Paul Sadin, March 29, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> “Save It,” *Wichita Eagle*, September 25, 1991, Resource Files, NNHS.

the nation's public schools and spurred the civil rights movement to new heights. In October 1992, Congress created the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site encompassing the Monroe school and surrounding facilities.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, Congress had given the approval in October 1991, for the National Park Service to conduct a suitability and feasibility study to determine whether the Nicodemus townsite demonstrated both the national significance and physical resources to gain authorization as a national historic site.<sup>59</sup> At this point, five structures in Nicodemus were under consideration for restoration or rehabilitation: the First Baptist Church, the A.M.E. Church, and the St. Francis Hotel (designated as the Fletcher residence on the National Register of Historic Places nomination form) from the National Historic District, along with the School District #1 building and the Jerry Scruggs residence.<sup>60</sup> By June 1993, the National Park Service released their study suggesting three options for what could be done in Nicodemus: self-reliance, a park service "affiliated area," or a national historic site.<sup>61</sup>

Three years later, on November 12, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed legislation that established Nicodemus as a National Historic Site. The buildings included in the site were the First Baptist Church, the A.M.E. Church, the St. Francis Hotel, the School District #1 building, and the WPA Township Hall.<sup>62</sup> The dedication of the site took place at the Emancipation Day celebration on August 1, 1998.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

Even today, Nicodemus's residents, as well as the descendants of former residents, have a strong sense of the importance of the history of their town. Some continue to farm the land where their ancestors settled more than one hundred years ago, while others return to Nicodemus to celebrate its rich heritage, through events like the Emancipation Day celebration and Pioneer Days. Regardless of whether they are residents or just occasional visitors, African Americans who call Nicodemus "home" are aware of the uniqueness of this community on the Kansas plains. The Nicodemus story is a remarkable one, not only because it includes the successful establishment of one of the first all-black towns in Kansas, the first African American township west of the Mississippi River, and one of longest-lived black towns established anywhere in the

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<sup>58</sup> Rachel Francis Weekley, "A Strong Pull, a Long Pull, and a Pull Altogether:" *Topeka's Contribution to the Campaign for School Desegregation*, History Resource Study, Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site (Omaha, Nebraska: NPS Midwest Regional Office, 1999), 254-56.

<sup>59</sup> "Treasure," *Wichita Eagle*, November 8, 1991, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>60</sup> Alan Stolfus, "Hayden Sees Historic Significance of Town," *Salina Journal*, December 24, 1991, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>61</sup> "Park Service Releases Study on Future of Historic Black Community," *Tribune* (Fort Scott, KS), June 29, 1993, Resource Files, NNHS. The final option carried an estimated initial cost of as much as \$6.8 million and an annual cost of \$500,000.

<sup>62</sup> Linda Mowery-Denning, "It's Official: Nicodemus is National Historic Site," *Salina Journal*, October 4, 1996; Matt Moline, "Historic Nicodemus Envisions a Higher, More Spiritual Purpose," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, November 24, 1996, both in Kansas Room, Hays Public Library, Hays, KS; and "Town Gets Helpful Designation," *Kansas City Star*, November 28, 1996, Resource Files, NPS-MRO.

<sup>63</sup> Duane DaPron, "Homecoming Takes on New Meaning," *Hays Daily News*, August 2, 1998, and Duane DaPron, "Joy Fills the Hearts of Nicodemus Residents," *Hays Daily News*, August 2, 1998, both in Resource Files, NPS-MRO. See also "Nicodemus Site Is Dedicated in Style"; Tanner, "Celebrating Its Roots"; and Horton, *Landmarks of African American History*, 116.

country after the Civil War. The story is also remarkable because Nicodemus survives as an active, vibrant community, when so many other homesteads and towns on the Great Plains—whether black, white, or otherwise—were lost or withered away. That vibrancy is testament to the strength of the familial network of generations of Nicodemus residents and their descendents, which accounts for a large part of the “survival and sustainability of this unique community.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted portion from Angela Bates, written comments, February 17, 2011.



## Section II: Nicodemus Architecture

### *Introduction*

Currently, there are approximately fifty-four extant buildings located within the Nicodemus townsite. This includes the six buildings that comprise the 1976 Nicodemus Villa. Of these fifty-four buildings, thirty-one were built in place and at least twenty-three were relocated to the town from outlying areas. Among the total number of buildings are twenty-five houses and two detached garage buildings; five Villa duplex units and one Villa community center building; one school building with one outbuilding; three church buildings; one township meeting hall with two portapotties; one municipal firehouse; one municipal garage; three pole barns; and eight trailers. There are also three metal silos and one municipal water tower. Numerous portable storage containers are also found throughout the townsite. Because these containers may not remain in place for an extended period of time, they are not included in the list of structures. It should be noted that most of the buildings in Nicodemus exhibit no official street address, making it necessary to describe the location of a building rather than the actual address.

Nearly half of all the buildings in the town have been relocated to Nicodemus from the surrounding countryside. This occurred primarily during the 1970s, when former residents began returning to Nicodemus to vacation and attend annual events. Because few buildings remained within the townsite, those seeking accommodations had to either build new houses or relocate buildings from other areas. By the early 1980s, relocated houses and mobile homes could be seen along nearly every street in the town. Many of these buildings are occupied only intermittently and some appear to be vacated entirely. Others are perhaps works-in-progress that will eventually see regular or occasional occupation.

All of these buildings, whether built in place or relocated to the town from outlying farmsteads, are invariably vernacular. As a rural community rooted in agriculture, domestic and municipal buildings have been built largely for utility. Indeed, most of the town's residential buildings are vernacular renditions of common housing stock found throughout the country. These include square-plan, gable-side, gable-front, and gable-T plan houses that exhibit no specific architectural style. Some of these houses have been compiled from multiple folk structures. Consequently, floor plans have changed over time. This tendency to connect and expand buildings to meet new needs is perhaps the most striking aspect of the town's residential architecture.

Largely due to the relocation of many of Nicodemus's businesses to Bogue in 1888, little survives of the town's commercial architecture. The few commercial buildings that remained after the decline of 1888 were reduced to ruins by the 1970s. The G. M. Sayers grocery store, formerly located on the northwest corner of Third and Washington Streets, was demolished ca. 1980, leaving the St. Francis Hotel as the last representative of the community's once-flourishing business district. Surviving photographs, however, indicate that commercial buildings, whether built of limestone or wood, were much like surviving residential architecture, utilitarian in design and appearance. This had much to do with the fact that these buildings were erected during the town's expansion period, when businessmen were attempting to establish a foothold in the local market. Owners erected buildings as quickly as possible, using what building materials were

available at the time.<sup>1</sup> Because the boom ended abruptly, there was little time for the inevitable evolution of architecture that occurred as towns progressed in age and development. Business leaders literally picked up their businesses and moved them to the new railroad town of Bogue, six miles southwest of Nicodemus. Following this event, commercial development in Nicodemus came to a standstill. Those few commercial buildings that remained were all but stranded on a largely empty expanse of unsellable town lots. By the 1920s, some of the streetscapes in Nicodemus resembled those of the prairie ghost towns found throughout the Great Plains.

The town's church buildings fared better than its commercial structures. The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the First Baptist Church provide examples of pre and early post-railroad period religious architecture. Like other Nicodemus buildings, the town's religious architecture is vernacular and largely utilitarian in design. These buildings have undergone numerous changes over the years, as they were expanded to accommodate growing congregations then left vacant and in disrepair. These buildings have been stabilized in recent years, but require additional stabilization and repair efforts.

Of the approximately fifty-four extant buildings, five are currently included in the Nicodemus National Historic Site. These include the St. Francis Hotel (ca. 1880); African Methodist Episcopal Church (1885); First Baptist Church (1907); Nicodemus School District No. 1 building (1918); and Nicodemus Township Hall (1939). These buildings not only represent the town's early settlement period through the Great Depression, they provide an invaluable cross section of commercial, residential, religious, and municipal architecture. They also comprise the last, largely intact examples of historic architecture within the townsite. :

The remaining buildings not included in the Nicodemus National Historic Site also span much of the history of the community, from at least the early twentieth century to the present. No dugouts or sod houses remain intact within the townsite, but a few early twentieth-century stone and frame structures do remain. And a variety of residential and community buildings from the postwar era help round out the history and evolution of the town's architecture. The following discussion addresses these stages of architectural development in Nicodemus from the earliest forms of construction to the latest.

The descriptions of extant buildings that follow the history of building methods provide an inventory of surviving architecture as well as, when possible, a summary of the structure's history. Many of the dates given for these buildings are approximate. Due to a lack of character-defining features, it is often difficult to provide accurate dates of construction for vernacular buildings. Additions and alterations to exterior walls further complicate the process. Therefore, circa is generally used, meaning that the building was built within about five years or so of the given date. The names used to refer to buildings were provided by the staff of the Nicodemus Historic Site and are presented as "historic name (current name)." In some cases, these names are the same, so only one name is given.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 47.



## Surviving Early Settlement Architecture

Not surprisingly, no dugouts or sod structures survive within the Nicodemus townsite, though archeologists have excavated the remains of these types of buildings in the outlying areas of Nicodemus Township.<sup>2</sup> Most of these earthen structures were not designed to last more than a few years. If not maintained, they soon returned to the elements from whence they came. The limestone and wood frame structures that replaced the dugouts and soddies lasted considerably longer than their predecessors, but many of these, too, disappeared as buildings were relocated to other towns or simply left to deteriorate. By the 1920s, only a handful of buildings from the early settlement period (1877-1888) remained intact. Among these were the G. M. Sayers grocery store (1879); Masonic Hall (ca. 1880); St. Francis Hotel (ca. 1880); and African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church building (1885). The roofless remains of the Masonic Hall survived until 1972, when its badly deteriorated hulk was bulldozed into the ground. Just eight years later, the G. M. Sayers grocery store met the same fate.<sup>3</sup> This left only the St. Francis Hotel and the A.M.E. Church. Thanks to efforts by the National Park Service and concerned citizens, these two buildings continue to provide a link between the town's early settlement period and the future.



**Figure 44. The Masonic Hall monument in the Township Park. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, *Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**

<sup>2</sup> See Williams, "Excavation of an Early Dugout Homestead," 84-87.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 78.

## St. Francis Hotel

In June 1877, Zach T. Fletcher and his wife Jenny relocated to Nicodemus from Nebraska, by way of Topeka, Kansas. An early promoter of the Nicodemus Town Company, Fletcher was also the first to open a general store in the new settlement. Located in a dugout on the bank of Spring Creek, Fletcher's store offered nothing more than cornmeal and syrup. Despite limited stock and competition from upstart mercantilists Louis Welton and W. H. Smith, Fletcher persisted, eventually moving his business to another dugout on the corner of Third and Washington Streets. The Welton and Smith stores both folded by late 1879, but Fletcher experienced additional competition from new merchants William Green and Samuel Wilson. With too few people to support three stores, Fletcher's emporium soon failed.<sup>4</sup>

Fletcher remained determined to run his own business and in 1880, he and his brother Thomas built a limestone hotel building on the south side of Main Street on Lot 10 of Block 12. Touted by the Fletchers to be the best accommodations around, the St. Francis Hotel proved too competitive for the only other above-ground hostelry in the town. The Boles House, a sod house with a single spare bed, owned by Anderson Boles, soon foundered, in part due to the 1883 death of Boles, leaving the Fletchers with a monopoly in the local hotel trade.<sup>5</sup> By 1886, however, they faced competition from the new Gibson House, built on the corner of Second and Washington Streets, near the Boles House ruins. Within two years, the St. Francis was once again the only hostelry in the town, as nearly all Nicodemus businesses relocated to the railroad boomtown of Bogue. The St. Francis remained, but the Fletchers sold their lots to town promoter W. R. Hill.<sup>6</sup>

Exactly when the Fletchers closed the hotel remains uncertain but, at some point in the 1890s or early 1900s, Graham County acquired the hotel property.<sup>7</sup> Around 1921, Fred Switzer, a grand-nephew of the Fletchers, purchased the hotel.<sup>8</sup> He and his newlywed wife, Ora Wellington Switzer, used the building as both a home and restaurant until the early 1970s.<sup>9</sup> In 1976, Ora Switzer relocated to Villa Housing at Washington and Fourth Streets.<sup>10</sup> The hotel is currently owned by Veryl Switzer.

As originally built, the St. Francis Hotel consisted of a vernacular, rectangular-plan, one-and-a-half story limestone building. It is not known where the original entrance was located but, given that the gabled end of the structure faced the main thoroughfare, it might have been a gable-front building. Also included in the original construction was a shed-roof kitchen on the east façade. At the interior, the hotel featured two rooms on each floor, with living and dining rooms on the first level and guest rooms on the second.<sup>11</sup>

By June 1888, the Fletchers had completed an addition to the original building. It is not known what the addition looked like or where it was located. By the time the Switzers acquired the building in 1921, the kitchen wing and ca. 1888 addition appear to have been removed,

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 41-42.

<sup>5</sup> Craig, "Boles Hotels."

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 46, 51-52.

<sup>7</sup> National Park Service, *Nicodemus Historic District*, sheet 2 of 9.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Bates, e-mail message to Donald Burden, February 5, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-22.

<sup>11</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-21.

leaving nothing more than the original rectangular-shaped stone structure. But this soon changed as the Switzers built additions to accommodate their needs. Some of these additions included at least one wood-frame structure that was relocated to the site. Added ca. 1924, the new addition consisted of a one-story side-gable building. Attached to the north half of the east façade, this new extension served as Ora Switzer's dining room. South of the dining room the Switzers added a lean-to addition that included the kitchen, pantry, and bathroom. Along the full length of the north wall they added a stoop. Around 1930, they built a one-story shed-roof bedroom addition at the southwest corner of the house.<sup>12</sup> Due to the deterioration of the exterior surfaces of the limestone walls, in 1949, the Switzers coated the old hotel with a layer of stucco.<sup>13</sup>

Another round of extensive additions occurred ca. 1953. About this time, the Switzers built a half-story addition over the dining and kitchen additions along the east façade of the original building. The half-story addition, which included a new bedroom, extended the gabled roof line to reach the ridge of the roof on the original hotel building. They also built a full-length shed-roof porch along the north wall and east half of the south wall. Subtle alterations, like replacement windows and aluminum siding on the covered porch, probably occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. The most recent alteration transpired in 1998, when Val and Easter Williams Construction replaced the two separate shed roofs along the south façade with one contiguous shed roof.<sup>14</sup>

As it appears today, the St. Francis Hotel includes what amounts to roughly fifty years of additions and alterations (Figures 45 and 46). The original hotel building has been largely obscured with later additions, leaving only the west wall entirely visible. Nevertheless, the exposed portions of the old hotel indicate that it was likely Spartan in appearance, with little or no embellishment. Window openings appear to have been few in number, with only two windows on the west façade, both on the first story. The gabled ends each include one window at the second story. It is not clear if the gabled ends had windows on the first story, but it seems likely that the rear of the building included at least one window on the lower level. Additional window openings were likely located in the first story of the east wall, but these were altered to create egress between the hotel and the later additions.

The orientation of the building suggests that the primary façade probably faced the street, indicating that the main entrance might have been located in the gabled end facing north. Other doorways were probably located in the east and south walls. These entryways would have provided access to the original kitchen wing and the ca. 1888 addition. The Switzers may have used these old doorways to create access between the old hotel and their new additions. During the early 1950s, the Switzers created an additional opening in the east façade to provide access between the second floor of the old hotel and the half-story addition over the kitchen and dining rooms.

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<sup>12</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-21.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 76.

<sup>14</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-21.





**Figure 45. St. Francis Hotel, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 46. St. Francis Hotel, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

The overall building now looks like a vernacular, one and a-half story gable-T plan with a shed roof addition along the rear side and a full-length covered porch along the primary façade. The conglomeration of additions is tied together with stucco, giving it a somewhat homogenous look. With the exception of windows along the primary façade and covered porch addition, all of the window openings on the building are currently boarded up. The covered porch addition is largely covered with aluminum siding, leaving only the east end of the porch partially open, with a screen covering and screen door to provide access to the porch and interior of the house. The building is currently vacant.

### **African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church**

Located in Block 11 at the northwest corner of Third and Adams streets, the A.M.E. Church is one of two surviving buildings dating from the early settlement period of Nicodemus (1877-1888). Originally built for the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in 1885, the building was one of numerous edifices used by the A.M.E. congregation between its inception in 1878 and its relocation to the extant building in 1910. The A.M.E. congregation's move to the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church building followed the decline of the Mt. Pleasant Baptist congregation after 1900. The building is currently owned by the National Park Service.

The building that the A.M.E. inherited in 1910 consisted of a single story, rectangular-shaped gable-front building. Utilitarian in design, this vernacular church appears to have been built with few or no stylistic details. A simple arched doorway in the façade, located on the east side of the building, was the only entrance into the single room that comprised the sanctuary space. In 1923, a window at the east end of the north wall was converted into a second doorway. Concurrently or soon after, a small shed-roofed vestibule was built around this north entry. Also during the 1920s, a cross-gable was added to the center of the north side of the roof. A large arched window was inserted in the center of the north wall below the cross-gable. Around 1931, the extant gable-front anteroom was added to the east wall (Figures 47, 48, and 49).<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 47. Photograph, A.M.E. Church, 1943. Reprinted from William J. Belleau, *The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas* (Hays, KS: [s.n.], 1943).**

<sup>15</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-3.





**Figure 48. Photograph, A.M.E. Church, 1949, after the addition of stucco finish. Reprinted from Van B. Shaw, "Nicodemus, Kansas: A Study in Isolation," Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, 1951. Available at Kansas State University.**



**Figure 49. A.M.E. Church, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



The building's load-bearing stone walls are built of locally quarried white magnesia limestone. The smooth surface of the stone blocks indicates that they were likely chat-sawn. Typical of stone buildings in the area, the walls are built two-wythes thick and are set in a common staggered bond.<sup>16</sup> The stone itself is a common building material for the Graham County area. Other surviving stone buildings in Nicodemus include the First Baptist Church, the original portion of the St. Francis Hotel, and a portion of the Jerry Scruggs, Jr., House at Second and Adams streets. These structures have been either partially or entirely covered with stucco. Indeed, sometime between 1943 and 1949, the exterior walls of the A.M.E. Church received a coating of stucco, but this material was in poor repair by the late 1990s, and has since been entirely removed (Figures 50, 51, and 52). The limestone walls are now exposed. They exhibit chisel marks, which might have been added to help key the stucco to the blocks (Figure 53).



**Figure 50. Photograph, A.M.E. Church in state of disrepair, ca. 1990s. Reproduced from National Historic Landmark files.**

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<sup>16</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 3-11; and U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45.



**Figure 51. A.M.E. Church. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**



**Figure 52. Side view of the A.M.E. Church. Reprinted from Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, OCULUS, and United States, Nicodemus National Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas: Cultural Landscape Report (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 2003).**





**Figure 53. A.M.E. Church, showing detail of limestone blocks, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

Currently, the only fenestration on the building consists of four tall and narrow, 1/1 windows along the south wall. Each of the window openings includes a limestone sill and relief arch atop the limestone lintel. The west wall was built without window openings (Figure 54), and the façade, on the west side of the building, appears to have had only the single doorway. Because the north wall was altered during the 1920s and then partially collapsed in the mid-1990s, it remains uncertain exactly how many window openings might have originally existed along this side of the building. Because the ca. 1923 north entryway was reportedly built from an existing window opening, it would appear that at least one window opening was located in the north wall. It is possible that at least a second original window opening was located at or about the point where the large window was added underneath the cross-gable addition. The entire length of the north wall is currently covered with plywood. The cross-gable, added during the 1920s, was removed sometime prior to HABS documentation in 1983 (Figure 55).



**Figure 54. A.M.E. Church, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 55. A.M.E. Church, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

## ***Surviving Post-Railroad Architecture***

By September 1888, it was clear to the residents who remained in Nicodemus that they would not see a railroad built through their town. The boom that had fueled a frenzy of construction for the past two years quickly faded as local merchants and professionals turned their attention toward Bogue. The Union Pacific's subsidiary land agency, the Union Land Company, platted the town of Bogue in September 1888 and by the following month, most of Nicodemus's business leaders had relocated. By December, the population of Nicodemus had dwindled to 103 residents and the number of structures was reduced to just thirty-seven.<sup>17</sup>

Following the bust, little new construction transpired in Nicodemus. The most significant construction projects between 1888 and the end of the 1920s included the First Baptist Church (1907); and the replacement of the 1887 Nicodemus School District No. 1 building, which had been destroyed by fire in 1916 (rebuilt in 1918). Four homes still stand in Nicodemus that were constructed during this time period; numerous similar and smaller structures were likely built during this time, but few of these survive.

### **First Baptist Church (Old First Baptist Church)**

The Nicodemus First Baptist Church congregation was organized in 1878, and the First Baptists initially met in various dugouts around the community. In 1879, they moved into a sod house, and by May of the following year they had completed a limestone church building at the northeast corner of Fourth and Washington streets. Similar to the extant A.M.E. Church building, the 1880 First Baptist Church was a modest-sized, rectangular-shaped front-gable building with a single entrance in one of the gabled ends and a series of four, 6/6, double-hung windows along the length of the side walls. The sanctuary space consisted of one open room with pews down either side of a center aisle.<sup>18</sup> This building remained in use until ca. 1907, when the First Baptists completed the larger, extant limestone structure (Figure 56). According to local legend, the ca. 1907 church was built directly around the 1880 building, allowing services to continue uninterrupted. As the story goes, upon completion of the new building, the old one was disassembled and hauled out the front door of the replacement structure.<sup>19</sup>

As built ca. 1907, the replacement First Baptist Church consisted of a rectangular-shaped side-gable building with flared eaves, gable returns, and peak head windows with lancet arch muntins in the upper sash. The east, north, and south walls each included a single pair of windows. Due to later additions to the façade (west side), it is not clear how many windows were located along this side of the building. For the same reason, it is also uncertain exactly where the original entrance was located but, because the bema was located at the north end of the building, the entrance was most likely situated in its current location near the south end of the west wall (Figure 57).

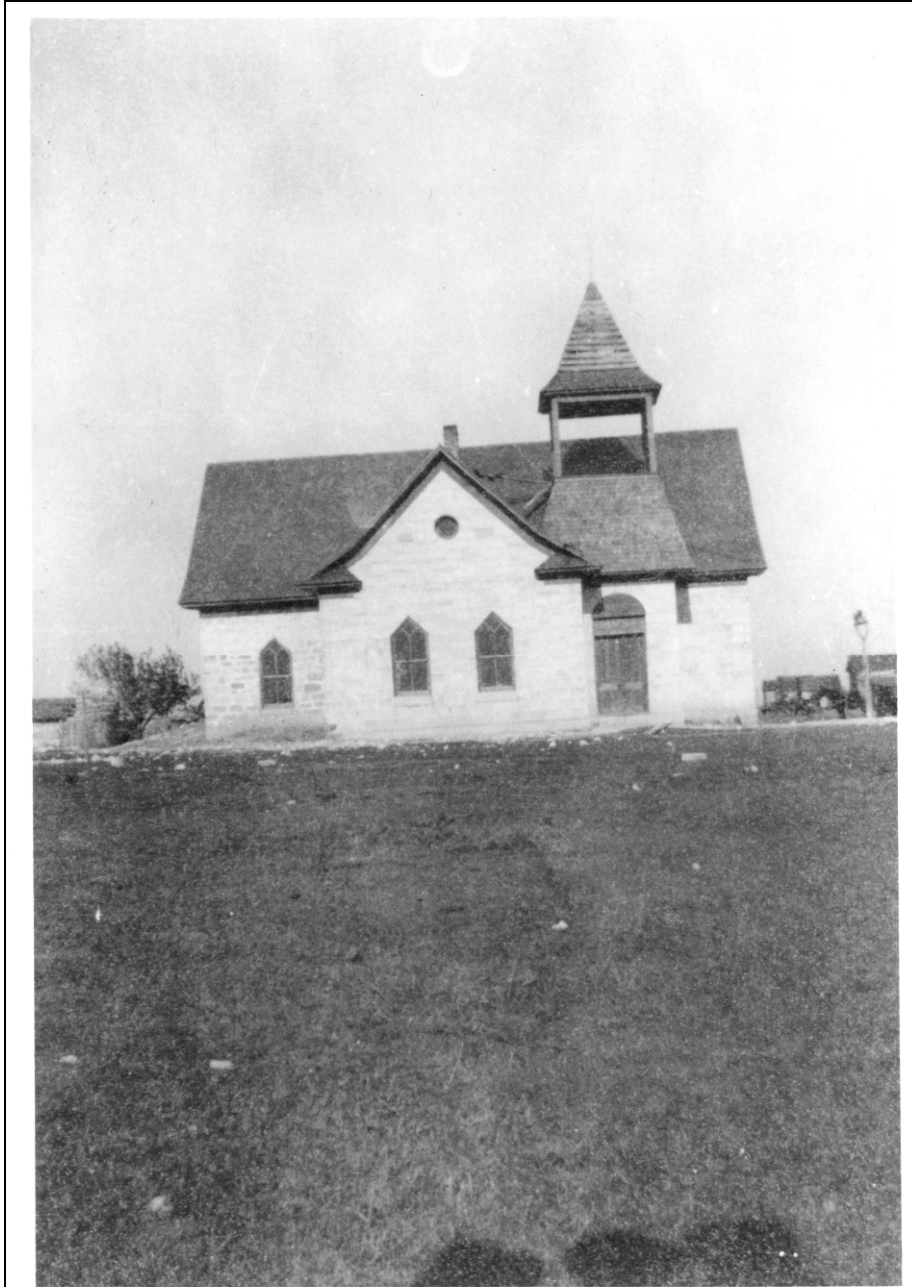
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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 51-52

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45-46.

<sup>19</sup> National Park Service, *Nicodemus Historic District*, HABS KS-49-K.





**Figure 56. Ca. 1908 view of Old First Baptist Church. Reproduced from University of Kansas, Spencer Research Library, Nicodemus Historical Society Collection.**





**Figure 57. Old First Baptist Church, looking northeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

Around 1920, the First Baptists added a cross-gable wing to the center of the west façade. Like the original side-gables, the wing featured flared eaves and gable returns. A pair of matching peak head windows with lancet arch muntins was located in the west façade of the wing. Concurrently, a steeple was built in the south end of the wing. The steeple included a foyer for the front entrance, which was in turn surmounted by an open belfry and a four-sided spire. Other changes included installation of a pressed metal-covered drop-ceiling within the sanctuary.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1920s, the building was experiencing structural problems. In response, a series of four limestone buttresses were built along the east wall (Figure 58). In addition, the pair of windows on the north wall was filled in.

During the mid-1930s, strong winds destroyed the four-sided spire atop the belfry. The bell remained intact but the spire and its four wood-post supports toppled to the ground. The event left the steeple truncated, much as it appears today. Until at least the late 1940s or early 1950s, the bell remained in place atop the tower. A short wooden railing bordered the edge of the tower roof, but this too had disappeared by the late 1950s (Figure 59).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-12.

<sup>21</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-12.



**Figure 58. Old First Baptist Church, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 59. Photograph, Old First Baptist Church, 1943. Reprinted from William J. Belleau, *The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas* (Hays, KS: [s.n.], 1943).**



The bell and its railing might have been removed when the building was covered with stucco in the early 1950s. During this time, the peak head windows were replaced with standard, rectangular-shaped double-hung wood windows, and the original four-panel rail and stile front doors were replaced. The remodeling project was apparently intended to both seal cracks and strengthen the limestone walls. As evidenced by the numerous stucco-covered buildings in and around Nicodemus, stucco must have been a popular method for either sealing a building against the elements or simply modernizing the appearance of a building. In the case of the First Baptist Church, workers are reported to have keyed the stucco to the limestone walls with nails that were driven into the mortar joints.<sup>22</sup>

Around 1967, a one-story cinderblock addition was built at the northwest corner of the church (Figure 60). The addition features a shed roof and a single window in the west wall. The addition contained a pastor's study and a pair of bathrooms.<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 60. Old First Baptist Church, ca. 1970. Reproduced from Kansas State Historical Society.**

In 1975, the First Baptist congregation built a new church building immediately north of the 1907 building. After the congregation relocated to the new building the older structure was used only for social gatherings. However, due to concerns about the building's structural integrity the old church was soon abandoned.<sup>24</sup> During the 2008 fieldwork for this report, the building appeared to have been mothballed for future restoration efforts. Vented plywood inserts have been installed in the window openings and the front entrance has been covered with a

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<sup>22</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-12.

<sup>23</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-12.

<sup>24</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-12.

temporary plywood door. Numerous plaster patches are visible around the building and a pair of wooden braces has been installed between the buttresses on the west wall.

### **Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse**

Teacher Jenny Fletcher taught the first classes in Nicodemus at various dugouts around the townsite. By the summer of 1879, Nicodemus residents had organized Nicodemus School District No. 1, the first in Graham County.<sup>25</sup> For roughly the next eight years, classes in School District No. 1 were taught at the Fletchers' St. Francis Hotel, as well as in private homes, by a number of different instructors. In 1887, Nicodemus residents transferred 2.45 acres of land to the school district on which to build an official school building. Located on Block 24 at the northwest corner of Fourth and Madison streets, the new schoolhouse consisted of a two-story, four-room wood frame building. The ca. 1887 school house remained in use until it was destroyed by fire ca. 1916.<sup>26</sup> During these years, the school was never used to its full capacity; in 1900, only two of the rooms were in use, while in 1903, a third room was used.<sup>27</sup> By 1918, the original schoolhouse was replaced by the extant one-room building that was built on or near the ca. 1887 structure (Figure 61).<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 61. Photograph, Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, 1943.**  
Reprinted from William J. Belleau, *The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas* (Hays, KS: [s.n.], 1943).

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 14

<sup>26</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-30.

<sup>27</sup> Lula Mae Sadler Craig, "The Nicodemus School District," typescript, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries.

<sup>28</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 2-30.

Due to the postwar decline in enrollment (a result of families relocating after World War II) in Fairview School District No. 78 (located in Nicodemus Township), the Fairview schoolhouse was relocated to the north side of the School District No. 1 building in 1945 (Figure 62). Used as an annex for grades one through four, the Fairview schoolhouse enabled School District No. 1 to accommodate an overflow of students.<sup>29</sup> Enrollment numbers in School District No. 1, however, began to decline by the early 1950s, and by 1952, the district no longer needed the annex. That year they sold the Fairview schoolhouse to the American Legion for use as a dance hall. The Legion relocated the building to the southeast corner of Second and Washington streets.



**Figure 62. Photograph, Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse and former Fairview schoolhouse, 1949. Reprinted from Van B. Shaw, “Nicodemus, Kansas: A Study in Isolation,” Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, 1951. Available at Kansas State University.**

By 1955, enrollment numbers for School District No. 1 had diminished to just a few students, forcing the district to close the ca. 1918 schoolhouse. Those students that remained in Nicodemus transferred to Bogue. The School District No. 1 building remained under the ownership of the school district until 1966, when it was donated to the Nicodemus 4-H Club. The American Legion Post #278 purchased and relocated to the building in 1983.<sup>30</sup> No longer needing the Fairview schoolhouse at Second and Washington streets, the district demolished the building.<sup>31</sup>

The wood-framed Fairview schoolhouse appears to have been a vernacular one-story, front-gable building with a covered porch along the primary façade. Typical of most one-room schoolhouses, it had a series of three windows along the side façades. It had an entrance to one side of the primary façade and a pair of windows to the right of the door.

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 74

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 75-76.

<sup>31</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, “Nicodemus National Historic Site,” 2-30.



The extant Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse remains largely unaltered from its original design. It is a vernacular, one-story square-shaped structure with a pyramidal roof (Figure 63). The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and the overall building is covered with original wood clapboard. The building rests on a cast concrete foundation. Its primary façade is located on the east side of the building and includes a small, gabled dormer in the center of the roof with a flagpole that extends from the ridge of the dormer roof; a small, concrete-covered brick chimney immediately to the southwest of the dormer; a covered porch with a hipped roof; and a central entrance with what appears to be an original sash door. The entrance is flanked by original 4/4 double-hung windows. The porch features glazed, colored tiles embedded in the sides of the concrete foundation. Pre-1983 photos indicate that the porch originally had a clapboard-covered railing and four square wooden posts or columns supporting the porch roof. By 1983, the wooden railing had been removed and the columns were replaced with four steel poles with adjustable screw jacks at the top ends.



**Figure 63. Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden**

The south side originally included a single pair of 4/4 double-hung windows near the west end of the wall. The overall opening for the pair of windows is currently covered with plywood. Whether the original wood sash windows remain intact underneath the plywood is unclear. There are no other features present on the south façade. There are no windows on the west wall (Figure 64). The north side of the building, however, includes a series of 2/2, metal sash windows with horizontal mullions. These replacement windows are framed side-by-side along the western half of the wall (Figure 65). Other fenestration on the building includes the pair of 4/4 double-hung windows on the façade and a pair of 4/4 double-hung windows in the gabled dormer, located in the center of the roof over the façade.





**Figure 64. Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 65. Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

A small, wood-frame coal shed is located just northwest of the schoolhouse (Figure 66). This front-gable building features horizontal wood plank siding and a wood shingle-covered roof. The building is surrounded by assorted building materials, including a large pile of limestone blocks purportedly from the demolished G. M. Sayers general store, and a steel storage tank.



**Figure 66. Coal shed behind Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

Toward the southeast corner of the schoolyard is a collection of playground equipment, including a slide, swing set, and jungle gym (Figure 67). The school's baseball field is located on the east side of Fourth Street, across from the schoolhouse (Figure 68). All that remains is the steel frame for the backstop and the grass-covered playing field.



**Figure 67. Playground equipment at the Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 68. Baseball field just east of Nicodemus District No. 1 Schoolhouse, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



## **Jerry Scruggs, Jr., House (Vernita Cruder Family House)**

The Jerry Scruggs, Jr., House is located on the northeast corner of Second and Adams streets. The rear portion of this vernacular cross-gable house is built of limestone, indicating that it might date to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (Figure 69). What appears to be the later addition is a ca. 1920, side-gable wood-framed structure (Figure 70). The stone section of the house includes an aluminum-covered door in the center of the south wall, flanked to the west by a single window opening. Another single window opening is located in the gabled end of the stone section. The façade, located on the west side of the wood frame addition, includes a door just south of the center of the façade, flanked by aluminum sash swinging windows. A single 1/1 aluminum, replacement sash window is located in the gabled south side of the addition. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and the wood-frame addition is covered with stucco.



**Figure 69. Jerry Scruggs, Jr. House, looking northwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 70. Jerry Scruggs, Jr. House, looking northeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Tuss/Lacey House**

The Tuss/Lacey House was located at the south end of a long, private drive that extends from the south end of Second Street and connects to the south end of Fourth Street. Built ca. 1910, the Tuss/Lacey House was a vernacular one-story wood-framed side-gable building with a covered porch addition on the façade and a small gabled el addition at the rear of the building. The front door was located in the center of the façade, which faced toward the north. The original section of the house was covered with stucco on the façade and side walls. The el was partially covered with wood shingles and InsulBrick (Figures 71, 72, and 73). An interior chimney protruded from the roof between the original portion of the house and the el addition. Surviving fenestration consisted of tall and narrow 1/1 and 2/2 double-hung wood sash windows. The foundation consisted of either poured concrete or limestone that has been parged with concrete.





**Figure 71. Tuss/Lacey House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 72. Tuss/Lacey House, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**





**Figure 73. Tuss/Lacey House, looking north, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

Like most of the original houses in the town, the Tuss/Lacey House was largely utilitarian in design, featuring no stylistic details, save the wood shingle siding on the addition. During the field work in 2008, many of these shingles were missing from the sides of the house as well as the roof. Having been abandoned to the elements, the house experienced water infiltration through the roof and sides, which threatened the structural integrity of the building. The house was demolished during the summer of 2010.

### **Calvin Sayers House**

The Calvin Sayers House was located on the north side of Madison Street between Seventh and Fourth streets. Built ca. 1920, this vernacular one-and-a-half story front-gable house featured a wood shingle roof and wood clapboard siding (Figure 74). A small, brick chimney protruded from the center of the roof. Most of the windows and doors were boarded up, but the few that remained exposed indicated that at least some of the fenestration consisted of 1/1 double-hung windows. The house originally included a porch along the façade located along the south side of the building, but it had collapsed. The building rested atop a poured concrete foundation. It retained good integrity as of 2008, but the overall structure was in poor condition. This house was torn down by the owner in August 2009.



**Figure 74. Calvin Sayers House, looking northeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Clarence and Yvonne Sayers House**

Located on the south side of Washington Street near Seventh Street, the Clarence and Yvonne Sayers House is the only one of the town's five hipped roof houses that was not relocated from another area. Built ca. 1920, the building was originally the Halbert and Verna Napue House.<sup>32</sup> During the 1960s or 1970s, current owners Clarence and Yvonne Sayers expanded the house with one-story gabled additions on the east and west sides (Figure 75). At some point they also added a covered porch addition over the façade, which faces toward the west. They also covered the building with vinyl siding. Fenestration consists of 1/1 and sliding aluminum sash windows. Only the hipped roof offers any clue to the presence of an older building. The modified Clarence and Yvonne Sayers House is typical of Nicodemus dwellings, which have, almost invariably, been altered over time to accommodate new uses or to offer more living space.

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<sup>32</sup> National Park Service, *Nicodemus Historic District*, sheet 4 of 5.





**Figure 75. Clarence and Yvonne Sayers House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

The Sayers property also includes a ca. 1980 detached three-car shed roof garage. The garage is framed with wood and sided with wood planks on three sides. There are no doors on the garage.

## ***Post 1920s Architecture***

The most significant construction project between 1929 and World War II was the Works Progress Administration-funded Township Hall (1937–1939). Aside from the construction of a few small houses, little development transpired in Nicodemus between the end of World War II and the late 1960s. It was during the mid-to-late 1970s, when descendants began returning to Nicodemus, that significant new construction occurred. Following renewed interest in the preservation of the community, local residents secured grants to build low-income retirement housing for the elderly, a municipal firehouse and garage, and a water tower.<sup>33</sup>

### **Sarah Moore House**

The Sarah Moore House is located on the east side of Second Street, just south of Adams Street. It is a ca. 1930, wood-frame, one-story, side-gable house with a lean-to addition along the rear of the building (Figure 76). The façade, which faces toward the west, features a single door near the south end of the façade and a single 1/1 aluminum sash window near the north end of the façade. A covered porch addition surrounds the front door. The side walls each feature three 1/1 aluminum sash windows.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 78.



**Figure 76. Sarah Moore House, looking east, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Nicodemus Township Hall (Township Hall and Nicodemus National Historic Site Visitor Center)**

Built between 1937 and 1939, the Nicodemus Township Hall was a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project that employed approximately twelve local residents during the building's construction (Figure 77).<sup>34</sup> It is not known who designed the building, but local resident Gilbert Alexander was the project manager and time keeper during its two-year construction. Following the dedication of the building in 1939, the community used it to host dances, meetings, and elections. Prior to this time, such activities were held at the Masonic Hall, formerly located on the northeast corner of Washington and Third streets.<sup>35</sup>

Typical of extant WPA buildings found throughout Kansas, Nicodemus Township Hall features load-bearing rock-faced limestone walls. Stone construction was common for WPA buildings, which often utilized elements of Rustic style architecture, as developed by the National Park Service (NPS) during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>36</sup> Foremost among Rustic design principles was the utilization of local building materials, such as native stone. This was intended to keep construction costs down as well as, in the case of park structures, reduce the visual impact of buildings within the natural environment.<sup>37</sup> In the case of town halls, native stone visually connected these buildings to their community through the use of local geology. It might

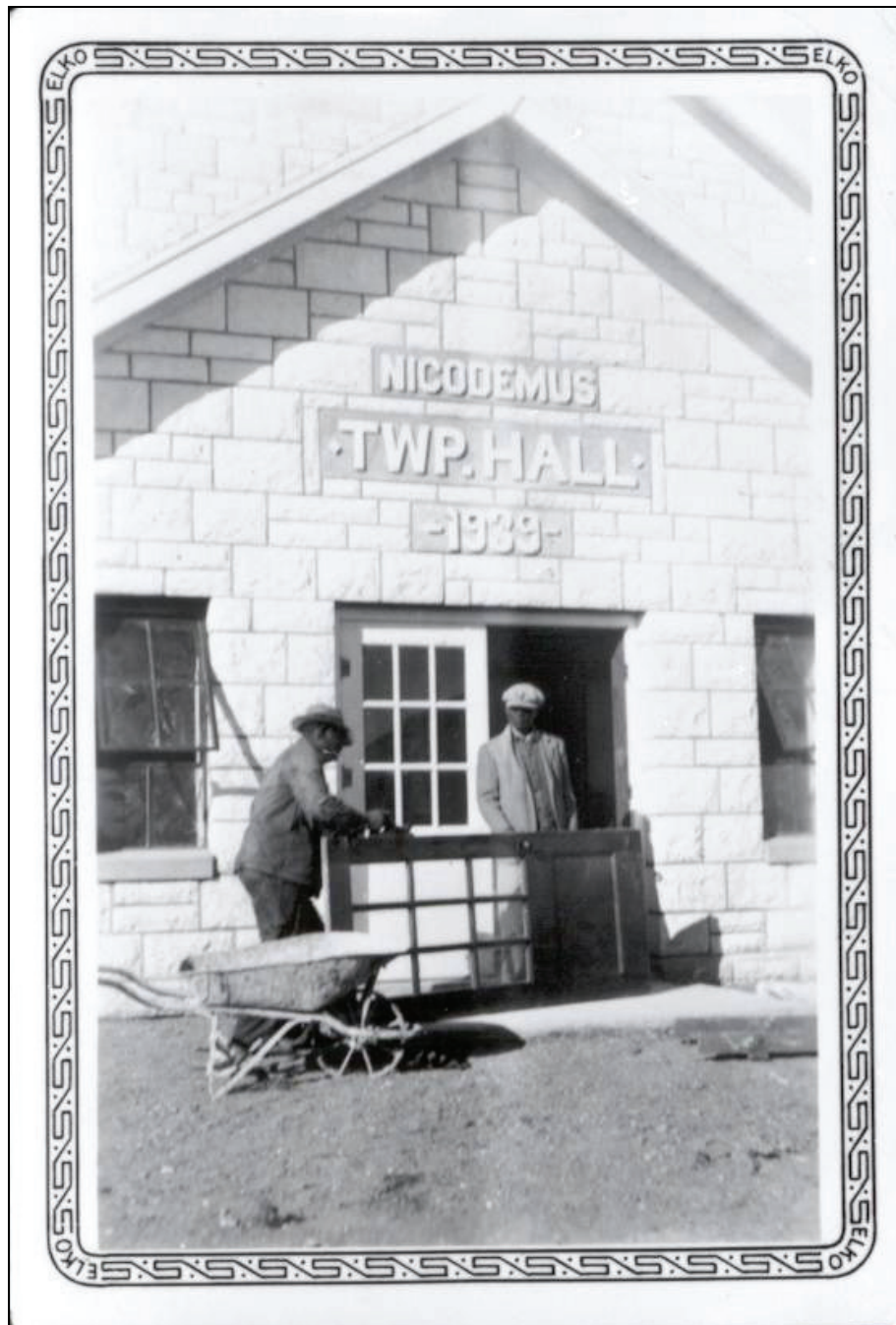
<sup>34</sup> According to Angela Bates, all of the workers were town or township residents. Angela Bates, personal communication, March 4, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 73-74.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>37</sup> Albert H. Good, *Park & Recreation Structures* (1938; reprinted, Boulder, CO: Graybooks, 1990), 6-7.

also be said that the use of native stone helped blend this particular hall with preexisting stone structures in the town. But, perhaps most important among WPA objectives, the intense labor that was required to quarry stone and transform it into architecture created jobs for skilled and unskilled workers.



**Figure 77. Photograph, Nicodemus Township Hall under construction, ca. 1939. Reproduced from HABS, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark files.**



The stone used for this building was quarried near Webster Reservoir, in Rooks County, Kansas. Local mason Gerald Napue cut the stones to dimension and patterned them with a mallet. Napue and a crew of approximately eleven men then laid the dressed blocks in a coursed-ashlar pattern (Figure 78).<sup>38</sup> As completed, the walls include two six-inch-thick outer wythes with mortar and rubble infill and average about eighteen inches in total thickness. A series of four stone buttresses, located along the east and west elevations, provide support to the four scissor trusses that comprise the roofing system.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 78. Photograph, Nicodemus Township Hall, 1943. Reprinted from William J. Belleau, *The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas* (Hays, KS: [s.n.], 1943).**

When finished, Nicodemus Township Hall became (and remains) the largest structure in the town. It is a voluminous front-gable, rectangle-plan building that measures forty feet wide by eighty feet long (Figure 79). Although the hall is a one-story building, the ridge of the roof is located thirty feet above grade, or about three-stories high. The façade, located at the south end of the building, features a gabled vestibule that reaches about one-and-one-half to two stories tall. The façade is divided into three bays with the main entrance located directly in the center. The side walls are divided into six bays. A tall, brick chimney extends from the north end of the east half of the roof.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 73-74.

<sup>39</sup> Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janney, Elstner, and Associates, "Nicodemus National Historic Site," 3-14.





**Figure 79. Nicodemus Township Hall, looking northwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

Fenestration consists of a series of five large twenty-five-light steel sash windows along the east and west walls. Six of the panes open via an operable pivot sash. An additional tall and narrow six-light steel frame window is located near the north end of the east and west walls, just north of the side entrances. An additional four-light steel sash window is located at the basement level of the west wall. Fenestration on the north wall includes a pair of four-light steel sash windows at the basement level. On the façade, the center entrance is flanked by six-light steel sash windows. All of these windows are original to the building.

Aside from occasional roof replacements, the exterior of the building has remained largely unaltered. The only noticeable change occurred during the 1970s, when the original nine-light wood sash front doors were replaced with the extant glazed aluminum doors. Inside, the floors were refinished and a drop acoustical tile ceiling was installed ca. 1980. Two years later, the interior was paneled with wood wainscoting and a pair of restrooms was installed at the north end of the building. Sometime after the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) inventory in 1983, the stone privy, originally located north of the hall, was demolished.

In 1996, the NPS located the Nicodemus National Historic Site Visitor Center in the hall. The building now includes interpretive exhibits, a small office for park staff, a library for local history, and a book store/gift shop. The interior remains largely unaltered from its original construction.

### **Alvin and Ada Bates House (Amos and Letitia Wellington's House)**

The Alvin and Ada Bates House is located on the south side of Washington Street between Third and Fourth streets. It is not certain when this house was built but it does appear in

a 1953 aerial photograph of Nicodemus. It could have been built as early as the 1920s or 1930s or as late as the 1940s. For the purposes of this discussion, it will be located with postwar architecture.

A vernacular one-story building, the Bates House features a cross-gable plan with a shed roof addition along the south wall of the gable-side portion of the house (Figure 80). The façade, which faces toward the east, is divided into three bays, not including the single-bay, shed roof addition at the south end of the façade. The front entrance is located at the north end of the façade. Fenestration consists of 1/1 aluminum sash windows. The large exterior chimney, which is attached to the gabled north elevation, is the most prominent feature of the house. Unlike the rest of the house, which is covered with stucco, the chimney is enveloped in aluminum siding.



**Figure 80. Alvin and Ada Bates House, looking southwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

The Bates property also includes a pole barn and three small silos. They are located just south of the Bates House on Third Street between Adams and Washington streets (Figure 81). Built ca. 1970, the pole barn is a trapezoidal-shaped structure with corrugated steel siding and a pair of sliding doors at the front of the building. The silos are made of corrugated steel. These are the only agriculture-related structures within the townsite.



**Figure 81. Alvin and Ada Bates barn and silos (Leon and Agnes Stephen property), looking south, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Ordral and Alvena Alexander House (Alvena Alexander House)**

Located near the southwest corner of Second and Washington streets, the Ordral and Alvena Alexander House is a ca. 1960, vernacular gable-T house (Figure 82). The façade, which faces north toward Washington Street, features a gable-front covered porch, supported by four columns. The front entrance, located in the center of the façade, is flanked on either side by large sliding windows. Fenestration elsewhere on the house consists of 1/1 aluminum sash windows. The entire house is covered with aluminum siding.

The Alexander House complex also includes a pole barn and mobile home (Figure 83). The pole barn is a rectangular-shaped structure with a standing seam metal roof and aluminum siding. A set of sliding doors and an overhead, rollaway door provide access to the interior of the barn. The mobile home, located immediately west of the pole barn, dates to the 1960s or 1970s. It is covered with aluminum siding and features a wooden deck along its façade. The interior is accessed via a sliding glass door at one end and a conventional swinging door at the other. Fenestration consists of aluminum sash sliding windows.





**Figure 82. Ordral and Alvena Alexander House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 83. Ordral and Alvena Alexander trailer and garage (Alvena Alexander trailer and garage), looking west, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

## Hattie Craig Burnie House

The Hattie Craig Burnie House is located on the east side of Second Street, just north of Adams Street. Built ca.1970, this one-story, side-gabled Ranch house features an asphalt shingle roof, composite siding, and a concrete slab foundation (Figure 84). The façade, which faces west, was divided into three bays. The front entrance, located in the center of the façade, is flanked on the north side by a metal frame Chicago window and on the south side by a pair of 1/1, metal sash windows. A small covered porch provides shelter over the front entrance. The gabled ends of the house, located on the north and south sides of the building, each feature a 1/1, metal sash window.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 84. Hattie Craig Burnie House, looking east. Photograph by Google Earth Street View.**

## Nicodemus Villa (Housing Authority “The Villas”)

Located on the northwest corner of Washington and Fourth streets, Nicodemus Villa is the largest of the postwar construction projects in Nicodemus. It consists of five single-story duplex units, a utility building, an enclosed garage for tenant rental, and a community center that were completed in 1976 (Figures 85 and 86). The units are all gable-sided structures with asphalt shingle roofs, brick veneer, and concrete slab foundations. Each half of a duplex includes a recessed porch with a front entrance and a pair of large picture windows with a movable lower sash. The gabled ends each include a single 1/1 aluminum sash window. Simple in design, these units resemble many of the ranch houses built in large tracts across the country following World War II.

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Weaver, Superintendent, NNHS, e-mail message to Heather Lee Miller, October 19, 2010.





**Figure 85. Nicodemus Villa, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 86. Nicodemus Villa, looking west, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



The Nicodemus Villa project was proposed in December 1969 by a group of six young men. Over the next six years, numerous Nicodemus residents, including Lois Alexander, who later served as the Executive Director of the Nicodemus Housing Authority, and the Township Board among others, lobbied for funding to create low income housing for the area's elderly. Perhaps due in large part to the community's National Historic Landmark status, HUD awarded \$250,000 for the Turnkey Housing Project. The money enabled the town to build the Nicodemus Villa. HUD funding, however, ultimately failed to cover construction costs for the entire project. But local residents secured community development funds, which were used to complete the community center.<sup>41</sup>

### **First Baptist Church (New First Baptist Church)**

The New First Baptist Church is located on the east side of Fourth Street, immediately north of the Old First Baptist Church. Dedicated on September 28, 1975, the church building is a one-story gabled-L building with an asphalt shingle roof, brick veneer, and a concrete foundation (Figure 87). The façade, located on the west side of the building, is divided into six bays. The main entrance, which consists of a pair of aluminum-framed glass doors, is located at the extreme south end of the façade. A second, metal door is located on the north-half of the façade. Fenestration consists of narrow, 1/1 leaded glass windows located along the east, west, and south walls. There are no windows on the north wall.



**Figure 87. New First Baptist Church, looking east, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

Reverend L. C. Alexander was largely responsible for the construction of the New First Baptist Church. He and a crew of volunteers, consisting of current and former Nicodemus residents, completed all but the brick veneer, which was contracted to a mason from Wichita.

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<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 78. See also Alexander interview, 2-4.

Upon completion of the New First Baptist Church, the Old First Baptist Church became the Fellowship Hall.<sup>42</sup>

### **Vergil and Roberta Robinson, Sr., House (Roberta Robinson House)**

The Vergil and Roberta Robinson, Sr. House is located on the south side of Washington Street between Fifth and Seventh streets. Built ca. 1975, this one-story rectangular building is located partially below grade (Figure 88). Known as a “Basement House” or “Hope House,” this particular design was built with future expansion in mind. The basement area provided living space until the owner could afford to build upper floors atop the lower level. The façade of this house appears to be located on the gable end facing toward the east. It is covered with a shed roof addition that includes three doors and an assortment of various sized window openings that include 3/3 and sliding aluminum sash. A series of three, randomly-placed awning windows and a Chicago-style window are located along the north side. A wide chimney protrudes from the gabled west side.



**Figure 88. Vergil and Roberta Robinson, Sr. House, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Temour Terry House**

The Temour Terry House is located on the south side of State Route 24, just east of Seventh Street. Built ca. 1975, the Temour Terry House is a long, one-story side-gable house (Figure 89). It is built of cinderblocks and features an asphalt shingle roof that extends slightly beyond the ends of the building. Due to the extended roof system, the gabled ends of the building resemble enclosed pediments. The façade faces north toward State Route 24. A gabled vestibule protrudes from the center of the façade. Fenestration consists of a series of five 1/1 aluminum sash windows along the façade and rear walls, and a pair of 1/1 aluminum sash windows in each of the gabled ends.

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 78.



**Figure 89. Temour Terry House, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Nicodemus Township Municipal Firehouse (Nicodemus Firehouse)**

Among the numerous buildings constructed during the flurry of activity in the late 1970s was the municipal firehouse, located near the west side of the Nicodemus Villa on Washington Street. Built in 1978, the firehouse is a one-story side-gable building with pairs of large overhead doors and a pedestrian door on the façade, which faces toward the south (Figure 90). It is sided with steel and rests on a concrete slab foundation. The building houses the township's firefighting vehicles.



**Figure 90. Nicodemus Township Municipal Firehouse and Nicodemus Villa Garage, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



## Nicodemus Water Tower

As the number of residents increased during the late 1970s, so too did the demand for water. In response, the community applied for and received an Economic Development Administration grant to create a municipal water system. The money was used to build the 100-foot tall water tower that is currently located on Block 20 (Figure 91). Prior to completion of the tower in 1980, local residents relied on their own wells and cisterns for water.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 91. Nicodemus Water Tower, looking southwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

## Juan and Susie Alexander House (Juan Alexander House)

The most recent house built in Nicodemus is located near the south end of Fifth Street, just east of the Ola Wilson House. Built ca. 2003, it is a one-story U-shaped house, with a gabled, two-car garage extending from the west end of the house and a cross-gable extending from the east end of the house (Figure 92). The ends of the lateral axis of the house are also gabled. The house includes a black, asphalt shingle roof; composite or possibly vinyl siding that resembles clapboard; a variety of 1/1 aluminum or vinyl sash windows with eight-light, muntin inserts; and a concrete slab foundation. This is the first house in the townsite to feature an attached garage.

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<sup>43</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 79.



**Figure 92. Juan and Susie Alexander House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

### ***Relocated Buildings***

During the 1970s, there was a growing effort by local residents to protect those few structures that remained in the town. This renewed interest in the town's heritage also motivated numerous former residents to acquire vacation homes in Nicodemus. However, few historic structures survived by the mid-1970s, leaving former residents and their descendents few alternatives aside from building new housing or moving older buildings onto lots in the town. The latter option proved most popular and, as a consequence, numerous houses from outlying farmsteads were relocated to Nicodemus.<sup>44</sup>

Given what is known about the trends in building materials over the twentieth century, it is not surprising that all of these relocated houses are modest wood-frame structures, making them relatively easy to move. Invariably, they are vernacular houses and most appear to have been built between 1900 and 1930. Because these houses exhibit no particular style, they are addressed in the following series of architectural descriptions by their ground plan and massing. The various plans among these relocated buildings include hipped roof, front gable, and side gable.

### **Hipped and Pyramidal Roof Houses of Nicodemus**

These buildings are one-story in height and have a square or near-square ground plan. Roof pitches vary from normal to steep. Their preponderance throughout Graham County and the state suggests a strong regional inclination toward equilateral or near-equilateral plans and roofing systems. This trend may have begun during the pre-railroad period of settlement, when dimensional lumber was in short supply. Since pyramidal roof framing requires fewer long-spanning rafters, it would have offered a clear economic advantage over gabled roof framing.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, many of the early limestone farmhouses around Nicodemus Township feature pyramidal

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> McAlester and McAlester, *Field Guide to American Houses*, 100.

or hipped roofs, suggesting that their builders might have made an effort to minimize the use of lumber. The square plan, however, remained popular long after dimensional lumber became more readily available. Certainly, economy of construction played a significant role in their long-standing popularity, but the plan may also have become embedded in the regional culture. All of these buildings within Nicodemus, with the exception of the Clarence and Yvonne Sayers House (see Figure 75), have been relocated to the townsite from outlying areas.

Because stone houses are relatively difficult to move, all four of the relocated square plan houses in Nicodemus are of wood frame construction. Some or all of the relocated houses may have come from outlying farmsteads that were abandoned in the postwar era. All but two of these houses have been drastically modified with additions, replacement siding, and replacement windows. Consequently, it is difficult to determine some of the dates of construction. A rough estimate, however, dates them to ca. 1900 to ca. 1935. These houses include the Orlando and Armantha Napue House; William Henry Napue House; Virgil and Juanita Robinson House; and Robert and Bertha Carter House.

Of the four relocated square plan houses, only the Orlando and Armantha Napue House and William Henry Napue House retain enough integrity to allow a clear assessment of their original configuration and features. Located near the southeast corner of First and Adams streets, the Orlando and Armantha Napue House provides the best preserved example of the square plan house. It includes a hipped roof with a large gabled dormer over the façade, which faces toward the west (Figure 93). Typical of local square plan houses, the façade is divided into three bays, with a center entrance flanked by double-hung windows. A second entrance and a covered porch addition are located on what is currently the west wall (Figure 94). Fenestration around the house consists of original, 1/1 double-hung sash of various dimensions, and a pair of sliding windows just south of the door on the west wall. The house is sided with wood clapboard. Like most square plan houses in the area, the Orlando and Armantha Napue House exhibits little in the way of architectural embellishment.

Similarly, the ca. 1935, William Henry Napue House is simple in design. Located near the corner of State Route 24 and Seventh Street, the William Henry Napue House exhibits little in the way of embellishment. It does, however, feature an unusual gable-on-hip roof (Figure 95). This is the only one of its kind in Nicodemus. But like the Orlando and Armantha Napue House, the façade, which faces toward the north, is divided into three bays, with a single window on either side of the center entrance. The house is covered with wood clapboard and fenestration consists of 1/1 double-hung windows. The windows appear to be replacements.

The Virgil and Juanita Robinson House, located at the east end of Washington Street, features a tall hipped roof that is truncated at the top (Figure 96). Truncated hipped roofs such as these sometimes included a wooden or wrought iron balustrade around the edges of the landing. These delicate embellishments, however, were typically lost over time. Indeed, in addition to being relocated to Nicodemus, this particular house has experienced many changes over the years. The exterior walls have been entirely obscured with brick veneer and lean-to additions, a common occurrence for older buildings that have been commandeered for new uses. Consequently, it is difficult to determine a date of construction for the original portion of the house, but the shape of the roof indicates a build date close to 1900. It is also difficult to determine which wall serves as the façade, but the covered porch on the west wall suggests that the façade faces toward the west.





**Figure 93. Orlando and Armantha Napue House, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 94. Orlando and Armantha Napue House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 95. William Henry Napue House, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 96. Vergil and Juanita Robinson House, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



The Robert and Bertha Carter House has also experienced considerable alteration, but much of the original configuration of the house remains visible. Located on the west side of Second Street, just south of Adams Street, the Carter House consists of a square plan house with a gabled wing addition at the north side of the building (Figure 97). The roof is a tall, steeply-pitched hip-on-hip roof with a chimney protruding from the center. This is the only hip-on-hip roof in Nicodemus. Due to the alteration of window openings and the addition of vinyl siding, no other original features are visible. As with the Virgil and Juanita Robinson House, the Carter House has been modified to meet new needs, leaving only the general shape of the house to suggest its early twentieth-century origins.



**Figure 97. Robert and Bertha Carter House, looking northwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

## **Side-Gable Houses of Nicodemus**

The side-gable house is the most common among relocated buildings in the town. At least eight side-gable houses have been moved to Nicodemus since the 1970s. Some of these houses have been heavily modified over time, making it difficult to assess their original configurations. However, a few of the early twentieth-century side-gable houses resemble the ubiquitous hall and parlor plan, commonly built throughout the eastern half of the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. These buildings are typically two pens wide and one unit deep. This plan might have been popular among farmers due in part to its familiar design, relative ease of construction and maintenance, and potential for later expansion. Like square plan houses, side-gable houses made good candidates for relocation to the townsite. Relatively light in construction, they can be moved much like a modular home.

Side-gable houses in Nicodemus include single-room and massed-plans; that is, houses that are more than one room deep. They are either one or one-and-a-half stories in height and the

primary façade is generally two or three bays wide. Like most of the buildings in Nicodemus, many of the side-gable houses have been altered over time. Lean-to additions, altered window and door openings, and replacement siding are common features of these local houses.

*Ace Williams House (Robert Brogden's Big Shed)*

The Ace Williams House is located on the east side of Fourth Street just south of Adams Street. Built ca. 1910, this small dwelling consists of two one-story side-gable buildings attached at the gabled ends (Figures 98 and 99). It is not clear if the smaller of the two sections was built as an addition or was simply a separate structure that was attached to another building. The façade and front entrance appear to be located on the east side of the building. Similar to the Clementine Vaughn House (see Chapter 5), the Ace Williams House features a wood shingle roof and wood shingle and InsulBrick siding. All of the windows have been covered with plywood. The house seems to have included only two rooms. A small chimney protruding from the roof, near the junction of the two sections, indicates that the house had a stove for heating and/or cooking. Given the small scale of the house, there could not have been much room for a kitchen. The house is currently vacant.



**Figure 98. Ace Williams House, looking southeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**





**Figure 99. Ace Williams House, looking northeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

### *Rosa Stokes House*

The Rosa Stokes House is located just west of the Ola Wilson House, which is located northwest of Jackson and Fifth streets. It is a ca. 1920, vernacular one-and-a-half story side-gable house with clipped gables. The façade, which faces toward the south, might have originally included a recessed porch but this has been entirely enclosed with vertical plank siding (Figure 100). The main entrance is currently located just west of the center of the façade and it is flanked by a large picture window to the west and a small 1/1 aluminum sash window to the east. A wheelchair access ramp provides access to the main entrance. A clipped gable dormer with a 1/1 aluminum sash window is located at the center of the roof near the ridge. The side walls each include a pair of 1/1 aluminum sash windows on the first story and a single 1/1 aluminum sash window on the second. The overall house is covered with asbestos siding.





**Figure 100. Rosa Stokes House, looking northwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

*Lloyd Wellington House (Twila Berry House)*

Located at the northwest corner of Second and Adams streets, the Lloyd Wellington House appears to consist of two side-gable buildings that have been joined to form a gable-L house (Figure 101). The largest section of the house is one-and-a-half stories tall. The roof is gabled at the north end and hipped at the south end. A lean-to addition is located along the west side of the building. Perpendicular to the south end of the larger structure is a one-story side-gable addition. The front entrance to this building is located inside the enclosed porch addition, which extends the length of the east side of the hipped roof structure. This enclosed porch constitutes the façade of the overall conglomeration of structures. The front door is located near the south end of the porch and a band of seven 1/1 aluminum sash windows are located to the north and south of this entrance. Fenestration elsewhere on the house consists of various sized 1/1 aluminum sash windows, similar to those found on the enclosed porch addition. The overall building, which rests atop a cinderblock foundation, is covered with stucco.



**Figure 101. Lloyd Wellington House, looking west, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

*Bernard and Ava Bates House*

The Bernard and Ava Bates House is located on the northwest corner of Washington and First streets. It is a ca. 1920, vernacular one-story side-gable house with a gabled addition extending from the rear wall (Figure 102). The façade of this wood framed house faces south toward Washington Street. It is divided into three bays, with a glass door in the center of the façade and a single, 1/1 aluminum sash window to the east of the door. Fenestration elsewhere on the house is limited to 1/1 aluminum sash windows. The house is covered with asbestos tiles. A side-gable pole barn is located just east of the house. It is covered with corrugated metal siding.



**Figure 102. Bernard and Ava Bates House, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

*Fred and Ivalee Switzer House (Ivalee Switzer House)*

The Fred and Ivalee Switzer House is located on the south side of Adams Street between Second and Third streets. It is a ca. 1930, vernacular wood-framed one-and-a-half story side-gable house (Figure 103). The façade, which faces toward the north, features a center entrance with a small covered porch. A picture window is located to the east of the door and a 1/1 aluminum sash window is located to the west of the door. A shed dormer, with a pair of aluminum sliding sash windows, is located in the center of the roof. Fenestration on the east and west walls consists of 1/1 and sliding aluminum sash windows. The overall house is covered with stucco. The foundation is made of either concrete or cinderblock. The most distinctive feature of this property is the old tire fence that lines the curb in front of the house. The tires are partially painted white to match the house.





**Figure 103. Fred and Ivalee Switzer House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

*Donald and Pearlana Moore House (Donald Moore House)*

The Donald and Pearlana Moore House is located on the east side of Second Street near the south end of Second Street, south of Adams Street. Due to alterations and additions, it is difficult to determine for certain whether or not the Moore House was originally a side-gable house, but the lean-to addition along the south wall might have originally been located along what would have been the rear of the original portion of this house (Figure 104). This would make the original section of the house a side-gable building. However, the owner built a side-gable addition onto the façade of the original section of the house. As it exists now, the house follows a gable-T plan, with the façade facing toward the west. It includes an asphalt shingle roof and assorted plank and plywood siding. Fenestration is limited. The lean-to addition at the south end of the building includes a 1/1 aluminum sash window, and the north end of the west wall features a large Chicago-style window. The front entrance is located just south of the Chicago-style window. The original section of the house probably dates to the 1920s, and the gabled addition likely dates to the 1960s or 1970s. The Moore House is a typical example of adaptive reuse of older houses from the outlying countryside.



**Figure 104. Donald and Pearlina Moore House, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**

*Guy and Juanita Redd House (Esther Clark's House)*

The Guy and Juanita Redd House is located on the east side of Seventh Street, between Washington and Madison streets. It is a one-story, rectangular-shaped, side-gable building with an asphalt shingle roof (Figure 105). The façade is located on the west side of the building, facing Seventh Street. It is divided into four bays with the front entrance located near the north end of the house. The front door features a small covered porch. Fenestration consists of 1/1 aluminum fixed sash windows. The exterior walls are covered with vinyl siding.





**Figure 105. Guy and Juanita Redd House, looking east, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

The Redds moved this building to Nicodemus during the 1970s.<sup>46</sup> When it was built, however, remains uncertain. It is possible that this is a modular house that was fabricated sometime in the 1970s then moved to the site on a trailer. It could also be an older ranch house that has been modified over time. Regardless, the generic, manufactured appearance of this building strongly suggests that it was built after World War II.

### **Front-gable Houses of Nicodemus**

The front-gable form became popular during the Greek Revival movement that occurred from the 1830s to the 1850s. The enclosed pediment, common to the Greek Revival movement, had much to do with the development of this building design. Long and narrow in shape, front-gable buildings became popular in urban environments, where building lots provided little lateral room for construction. In the East and Midwest, front-gable buildings often stand one-and-a-half or two-stories in height and typically feature steeply pitched roofs. However, one-story shotgun houses were also popular in many working-class neighborhoods throughout the South and Midwest.<sup>47</sup>

During the Craftsman movement of the early 1900s, front-gable houses gained new popularity. Many of the front-gable houses from this period, however, are simply folk houses that took their basic design from Craftsman design principles.<sup>48</sup> The only true front-gable house in Nicodemus, the Ola Wilson House, falls into this category. It is not known why front-gable

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> McAlester and McAlester, *Field Guide to American Houses*, 90.

<sup>48</sup> McAlester and McAlester, *Field Guide to American Houses*, 90.

houses were not more popular in the outlying areas, but it might have to do with the fact that farmhouses were not restricted in size by the shape of their lots. Having ample room to build as they pleased, local residents might have been more inclined to build laterally as opposed to longitudinally.

*Ola Wilson House (Ola Wilson House/Nicodemus Historical Society)*

The Ola Wilson House, now the home of the Nicodemus Historical Society, is located on the west side of Fifth Street between Madison and Jackson streets. It is a ca. 1920 vernacular front-gable bungalow. The façade is divided into three bays with a center entrance and vinyl or aluminum replacement sash picture windows on either side of the door (Figure 106). The façade includes a gabled, covered porch that is supported by a pair of square columns. The east wall is divided into three bays. Fenestration consists of two pairs of 1/1 replacement sash windows and a single 1/1 replacement sash window. The west wall was originally divided into four bays, but all but one of the window openings has been infilled with plywood (Figure 107). A single 1/1 replacement sash window is currently the only fenestration on the west wall. The rear wall includes a small covered porch addition. The overall house is covered with white asbestos tiles and it rests on a new cinderblock foundation.



**Figure 106. Ola Wilson House, looking northwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 107. Ola Wilson House, looking northeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

### *Priscilla Arts Club*

The Priscilla Arts Club is located on the north side of Washington Street, immediately west of the Township Hall. The school building is the only relocated front-gable structure in the town that was not a residence. It is a one-story front-gable building with an asphalt shingle roof, aluminum siding, and a concrete foundation (Figure 108). The façade, which faces south toward Washington Street, includes a door near the west corner of the façade and a single 1/1 window at the opposite corner. The east and west walls each include a pair of 2/2 double-hung windows.





**Figure 108. Priscilla Arts Club, looking northeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

### **Mobile and Modular Homes in Nicodemus**

In addition to relocating houses from outlying areas, those seeking to maintain temporary residences in Nicodemus have also relied on mobile and modular homes for shelter. Currently, there are eight mobile homes and one modular home within the Nicodemus townsite. These homes date from the 1960s to the 1980s. Mobile homes include the Ernestine Van Duvall Duplex (Figure 109); the Former Baptist Parsonage on the east side of Third Street near State Route 24 (Figure 110); the Harold Switzer House at Washington and Second streets (Figure 111); the Ordral and Alvena Alexander trailer on Second Street between Washington and Adams streets (see Figure 83); the Veryl and Fern Switzer Trailer (Veryl Switzer Trailer) on Washington Street between Second and Third streets (Figure 112); First Baptist Church Parsonage at Washington and Fourth streets (Figure 113); the Lawrence and Mae Clark trailer (Figure 114); and the Shelly and John Rew trailer (Figure 115).



**Figure 109. Ernestine Van Duvall Duplex House, looking north, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 110. The former First Baptist Parsonage, with Reverend Groves' trailer, on east side of Third Street near State Route 24, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**





**Figure 111. Harold Switzer House, looking southeast, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 112. Veryl and Fern Switzer Trailer, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 113. First Baptist Church Parsonage, looking southeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**



**Figure 114. Lawrence and Mae Clark trailer, looking southwest, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**





**Figure 115. Shelly and John Rew trailer, looking southwest, November 2008.  
Photograph by Don Burden.**

Commercial production of house trailers began during the 1920s. Initially built as vacation homes, these temporary shelters became popular with salesmen, entertainers, and migratory workers during the Great Depression. During World War II, the U.S. government acquired tens of thousands of trailers to house wartime workers. Although stigmatized by its association with transient labor and the downtrodden, the trailer emerged in the postwar era as a legitimate alternative to fixed-house living. Built with sheet metal, plastics, and various processed materials, trailers offered consumers a complete house package, equipped with carpet, appliances, and even furnishings. Consequently, the “mobile home,” as it was coined during the mid-1950s, became increasingly less mobile.<sup>49</sup>

During the 1960s, trailers came in standard sizes of twelve and fourteen-foot widths. Placed side-by-side, two “single-wide” trailers could be used to make a “double-wide.” By the late 1970s, some single-width trailers were as wide as seventeen feet and as long as sixty. Trailers had grown expansive enough to include fireplaces and even cathedral ceilings. Impractical to move, these massive trailers became increasingly viewed as real property, as opposed to motor vehicles. As a result, local government agencies began taxing trailers as real estate.<sup>50</sup>

Similar to mobile homes, modular homes are assembled at a manufacturing facility and then moved to their intended location. Like a fixed house, they are generally built of wood and steel members. However, unlike fixed houses, a modular home is erected in sections on an

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 261-62.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 262-63.

assembly line, much like an automobile. Divided into smaller components, the house can be moved via surface roads. Lacking axles, like those on a mobile home, modular home components are typically transported on flatbed trucks. The G. Irvin and Minerva Sayers House (Robert and Billie Brogden House), located on South Street, between Third and Fourth streets, is currently the only known modular house in Nicodemus. A front-gable detached garage is located just south of the house (Figure 116).



**Figure 116. G. Irvin and Minerva Sayers House, looking northeast, November 2008. Photograph by Don Burden.**





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