



NEWS

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Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History April 11 - 17, 1854 (2004)

Nineteenth-century Americans took great pride in pedigree, believing early arrivals of European blood who built a structure at any particular spot from Plymouth Rock to Seattle were somehow superior to more recent immigrants. The frontier blue book was the list of "Old Settlers," those who staked the first claims.

To celebrate the Territory's 25th anniversary in 1879, 3,000 Kansans met to reminisce about "Bleeding Kansas" and record their arrival dates in the "Register." Among the oldest of the old settlers was J. W. Lunkins of South Carolina, who arrived in Lawrence, he wrote, on April 13, 1854. Lunkin's entry is a minor mystery in territorial history because no other records of Lunkins in the territory survive. The typeset entry is probably an error due to handwriting interpretation and this early settler was actually William Hall Richardson Lykins, whose wife was from South Carolina.

Lykins, 26 years old in 1854, staked a claim overlooking the Kaw River in today's Lawrence in April or possibly on May 26th, a date often linked to his name. Whether April or May, his claim was illegal but, unlike other squatters, Lykins had lived in the territory for much of his life. Son of a missionary, Dr. Johnston Lykins, and grandson to another, Isaac McCoy, William came here as a child in the early 1830s with his parents. Johnston and Delilah McCoy Lykins accompanied a group of Shawnee on their journey to the Indian lands west of Missouri.

Isaac McCoy had lived on the frontier in the days when Indiana was the far west. He was a Baptist Missionary to the Miami there, then to the Potawatomi and Ottawa in Michigan. McCoy supported Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal policy, moving native tribes who wanted to keep their traditional culture. William Lykins grew up as a white child in Indian Kansas, living first at the Shawnee Baptist Mission in what is now Mission, Kansas, and then at the Potawatomi Mission, near today's Kansas Museum of History in Topeka.

By 1854, Isaac McCoy and Delilah had died and Johnston Lykins had retired from the ministry. The elder Lykins lived "back in the states," in year-old town of

Kansas, where he made a success of real estate speculation, acquiring lots, building the town and then selling real estate at a profit to later settlers.

In the spring of 1854, while would-be settlers impatiently waited for Washington to act, William Lykins might have had his eye on a particularly pretty spot in the western Shawnee Reserve, near the California Road. The overland trail that wound west of Blue Jacket's Wakarusa crossing passed over a high point of land that travelers called Back Bone Ridge, a limestone hill between the two valleys cut by the Kansas and Wakarusa rivers. Lykins picked a claim on the edge of the ridge that spring, but later in the summer moved down to the edge of the Kansas River. (480 words)

Charles S. Glead, The Kansas Memorial, a Report of the Old Settlers' Meeting.(Kansas City, 1880) Pg. 234.

Daniel W. Wilder, The Annals of Kansas (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1875) Pg. 41.

John N. Holloway, History of Kansas (Lafayette, Indiana: James, Emmons & Co., 1868) Pg. 116.