



NEWS

6425 SW Sixth Avenue

Topeka KS 6615-1099

785-272-8681

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By Barbara Brackman

Kansas Troubles: This Week in Territorial History October 3-9, 1854

Albert D. Searl, a 23-year-old civil engineer from Massachusetts, spent the fall surveying Lawrence and platting the streets. Searl's plan, probably suggested by the Aid Company, imposed a two-dimensional grid over the three-dimensional landscape. His main streets lay in straight lines crossed at right angles by secondary streets to make rectangular blocks, a plat that reflected city planning trends of the day. Although raised in Massachusetts where most streets and highways followed the lay of the land, winding around hills and curving with the river, Searl's new town echoed William Penn's gridiron plan for Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was strikingly different from coastal cities such as Boston and Annapolis where European tradition was laid atop Native American communities. Englishwoman Frances Trollope found Philadelphia boring. "The city is built with extreme and almost wearisome regularity." Another English traveler characterized the street system as a "mathematical infringement on the rights of individual eccentricity." Charles Dickens thought it "handsome but distractingly regular.... I would have given the world for a crooked street." Penn's plan, however, appealed to practical Americans like Dr. John Cotton. "Though an entire stranger, I can find any street and even house without enquiring. The streets are very spacious and clean and the sidewalks in every street wide enough for five or six persons to walk abreast."

Penn's rational gridiron plan became the western standard, so much so that a Western man like former Kansas Governor James Denver, visiting Boston after the Civil War was aghast. "The plan of the city! How shall I describe it? It is unlike anything I ever saw before, or ever will see again.... It is a perfect reflex of the New England mind---cranky, crochety and full of sharp turns. There is hardly a straight street to be found in it. They twist and turn, make a curve here, and a sharp angle there, half a dozen converging to the same point, and each finding a new name before it gets three blocks away."

The Aid Company may have instructed Searl to look to Philadelphia for the grid, but they rejected Penn's ideas about street naming. The common European model of naming streets for the King or a prominent personage offended Penn's Quaker sense of equality. He honored, instead, the native trees of the Schuylkill

River valley, naming the streets Mulberry, Elm and Pine and numbering the cross streets. The Aid Company followed the ideas of L'Enfant who, in designing the nation's capital, named major streets after the states. Searl's map named the north-south streets for the thirteen original colonies, beginning with the proposed main street of Massachusetts and stretching east. Streets continued west as states in the order they were added to the Union. Cross streets in Lawrence honored Revolutionary War heroes---Pinckney, Henry, Lee and Winthrop.

While Searl was mapping Lawrence City, the family of Moses Baldwin was planning the overlapping town of Excelsior on the same land. The Aid Company had paid Clark Stearns \$500 for his rights to 160 acres at the bend in the Kansas River, but their planned town extended beyond the 320 acres permitted by federal land policy. The Lawrence Association designed a larger town by adding private claims, some under false names.

Leavenworth lawyer Carmi Babcock represented John Baldwin, the most vocal of the brothers who claimed the strip of river land east of the proposed Massachusetts Street, but lawyers were of little use in a territory with no courts. While the Baldwins threatened to bring over 50,000 Missourians to back their claim, their new neighbors managed to out bluster the "whiskey barrel chivalry," as the eastern papers termed the Baldwins. The town was called Lawrence and the New Englanders' tents remained in place on Massachusetts Street, where they formed a "Regulating Band," also called the "Shot-Gun Battalion," after the October 6th confrontation.

In Lawrenceburgh, Indiana, on Saturday night, former Congressman James H. Lane was shot by John Vail after a fight begun by Lane who, according to the local newspaper, struck Vail with his cane several times. "This difficulty is supposed to be the result of an old quarrel." The bullet lodged just under the skin and was removed at the hotel. Lane "got into his buggy and went home." (701 words)

Anonymous member of the first party of Lawrence settlers, a paper read at a meeting of the "54ers" in Lawrence, 1909. Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

George Barns, *Denver, the Man* (Wilmington, Ohio: 1949) Pg. 326.

John Cotton quoted in Beatrice B. Garvon, *Federal Philadelphia: The Athens of the Western World* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987) Pp. 14-15.

Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (Reprint, Vermont: Everyman, 1997) Pg. 107.

"Yankee Boys Vs. Missourians," *Fitchburg Sentinel* October 27, 1854.

KANSAS TROUBLES: This Week in Territorial History – Add 3

[Captain Hamilton,] *Men and Manners in America* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1833) Pp. 337-338.

“A Fracas,” Lawrenceburgh, Indiana, *Independent Press*, October 11, 1854.

Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: Whittaker, Treacher & Co., 1832) Pg. 201.