

WHEN KANSAS CITY, MO., CAME CLOSE TO BEING A CITY IN KANSAS

ROBERT W. PATRICK

THERE have been several attempts by the citizens of Kansas City, Mo., to cede that city to Kansas. To understand why such an event was very seriously considered, one must examine some of the geographic and political reasons given in an attempt to justify such action.

At the time Missouri was admitted into the Union, the western boundary of that state was on a line running north and south through the center of the mouth of the Kansas river.¹ Various accounts put this site at different locations ranging from its present location to a point 14 miles east.² Most of the stories blame a flood in 1844 for changing the course of the Kansas river. One account says that the channel of the Missouri is the former course of the Kansas river. Another story says that prior to the flood of 1844 the Kansas actually flowed into the Missouri at a point east of where the old Union Station stood, and that the stream was deflected northeastward by the bluff.³ However, these arguments have never been held to be valid because the description given by Lewis and Clark of the site in 1804, some 40 years before the flood, describe the site much as it appears today. The explorers' journals describe the area around the mouth of the Kansas river in the following manner:

The Countrey about the mouth of this river [Kansas] is very fine on each Side as well as North of the Missouri the bottom, in the Point is low & overflows for 250 yards. it rises a little above high water mark and continous of that hight of good quality back to the hills. A high Clift, on the upper Side of the Kaneses $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile up. below the Kaneses the hills is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ Miles. from the point on the North Side of the Missouri the Hills or high lands is Several miles back.

The journal reports that readings were taken and the latitude was $38^{\circ}31'13''$. The longitude

was not entered but was left blank in the journal, evidently to be filled in later. However, this addition was never made. The width of the Kansas river was given in one journal as $230\frac{1}{4}$ yards, and in another (Biddle) as being $340\frac{1}{4}$ yards. Both say, however, that the Kansas river is wider above its mouth. The journal lists the Missouri river at the mouth of the Kansas river as being about 500 yards wide. One can readily see that the description is fairly accurate even today.⁴

Water transportation was of major importance to settlers in the early days of the area. When railroads began to replace water transportation, they frequently built along the route of the river. Not only were there communities along the river but the land was fairly regular and the incline generally was not excessive and could easily be handled by a locomotive. The Kansas City area was fortunate to have two rivers which would allow railroads easy access to the area. However, this easy transportation route for the railroads along the river routes would later play an important role in the city developing on the Missouri side of the state line. The people for whom Kansas City was a trade center were mostly east and south of the Kansas river.⁵ The expense of building river crossings is one of the reasons why Kansas City, Mo., took the lead in growth over the Kansas side of the metropolis.⁶ In 1875 six of the eight railroads serving the area could reach that city without having to cross the Kansas river. The ninth line also proposed to terminate its route in that city.⁷ The trade of both Missouri and southern Kansas could reach the Missouri side of the line without the time, trouble, and expense of building a bridge to cross the Kansas.⁸

1. William E. Connelley, "State Line Issue," *Kansas City (Mo.) Journal*, March 6, 1899. The article also appeared under the title "The East Boundary Line of Kansas," in the *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 11 (1909-1910), pp. 75-80.

2. "When the City 'Seceded'," *Kansas City (Mo.) Times*, December 18, 1915, p.3.

3. Cecil Howes, "Annexation of Kansas City to Kansas Was Attempted at Least Three Times," *ibid.*, December 12, 1946, p.24.

4. Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806* (New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1904), v. 1, pp. 59-60; Connelley, "State Line Issue."

5. Wyandott Herald, September 2, 1875.

6. *Ibid.*

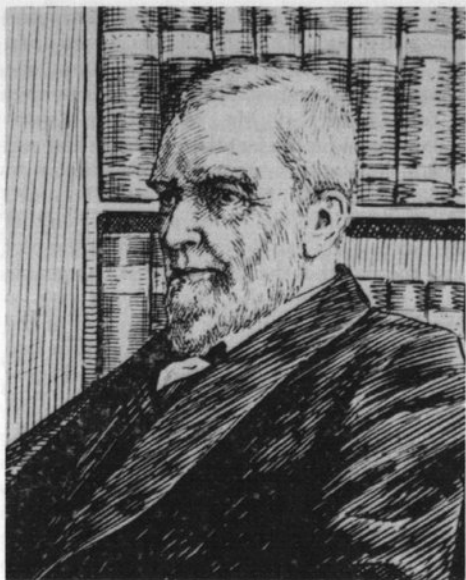
7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

Early residents of this area recognized that political subdivisions would tend to act as a limiting factor on the size of the city. They knew that it was impractical for what was essentially one city, to be in two states. They recognized that there was to be a major city at the mouth of the Kansas river, and they wanted that city to be in Kansas.

THE EARLIEST attempt by Missouri citizens to cede a portion of that state to Kansas occurred in 1855. The Kansas territorial legislature, called by some the "bogus" legislature, was in session at Shawnee Mission, six miles from Kansas City, Mo., and at the same time the Missouri legislature was in session at Jefferson City.⁹ Mobillion W. McGee was a member of the Kansas legislature although he was a resident of Westport, Mo. He was one of the prime agitators in a scheme to annex a portion of Missouri onto Kansas territory, and if the plan had been successful, his Westport farm would have been in Kansas. This 1855 annexation scheme was comprised of Proslavery people in Missouri who wanted to see Kansas enter the Union as a slave state. As matters stood at this time, Missouri was like a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by free territory. If Kansas were admitted into the Union as a slave state this would eliminate one part of the underground railroad helping slaves to escape and would give a wider market for selling new slaves.

In addition to McGee, his fellow conspirators were said to include Col. Robert T. Van Horn, and a third gentleman who shall be discussed shortly. As the story is told, these three plotters agreed that it would be a good thing for Kansas City if it were detached from Missouri and attached to Kansas territory. They visited the legislatures of both Missouri and Kansas territory and became convinced that Kansas was willing to accept, and Missouri was willing to grant that territory west and north of the Big Blue river, from the point where it crosses the Kansas line, down to its junction with the Missouri—an area of some 60



Col. Robert T. Van Horn (1824-1916), Kansas City, Mo., newspaperman and civic leader, served his city and state as mayor and congressman, and was one of the leaders in a scheme to annex a portion of Missouri to Kansas in 1855. This earliest of several attempts by Missourians to cede Kansas City to Kansas failed when one of the conspirators fell in love. Sketch reproduced from *Illustrated Doniphan County, Supplement to the Weekly Kansas Chief*, April 6, 1916 (Troy, *Weekly Kansas Chief*, 1916).

square miles.¹⁰ This is the same area which would be proposed to be annexed in later attempts.

Colonel Van Horn's part in the plot was to look after the legislatures, and the third plotter, a mystery man who has been described as being a "distinguished citizen of the Territory of Kansas," was to go to Washington and engineer the consent of congress to the cession. The plotters tried to make allowances for all contingencies. They knew that once the legislatures of Missouri and Kansas territory had acted congress would have to pass an enabling act. It should not have been any problem to gain the support of congress because at that time it was intensely Proslavery. The conspirators counted on support for their plan from

9. "Addenda," *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 11 (1909-1910), p. xviii; Henry C. Haskell, Jr., and Richard B. Fowler, "The Attempted Annexation of Kansas City to the State of Kansas," *Missouri Historical Review*, Columbia, v. 44 (1950), pp. 222ff; Haskell and Fowler, *City of the Future* (Kansas City, Mo., Frank Glenn Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 85-86.

10. "When Kansas City Came Near Being Part of Kansas," *Kansas City Star*, May 29, 1910, p. 1C; *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 11, p. xviii.

Sen. David R. Atchison, Gen. B.F. Stringfellow, and others. While the plotters agreed upon all the plans in the scheme, there was one contingency that they failed to consider—love.

Yes, Kansas City, Mo., might be in Kansas today except for the fact that a Kansan met and fell in love with a woman in Washington in 1855. Colonel Van Horn, who in 1910 claimed that he was involved in the plot, asserted that he successfully carried out his part of the plot and the fact that the plot failed is chargeable only to the agent that the plotters sent to Washington to secure the cooperation of the Proslavery leaders in congress. Van Horn said that while in Washington, this unnamed agent met and fell deeply in love with a lady and they took a trip to Europe. It was some two years later when he was next heard from! By then time for action on the annexation had passed and the plan faded. Both Colonel Van Horn and Judge H.C. McDougall in writing of the plan refused to identify the “distinguished citizen” other than to describe him as a friend for more than 30 years who after the war took a prominent part in the politics of Kansas.¹¹ The mystery man in this story died a few years prior to 1910, keeping inviolate the secret of his alleged Washington romance.¹²

As the story was reprinted in later years, the word “marriage” was added to the story. It seems rather curious that merely falling in love and getting married would so embarrass even a politician that he would not want his identity revealed. It seems far more likely that this may have been an “affair” which did not lead to the exchange of marriage vows. The “woman” part of the story was denied by the “distinguished citizen,” who said that it was pure fake on the part of Van Horn.¹³ In view of the fact that the whole story was disclaimed by the person himself, it seems likely that it was either false, or he did not wish to embarrass his family with his infidelity.

One other interesting thing about this alleged attempt is the involvement of Van Horn. The attempt was supposed to have taken place in 1855 when the legislatures were in session in Missouri and Kansas. This would have

placed the time as in the spring of 1855. But, Van Horn did not come to Kansas City until late in 1855 when he came to inspect the property of a newspaper, the *Enterprise*. He agreed upon a purchase price and left Kansas City, returning one month later, to take over the paper.¹⁴ If Van Horn was indeed involved in the scheme in 1855 to the extent he claims, he was an extremely fast worker during the last two months of 1855. Unfortunately, much of the political history of those days was not set down in the records and indeed much of it was secret and known only to the men who were directly involved. Therefore, many stories die as did this one, with the men who made the stories.

THE FERVOR to move the state line to the east also died down for some years. Occasionally a spasmodic attempt would rise up for a short time but nothing was done. There was no major talk of Kansas City, Mo., seceding from Missouri until 1872. One writer states that the project was brought to life again in that year, and that the Kansas legislature of 1873 passed a “law” which provided for the annexation of Kansas City, Mo., and “one mile in each direction.”¹⁵ He goes on to say that Kansas offered to pay Missouri for the area to be taken. And, that although no specific amount was fixed, the bill would be paid in 10 annual installments. Under the terms of the bill Kansas City was to retain its existing charter and municipal government, its courts and other legal arrangements until the Kansas legislature arranged for it to become a city of the first class under the jurisdiction of Kansas. In addition, there were to be no state taxes levied against Kansas City property until the deal was completed, both legislatures had acted, and the consent of congress had been given.¹⁶

A search of the house and senate *Journals* and the *Session Laws* of Kansas from 1855 until 1879 failed to turn up any indication that such a law had ever been discussed, much less passed, by both houses. The senate and house *Journals* for the state of Missouri for several years around 1873 failed to mention that any such action was taken on the part of the Mis-

11. “Charter and Revised Ordinances of Kansas City, Missouri,” 1899, p. xvi; George W. Martin, “The Boundary Lines of Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 11, p. 73.

12. “When Kansas City Came Near Being Part of Kansas.”

13. “Charter and Revised Ordinances of Kansas City, Missouri,” 1899, p. xvi.

14. “Robert T. Van Horn Papers,” Kansas City, Mo., Public Library.

15. Howes, “Annexation of Kansas City.”

16. *Ibid.*

souri legislature. As no evidence was discovered that such a "law" was discussed or passed it must follow that it was at most discussed, perhaps in committee, but never brought on the floor of either legislature. However, in 1873 the Kansas legislature did pass House Concurrent Resolution No. 13 which called for a resurvey of the boundary line between Missouri and Kansas. The reason given was that it was believed that the line should actually be one or two miles east of the present line. But resurveys had been asked before, and would be requested again. This appears to be the only action that was taken on the annexation question in 1873.

In 1875 there was a considerable amount of attention given to the establishment of a great trade center in the area. On September 23 of that year, a "Metropolis Meeting" was held at Dunning's Hall. About 300 persons from all parts of Kansas packed the hall to its utmost capacity. So many persons attended the meeting that some were unable to gain admission to the hall. Much of the meeting was directed against the railroads which were making their terminals in Missouri rather than in Kansas. This was a direct violation of several of their charters. As a result of this meeting a resolution was passed and a committee appointed which was to call upon the railroads serving Kansas and influence them to build the new union depot within the limits of Kansas.¹⁷ A number of speeches praised the mouth of the Kaw as being the site of the future metropolis. However, at this meeting Col. S.A. Cobb dismissed as childish any hope that Kansas City could be severed from Missouri and annexed to Kansas.¹⁸

In 1876 the question of the border between Missouri and Kansas came to the attention of congress. In that year two bills were introduced into the house of representatives. The first bill provided for a resurvey and definite establishment of the boundary line between the states of Missouri and Kansas. The second bill provided for establishing a new boundary line between the states of Missouri and Kansas south of the Missouri river. The bills were referred to the committee on public lands where they apparently died. Nothing was heard from either bill again.

THE MATTER laid more or less dormant until the annexation fever broke out in earnest in December, 1878, when the *Kansas City Times* printed an editorial which began:

The only obstacle to the material progress of Kansas City is the state line. The *Times* has long recognized this fact, although it has not heretofore made it the subject of serious public discussion. Now, however, that the Legislatures both of Missouri and Kansas are about to assemble, we feel impelled to suggest such concurrent legislation by the two commonwealths as shall make Kansas City in fact, as well as in name, the *City of Kansas*.

The article continued that the *Times* was sure that everyone would favor such a move and could see no serious opposition from any portion of Jackson county, or the state of Missouri. It went on to say that the annual revenue paid into the state treasury by Kansas City was about \$67,000 and that Jackson county received \$15,000 of this money back. This left a difference of about \$52,000 which the state retained.¹⁹ The *Times* suggested that the state of Kansas would welcome the addition of about 60 square miles and would be wise to effect a virtual purchase of the land gained by making the Big Blue river the new boundary. It went so far as to say that Kansas should assume ". . . to pay the existing State revenues of Kansas City into the treasury of Missouri for fifty years to come, or say a quarter a million of dollars." The editors must not have been too good at figures because if \$52,000 is multiplied by 50 (years) you arrive at a figure of \$2,600,000. This must have been called to the attention of the editors because later articles called for a figure of \$2,500,000.

The editorial continued that the argument in favor of the annexation was incontestable. The *Times* recognized that if the patronage which came from Kansas were cut off Kansas City would relapse into insignificance. It said:

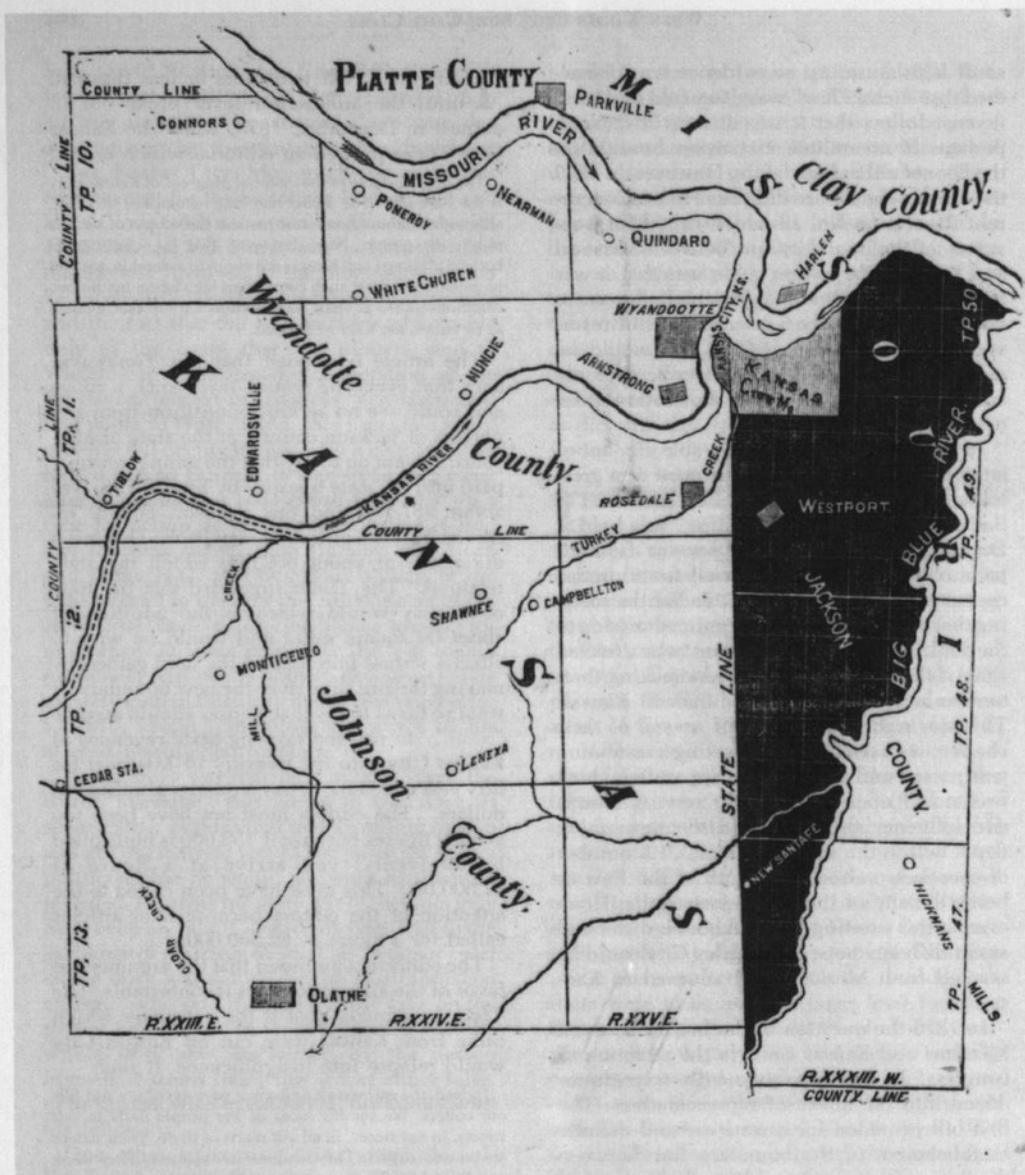
Indeed, the entire state of Kansas pays us tribute and fills our coffers. We see the faces of her people daily in our streets, in our stores, in all our marts of trade. Their names are on our ledgers. They read our newspapers. They think our thoughts. They are essentially a part of the same community, for we are practically one people. Who shall say that we have not closer commercial ties and stronger sympathies with the people of Kansas than of Missouri?

In the first of a series of articles on the subject, the *Times* suggested that not only should Kansas City, Mo., be set over into the state of Kansas but that Wyandotte and Kansas

17. Wyandott *Herald*, September 30, 1875.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Kansas City Times*, December 14, 1878.



One of the leading advocates in 1879 of the annexation of Kansas City, Mo., to Kansas was the *Kansas City Times*. On January 1, 1879, the paper devoted its entire front page to the proposal and printed this map of Kansas City and vicinity showing the area to be annexed. According to the *Times*, "the only obstacle to the material progress of Kansas City is the state line," so the paper urged the legislatures of Kansas and Missouri to make the city in fact as well as in name "the City of Kansas."

City, Kan., as well should be incorporated under one municipal government. The later part of the idea did come true some eight years later in 1886 when not only Kansas City, Kan., and Wyandotte, but also Armourdale and two small communities named Riverview and Armstrong merged to form a city called Kansas City, Kan. It was hoped that by putting all these communities under one municipal government that perhaps the major city that was wanted so desperately by Kansas would materialize.

The *Kansas City Times*, December 22, 1878, reprinted comments from various newspapers around the country, most of which supported the stand of the *Times*. One paper, the Keokuk (Iowa) *Constitution*, not only seemed to favor the annexation but wanted to get in on the act itself. Keokuk lies in the southeastern corner of Iowa near the mouth of the Des Moines river at the Mississippi river. This paper said:

There is considerable discussion in Kansas City over a proposition to annex that place to Kansas. It is said that business men, lawyers and politicians favor the project. Kansas is favorable to it also, for the reason that she wants a metropolis, Kansas City having outstripped her neighbors in the march of progress. In case these propositions are successful, how would it do to annex Keokuk to Missouri, in order to give her a metropolis? Missouri can't stand the loss of Kansas City unless she supplies it with the gain of Keokuk.

Another paper, the Warrensburg (Mo.) *Standard*, also supported the annexation and wanted Johnson county, Missouri (which lies east of Cass county, Missouri), added to the annexation because it felt that within two years "... Johnson county would be the garden spot of Kansas, and the choicest portion of the emigration now pouring into that state would stop here. In this way we might all become rich, and it is not a flat scheme either."

The Fort Scott *Evening Herald* took a dim view of the annexation and said, "We see no valid reason for throwing our state east of Kansas City, and if anybody is to be benefited thereby it will be the residents of that city, and common modesty dictates that they should wait until they are invited."

The Marion Center *Record* took a pot shot at the *Times* in its editorial on the subject when it said, "the Kansas City *Times* wants Kansas City annexed to Kansas. Let us not be in haste about this; the *Times* will have to come too."

Between December 22 and 31 the *Times*

printed some 40 comments about the annexation, of which about 25 seemed to favor the project, five were flatly opposed, and 10 either did not commit themselves, or merely were reporting the story in their own papers. Some of those who favored the project did not favor paying Missouri the proposed \$2,500,000 consideration for the "purchase" of that city. But, they were still in favor of allowing Kansas City to become a Kansas city if she wanted to do so.

On January 1, 1879, the *Times* devoted the entire front page of the paper to the annexation story. It reprinted the editorial of December 14 in part, and added some new comments. In this issue the *Times* advanced the question of the possibility of success of the annexation scheme. While the *Times* said that it would like to give an unequivocal "yes, it was possible" to the question, it would merely state the facts and let the reader draw his own conclusions. The *Times* said that the transfer of Kansas City to Kansas would require not only the permission of Missouri for that territory to secede, but also the acceptance of that same territory by Kansas, and finally the congress of the United States would have to pass a concurring act. As far as the *Times* could see, the only snag in the scheme would seem to be whether Missouri would agree to the secession. The *Times* went on to suggest that if the people of Kansas City really wanted to have their city in Kansas, they would have to work for the passage of enabling legislation by the Missouri legislature. The *Times* felt that the "able and intelligent representation in both branches of the Legislature" would endeavor to carry out the expressed wishes of their constituents. The *Times* went on to suggest that to show the legislature how the people felt on the issue, a petition be circulated and sent to "our Senator and Representatives," asking that a vote be taken on the issue by the people which would be affected by the proposed annexation. The *Times* felt that the businessmen of the city would "cheerfully" defray the expense of an election to decide the issue.

As some rural newspapers had charged the *Times* with supporting the move to Kansas because of the results of the preceding congressional election, the *Times* used several paragraphs to deny that the election campaign had anything to do with the decision to promote the move of Kansas City to Kansas. It

claimed to have only the interests of the citizens of the city at heart in making the proposal.

The *Times* printed a map showing the area to be annexed with this article. In commenting on it the *Times* said:

As will be seen from the map, the point of new departure in the boundary line between the two States is near the southwest corner of Jackson county, where the State line at present most northerly intersects the main channel of the Big Blue river, in the northeast fractional quarter of fractional section thirty-one in township forty-seven, of range thirty-three west of the fifth principal median, thence running in a northeasterly direction with the meanderings of said river to the point where it empties into the Missouri river—thus embracing all of the Kaw and Westport townships and a portion of Washington township and including about sixty square miles.

A public opinion survey was taken by the *Times* reporters and the results printed in this New Year's day issue. Instead of stopping just anyone on the street, in the manner the newspapers frequently take opinion surveys today, the *Times* sought out the various business and professional men in the area. The reporters were so zealous in their attempts to get certain business men interviewed that they would talk to their partners, or in a couple of cases, to employees and that person's opinion was used as if it were the employer's opinion. The reporters interviewed some 127 persons whose replies were published in the paper. Of this number only four negative responses were printed. In addition there were eight persons who either failed to express their opinions, or, as in the case of a couple politicians, their answers were guarded, and no clear-cut answer was given.

Some of the opinions expressed during these interviews seem to echo some of the opinions still heard in the 1970's. A sampling of some of the opinions will demonstrate this fact.

Harry T. Wright, a bookseller-stationer, said, "I know that great numbers of Kansas merchants don't feel very pleasantly in regard to their trade helping to build up a town out of their own state."

C. B. Platt, a real estate and loan broker, said, "I'd like to get in a state where a Republican vote would 'count'. I've been voting away for years in this place, but what good has it done, except once in a while in a city election? I'm in favor of annexation first, last, and all the time."

M. H. Dickinson, another bookseller-stationer, said "One-half the people of the East

think the city is in the State of Kansas, and in that State is exactly where this town of right belongs."

W. H. Knotts, a jeweler, said, ". . . This city is purely a city of the State of Kansas in everything that pertains to the trade and commerce. All our trade, nearly, comes from that State."

Even the postmaster of Kansas City, Col. Theodore S. Case, favored the project, he said, "the interests of this city would be greatly advanced by the change. In every respect it would be a desirable result to accomplish. The mutual advantages that annexation would bring to the State of Kansas and this city can hardly be overestimated."

The *Times* sent reporters into Kansas and interviewed a number of Wyandotte and Kansas City, Kan., business and professional men. All who were interviewed favored the annexation. There were some, however, who did not believe that any "bonus" should be paid to Missouri for the city.

Col. John Conover, humorously suggested that, ". . . such a change would set Missouri back for fifty years."

Two days later, on January 3, 1879, Kansas City, Mo., did become attached to the state of Kansas and was duly reported by the *Wyandotte Gazette* which said, "the annexation scheme has been successfully carried out for the present at least. Both rivers are frozen solid between here and Kansas City."

It is interesting to note that the *Kansas City Journal* remained virtually silent on the annexation even though it was owned at this time by Van Horn. Van Horn was well aware of the annexation proceedings as he was present at some of them. One of the few brief notices that the *Journal* took of the issue occurred on January 5, 1879, when a brief letter to the editor was carried which asked if the reason that the *Journal* had remained silent during the discussion was because it knew that Article I, Section 1, of the constitution of Missouri stated that: "The boundaries of the State as heretofore established by law, are hereby ratified and confirmed." The writer, who signed his name "Willing," said that the way he understood the constitution was that an amendment would be necessary for the change to take place.

The *Journal* replied that it was aware of the article, but was not sure that a mere declaratory

clause of this kind would have any constitutional force. However, the *Journal* said it did know that Article IX, Section 3, prescribed that: "No county shall be divided or have any portion stricken therefrom without submitting the question to a vote of the people of the county, nor unless a majority of all qualified voters of the county thus affected, voting on the question shall vote therefor." The *Journal* said that in as much as this seemed to make it an insurmountable problem, or at least impracticable that the *Journal* was "... not in the habit of wasting its time or room in beating the air, or making a noise merely to hear itself."²⁰

In mid-January a series of bills on the subject were introduced into the Kansas legislature. The first provided for the annexation of Kansas City, Mo., to Kansas; the second asked for a resurvey of the state line; and a third was a resolution providing for a joint committee of the house and senate to consider the subject of the annexation of Kansas City to Kansas. With this action on the part of the Kansas legislature it seemed that the plan might indeed become a reality. However, it was to be several months before any further action of which there is any record was taken. One other piece of legislation was also introduced in the Kansas senate about this time which proposed the annexation to Kansas of the entire Platte Purchase in Missouri.

The Kansas City *Journal*, January 24, 1879, reported the preparation of a memorial addressed to the Kansas legislature. The memorial was to be circulated for signatures to show that large numbers of people were in favor of attaching that city to Kansas. The memorial outlined the territory to be annexed, using the Big Blue river as the proposed new boundary on the east and the Missouri river on the north. It gave as one of the reasons that the inhabitants of the area were in effect already citizens of Kansas, except in their present political affiliations.

Other newspapers throughout the country as well as the area papers began to take the annexation scheme more seriously. It had been discussed in the Kansas legislature and it appeared to be a more important and real issue than if the *Times* was merely "beating the air." On January 23, 1879, the Olathe *Mirror* and

News Letter carried an editorial on the subject of the location of the mouth of the Kansas river. A few days later the *Times* identified the editorial writer as "formerly a civil engineer . . . employed in the border counties of Kansas in the territorial days, and (he had) made large professional discoveries of facts and circumstances bearing upon the old government survey and location of the Missouri-Kansas line."²¹ The *Mirror* noted that a resolution had been introduced asking for a resurvey of the Missouri-Kansas line. It acknowledged that this was the only way to settle the dispute as to the proper location of the line. It felt that when the results of the survey were in that not only Kansas City, but also a considerable strip of Jackson county, Missouri, would be found to actually be in Kansas.

The writer (who may have been the editor of the *Mirror*) said that at the time Missouri was admitted into the Union the mouth of the Kansas river was several miles east of its 1879 location. The writer said that,

In 1859 and in 1860 we took particular trouble to look this matter up, and we found three old gentlemen living near Independence Landing, who were residing in that vicinity at the date of the admission of Missouri into the Union, who gave us the particular location of the mouth of the Kansas river at that time, and at our request made the statements in writing and were sworn to it before an officer in Kansas City, Missouri; these affidavits were in our possession until the sacking of Olathe by Quantrell [sic], the night of the 6th of September, 1862 [1863], when our printing office was destroyed, and all our books and papers carried off. . . . We have a portion of the field notes of the Kansas border in our possession, and from them and the meridian lines as located in 1820 by [the] government. We find that the line between Kansas and Missouri at the Kansas City State Line House, is just three miles and three quarters west of where it would be if located on the meridian line passing through the middle of the mouth of the Kansas river in 1820. . . .

Just why these field notes, if they did indeed show that the state line was not properly located, were never used is not known. The editor of the *Mirror* may have had an over-active imagination, however, because he is also quoted as saying that in 1821, when Missouri's borders were established and that state admitted into the Union, "... the junction of the Kaw and Missouri rivers was fourteen miles below the present confluence. The Missouri then hugged the Clay County hills, while the Kaw flowed in what is now the Missouri's bed.

20. Kansas City *Journal*, January 5, 1879, p. 4.

21. Kansas City *Times*, January 26, 1879, p. 1.



El Dorado newspaper editor Thomas B. Murdock (1841-1909) served as a state senator and chairman of the legislature's joint committee on annexation of Kansas City, Mo., in 1879. At his invitation a delegation of Kansas City businessmen and civic leaders came to Topeka to seek support for their proposal that Kansas annex the city. At least two other attempts were made in the 19th century to move the state line to the east, but they were no more successful.

The Blue emptied into the Kaw.”²² It gave as the reason that the Missouri changed its course the sinking of a steamboat in the 1850's at a bend in the river around which a sandbar formed that diverted the Missouri into its present course. According to the *Mirror* this meant that a 14-mile strip of land rightfully belonged to Kansas; this was despite the fact that the *Times* favored the annexation of only that land north and west of the Big Blue river.

The question raised by the *Mirror* about the elderly gentlemen living in the area who remembered the old course of the Missouri river was discounted by William E. Connelley in 1899 when he wrote that he had interviewed old Wyandot Indians living in the vicinity and that the mouth of the Kansas river was changed very little by the flood of 1844.²³

22. "When the City 'Seceded'."

23. Connelley, "State Line Issue."

On February 12, 1879, T. B. Murdock, chairman of the joint house and senate committee on annexation sent an official communication to Mayor George M. Shelley of Kansas City, Mo., inviting the mayor and representative citizens of Kansas City to come to Topeka so that the matter could be fully considered.

The dispatch was read at a meeting of the city council March 3 and a committee consisting of W. H. Winants, R. H. Drennon, and Leftrick A. Allen was appointed to confer with a committee of five, to be appointed by Mayor Shelley. The members of the mayor's committee were: C. H. Prescott, T. F. Oakes, L. V. Morse, T. B. Bullene, and F. M. Black. On March 5 a meeting of the two committees was held in the director's room of the Armour Brothers Bank. At this meeting it was decided to draft a resolution expressing the views of the committees on the question of annexation. They also agreed to go to Topeka two days later and confer with the joint annexation committee of the Kansas legislature. In attendance at the meeting was one Mr. Cruise of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad who, on behalf of his company, offered the committee a special train to Topeka for the use of the delegation. The committee accepted the offer of the Santa Fe and a request was made that all persons wishing to make the Topeka trip to leave their names at the Armour Brothers Bank not later than 3 p.m. March 6, the day before the trip, in order that the Santa Fe would know how many passenger cars to provide. Over 100 business and professional men signed up to make the trip.²⁴

On the morning of March 7 the *Times* was basking in the full glory of the spotlight that it had turned on itself by bringing up the question. It seemed that perhaps the annexation proposal might bear fruit after all. The *Times* and the mayor's council committee and the citizen's committee only regretted that more advanced warning had not been given to the public so that more interested persons could have arranged to go on the trip.

Those in charge of the excursion trip realized that there would have to be some control over who actually boarded the train. They knew that there might be some persons who would take advantage of the free ride to Topeka for their own personal business. The *Times* printed a

24. Kansas City *Times*, March 6, 1879, p. 5.

notice which it hoped would discourage anyone planning to freeload. The notice said in part, "... that no dead beats, bummers or professional excursionists [will] be allowed on the train, and that only representative business men [would] be issued tickets. . . . But the committee will be pleased to have as many representative and reputable business men take part in the excursion as possible. . . ."

There were 92 persons who made the trip to Topeka. A check of the passenger list that day does disclose that a couple of "laborers" did manage to board the train. However, virtually all of the persons making the trip were indeed business and professional men.

The day was bright and pleasant. It seemed that March had favored the annexation party with as pleasant a day as it could. The annexation party gathered at the Union depot for the train which although it had been announced to depart at about 8:30 a. m., did not leave until 9:30 a. m. As the train departed the sun was beaming brightly and gave off a bland warmth. "The train consisted of that staunch and swift engine, No. 12, one of the best on the road. The two coaches were luxurious and elegant, such as any road might be proud to run." The *Times* identified the crew in glowing terms. "Mr. E. H. Dick was conductor of the train. He is one of the best and most popular conductors on the Santa Fe line, ever attentive to the responsible duties of his position, and uniformly courteous. B. F. Collins was the capable engineer, G. E. McElroy fireman, and Dick Early and G. O. Fitch brakemen."

Once under way, Alderman L. A. Allen took charge of the excursion party. Taking a notebook from his pocket, he wrote on the first page:

A Vote on annexation!
Let there be a fair count!
No repeating!!
No bulldozing!!
No stuffing of the ballot-box!!
No intimidation!!
Vox Populi!!

He then handed the notebook around and some 86 citizens affixed their signatures as a demonstration of their favor of the annexation.

The trip from Kansas City to Topeka was made in good time; they arrived only two and one-half hours after they started, some 20 to 35 minutes less than a regularly scheduled passenger train. It was noon when they arrived in

Topeka and the excursionists scattered to the various hotels for the noon meal. The understanding was that they would assemble at the Tefft House at 1:00 p.m. or as quickly thereafter as they could get there. Accordingly, the delegation assembled at the Tefft House, where they received introductions to Senator Murdock and the members of the joint committee. Senator Murdock announced that arrangements had been made for a meeting to be held at the office of the secretary of state in the capitol building at 2:30 p.m.²⁵

Meanwhile, the afternoon session of the senate convened at 2:00 p. m. The senate must have been unaware that a delegation from Kansas City had been invited and had arrived in Topeka, because as soon as the senate met, a resolution was introduced which noted that Murdock, as chairman of the joint committee on the annexation of Kansas City, Mo., to the state of Kansas, had invited the citizens of Kansas City, Mo., to meet with said committee in Topeka in regard to the annexation. The resolution noted that since the senate had adjourned from the morning session, "... that a large delegation—about 125—of the prominent men of said city . . ." had arrived in Topeka by a special train. It noted that upon arrival there was no welcoming delegation from the legislature "... authorized to meet them or to extend the most common civilities due upon such occasion. . . ." The resolution called upon the joint committee through Murdock, to explain why an invitation was issued without the full occurrence of said committee, and why the senate did not receive official notice of the projected arrival of the delegation, and why no steps were taken to receive the guests with due courtesy.

In defending his actions, Senator Murdock explained to the senate that the committee and delegation of citizens of Kansas City, had come to meet the joint committee on annexation, and not the legislature, and that meeting was to be held at 2:30 p. m.

While this action was taking place on the floor of the senate, the delegation was meeting with Gov. John P. St. John. He met with the delegation for an hour and discussed the annexation. The governor was described as being "strongly in favor of the measure."

25. *Ibid.*, March 7, 1879, p. 4.

At the appointed hour the delegation assembled in the office of the secretary of state. Senator Murdock welcomed the group and expressed his pleasure at the size of the delegation from Kansas City. Murdock introduced Lt. Gov. Lyman V. Humphrey, who appeared on behalf of, and as president of, the senate. He welcomed the delegation to the capital and expressed his regret that a meeting of the full senate was not possible because of the nearness of the closing session.

Senator Murdock then introduced the speaker of the house, Sidney Clarke, who also welcomed the delegation and invited them to accompany him to the floor of the house. The invitation was accepted and the delegation proceeded to the house where Speaker Clarke addressed the delegation. He expressed the hope that the day was not too distant when Kansas City would be one of the metropolitan cities of Kansas.

Col. Daniel S. Twitchell, a Kansas City attorney, spoke on behalf of Kansas City and its delegation. As part of his speech he read the article from the preceding day's *Times* which was signed by the council and citizen committees. At the conclusion of Colonel Twitchell's address the delegation retired and a conference was held in the office of the secretary of state between the joint annexation committee of the legislature and the council and citizen's committees of Kansas City. After a meeting which lasted more than one hour, and because the legislature was on the eve of its closing, they agreed to appoint a permanent annexation committee which would consult from time to time and adopt such a plan of action that might eventually accomplish the annexation. The legislature promised to bring the matter up before their respective bodies before the close of the present session. And the representatives of the Kansas City council said that they also would bring the matter up at the earliest opportunity. On this harmonious note the meeting drew to a close.

On the return trip a committee on resolutions was chosen, which consisted of T. B. Bullene, H. C. Morrison, Alfred Bury, Theodore S. Case, and Leftrick A. Allen. The proposed resolutions were read in each car and were adopted unanimously. The first resolution acknowledged the courteous treatment that they had received from Governor St. John and from

the senate and house. The second resolution stated that to the fraternal sentiments of the address made to the delegation by Speaker Clarke, they could respond in a like cordial manner. The third resolution acknowledged the able and eloquent manner in which Col. D. S. Twitchell responded in behalf of the delegation to the various legislative bodies. The fourth resolution reaffirmed the conviction that Kansas City, Mo., wanted to become a part of Kansas. The fifth and final resolution acknowledged the contribution of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad for the use of the special train. After reaching the Union depot, three cheers were given for annexation, which were delivered with "right good will and most hearty emphasis." A hurrah was proposed for "the great and good Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway." A loud hurrah was given and the excursionists departed for their homes. "And so ended one of the most important and interesting excursions of Kansas City's business men, for business purposes, that the town ever knew."²⁶

The following day, in keeping with their bargain, the legislature passed resolution number 45 providing for a committee to sit without compensation after adjournment, to confer with the "common council of Kansas City," in relation to the annexation of that city. Appointed to the committee were Senators Gillett and Murdock. The house appointed Greever, Riggs, and Gilmore.

THERE appears to have been at least two more attempts to move the state line to the east. According to an article in the *Kansas City Journal* by William E. Connelley in 1899,²⁷ in 1884 the matter was once more "threshed over." Connelley, who was county clerk of Wyandotte county at that time, wrote that he supported the claim that the state line was incorrectly located until he made an investigation of the matter. He said that in that year he made a map and plat of every tract of land in Wyandotte county. In order to draw a plat map it was necessary to locate the state line precisely. According to Connelley at that time many Kansans would consent to no less than six miles of Missouri territory. As the matter was looked into the claim narrowed until a

26. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1879, p. 8.

27. Connelley, "State Line Issue."

point at the foot of Broadway was established beyond which no Kansan could honorably retreat.

In this same article Connelley mentions that in 1899 the controversy broke out once more. At this time the Kansas legislature was asked to appropriate the sum of \$5,000 to institute proceedings in the supreme court of the United States for the purpose of determining the true boundary line between the states of Missouri and Kansas.²⁸ I have not been able to determine that such a sum was actually appropriated, or that such a suit was brought in any court.

The time for action has long since passed, if indeed it ever actually existed at all. There are some who have said that Kansas City would have reached its greatness many years before if the state line had not divided the city. The Greater Kansas City area has always been torn by political and ethnocentric feelings. Each of the cities has been jealous of advancement on the part of the other. Each understandably

wants credit for getting a job done. But these petty jealousies have kept both cities from growing. It is doubtful, of course, that either state would cede any of its territory to the other today. But, if it were to do so, perhaps even at this late date Kansas City would generate a building and expansion boom nourished by a feeling of civic pride in a unified city and Kansas City would become an even greater city than it is. The only problem is, who would annex whom? It is interesting to note that all the annexation attempts have been to move the state line eastward to allow Kansas City to become a part of Kansas. In the words of George W. Martin, ". . . and so the only trouble we have ever had about the boundary lines of Kansas has been from people on the outside endeavoring to get in."²⁹

28. Wyandott *Herald*, February 2, 1899; Kansas House and Senate Journals, 1899.

29. Martin, "Boundary Lines of Kansas," p. 74.