HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN KANSAS

Black Historic Sites:
A Beginning Point

Historic Sites Survey
Kansas State Historical Society
Topeka, Kan.
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Cover: A studio photograph of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and one of his circulars urging blacks to migrate to Kansas.
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HOR

FOR SUNNY KANSAS

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS:

I have just returned from the Singleton Settlement, in Morris County, Kansas, where I left my people in one of the finest countries for a poor man in the World. I am prepared to answer any and all questions that may be asked. The Singleton Settlement is near Dunlap, Morris County, a new town just started on the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway. The surrounding country is fine rolling prairie. Plenty of stone and water, and wood on the streams. Plenty of coal within twenty-five miles.

I have this to say to all:

Now is the Time to Go to Kansas.

Land is cheap, and it is being taken up very fast. There is plenty for all at present.

BENJAMIN SINGLETON,
President.

ALONZO D. DURANT, Secretary,
JOSEPH KEEBLE, Agent, Real Estate and Homestead Association.

For full information, address COLUMBUS M. JOHNSON, Topeka, Kansas.
General Agent.
INTRODUCTION

The Historic Sites Survey department of the Kansas State Historical Society has been making a survey of the state's historic, architectural, archeological, and cultural resources since 1969. More than 6,000 buildings and sites have been identified as having some degree of significance and are included in the state inventory.

In analyzing the inventory contents it became evident that very few Kansas sites relating to minorities had been located. The county-by-county historic sites surveys had identified only a handful of places associated with ethnic minorities. One black settlement, Nicodemus, had been designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service and the George Washington Carver homestead site in Ness county and a black Masonic lodge in Wichita are undergoing evaluation by the Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, but otherwise the results in this area were negligible. Consequently an application was submitted to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in March, 1976, for a summer intern to research the Kansas State Historical Society's holdings for information on buildings and sites relating to black history in Kansas. A report would be prepared which could serve as a basis for additional research, for field survey work, and for potential National Register nominations.

The National Trust received 115 applications and the Kansas State Historical Society was one of 25 selected to participate in the intern program. A two-thirds share of the intern's stipend was provided by the National Trust and one-third from the private funds of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Mark W. Riley, the intern who compiled this research material, was a student at Vanderbilt University where his major field of study was urban design in historical perspective. The results of Riley's research are admittedly fragmentary. Much of the information needed to document locations could not be found, for a number of reasons: It was not in the Society's holdings, it did not exist in written form, or people having information would not make it available to the researcher.

Efforts were made in the summer of 1977 to locate the places identified in this report. One of the Historic Sites Survey's summer field personnel, Bruce Leisy, photographed and completed inventory forms on those places that could still be identified.
THROUGHOUT Kansas history, blacks have played a very influential role in the development of the state in spite of the fact that at no time have they accounted for more than 4.7 percent of the population.¹ In order to view this role, it is first necessary to examine the events which caused Kansas to assume such a prominent position in the struggle for Negro rights.

The area now comprising Kansas was, for the first decades of the 19th century, considered merely as a part of the “Great American Desert.” Deemed suitable only for Indian habitation, it was designated in 1830 as Indian territory. During these years, however, a great controversy was growing in the country which would thrust Kansas to the forefront of a national crisis in the 1850's. This was the growing rivalry between the North and the South which had been narrowed down to the expansion of slavery. The balance between slave and free states was preserved by a complex group of compromises and agreements, including the Compromises of 1820 and 1850.

Interest in Kansas migration grew as good reports were received from those pioneers traveling westward to California. As a result, in 1853 the Kansas-Nebraska bill was introduced in Congress. It organized the area west of Missouri into two territories and granted each the power of popular sovereignty on the slavery issue; at the same time, the act repealed the Missouri Compromise thus effectively striking down all congressional barriers to the spread of slavery. The passage of this act set the scene for a period of violence and bloodshed in Kansas between free and proslavery forces in what has often been described as a prelude to the Civil War. Tension grew as Southerners from Missouri and Arkansas poured into the new territory in order to insure a proslavery majority in the popular referendum. In anticipation of this, Northerners, especially New Englanders, often influenced by immigration societies, proceeded to populate the area with those opposed to the spread of slavery. The news of such organized colonization attempts enraged some Southerners and caused them to make further efforts to control the new territory. Both proslavery and free-state towns were set up to attract additional settlers, and political parties were formed with slavery the primary issue.

In November, 1855, violence erupted when a proslavery sympathizer murdered a free-state settler. For the next two years, guerrilla raids and skirmishes were frequent, culminating in the

“Sack of Lawrence” and John Brown’s infamous Pottawatomie massacre. Eventually, in the late 1850’s, the free-state forces won out in the struggle for political dominance, and finally, in January, 1861, after various attempts at organization, the territory was admitted to the Union as a free state. Ironically, this same year was also to see the secession of the Southern states and the beginning of violence on a national level. Thus, though there were less than 600 blacks in the territory in the 1850’s, “Bleeding Kansas,” became a symbol of the greater struggle within the country over the future of the Negro race.

These years of political struggle in Kansas over the status of the Negro are very important in the record of the black experience in Kansas history. This unique black heritage made Kansas especially attractive to blacks and is important in the discussion of the movements of blacks to the “Free State” in the last decades of the 19th century.

The first group of Negroes to come to Kansas in any number was 500 slaves brought from Santo Domingo by Francis Renault in 1718 to work in the lead mines near the present site of Pittsburg. Later in the century the French employed blacks to work in the fur trade which was actively pursued in the areas to the west of St. Louis. At the early forts established in Kansas territory to protect the trade routes to Santa Fe, many Negro slaves were present as cooks, laborers, and attendants to the officers.

In 1830 an act of congress set aside a large area in the West, including Kansas, as Indian territory, and as the Indians migrated to the land, some brought Negro slaves. A small number of slaves were brought by missionaries and Indian traders. The descendants of these slaves and the Negroes brought to the forts made up a large portion of Kansas’ prewar black population.

After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act in 1854, the slave population in the territory increased a great deal as Southerners moved to the new territory with their slaves. This trend was shortlived, however, for in the late 1850’s the free states gained control and the number of slaves decreased. Replacing the slaves in the black population was a new element, the free Negro.

Another significant group included in Kansas’ black population in the late 1850’s was the fugitive or runaway slaves, many of whom were aided in their escape from their masters by the Underground Railroad. This so-called railroad, actually just a route made up of various “stations” where blacks could be hidden on their treks to the northern states and Canada, was very active in Kansas because of its proximity to the slave state, Missouri. A Topeka newspaper article delineated the two principal routes. One crossed the Kansas river at Lawrence and then proceeded to the north and west by way of Oskaloosa to Holton. The other went north through Topeka to Holton. Holton was selected as the end point because that region was settled by northerners sympathetic to the system, who would keep the fugitives on their way northward. The two routes were completely separate because of proslavery settlements at Franklin and Lecompton.

John Brown was active in the railroad in Kansas in the years 1857-1859; Brown’s headquarters in Topeka was at the home of Daniel Sheridan, located at the southwest corner of 23d and Pennsylvania streets in Highland Park. A station at Leavenworth was reported to have been on the southwest corner of Third and Delaware streets. In his thesis Leland Smith identifies another route, with stations located in Wabaunsee county: One on Mission creek in the southwest corner, and one at Wabaunsee near the northwest corner of the county. From this northern station, the fugitives could easily escape to Nebraska.

In Topeka, in addition to Sheridan’s house in Highland Park, there were other important stations. One was Mrs. William Scale’s stone house at 427 Quincy street. Built in 1856 by John Armstrong, it was the first station in Topeka on the railroad, and this service was continued by the second owner, Caroline Scales. (This house was torn down in the 1920’s.) Other Topeka citizens involved with the railroad were Rev. Lewis Bodwell of the Congregational church and Avery Washburn. Mrs. J. B. Abbott reminisced in 1895 about the station her family had on Coal creek in southern Douglas county, and about a station kept by John Brown, Jr., at Palmyra, on the Santa Fe road near Baldwin City.
The census taken in 1855 reveals that there were 151 free Negroes and 192 slaves in Kansas, making a total Negro population of 343.\textsuperscript{13} By 1860 as the free staters gained political dominance, and Kansas’ admission to the Union as a free state seemed imminent, the Southerners either sold their slaves South or moved to avoid the financial loss. Thus in 1860 625 free blacks were recorded compared with two slaves.\textsuperscript{14} Negroes lived in each of the 15 organized counties and in 23 towns. They worked as house servants and laborers and in rural areas as small-scale farmers or hired hands.\textsuperscript{15}

With the outbreak of the Civil War many slaves, primarily from Missouri, fled into the free state of Kansas. The slave owners along the Missouri border began to take measures to prevent their escape, including selling them South, which increased the Negroes’ inclination to flee. These runaways often headed for Lawrence because of its reputation as a free-state town from the 1850’s.\textsuperscript{16} Most settled in eastern Kansas towns and cities.

During the last two years of the war, after all hope of quick surrender by the South had ended, Lincoln finally yielded to the pressure of radicals and abolitionists, to allow blacks to serve in the Union army. In Kansas this movement was spearheaded by Sen. James H. Lane and, in fact, was occurring before it was authorized by the War Department. In January, 1863, the First regiment, Kansas Colored volunteers, the fourth Negro regiment to enter the Union army, was organized. Its first important field assignment was in the spring of 1863 at Baxter Springs, and in June the regiment firmly established its military reputation by forcing the Confederate forces in northeastern Indian territory to retreat. In the summer of 1863, recruiting for the Second Kansas Colored volunteers began and by October 10 companies were filled. This regiment served as an escort for a Fort Smith supply train, and in the spring of 1864 fought at Poison Springs near Camden, suffering many casualties. Both regiments were joined with the 11th U. S. Colored troops and the 54th U. S. Colored troops to form a brigade made up entirely of black soldiers. This brigade served as supply train escorts, did garrison work, and was in continuous service until mustered out in October, 1865.\textsuperscript{17}

After the war, the steady stream of blacks migrating to Kansas

\textsuperscript{13} Smith, “Early Negroes in Kansas,” p. 39.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, p. 50B.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{16} Richard Cordley, A History of Lawrence, Kansas (Lawrence: E. F. Caldwell, 1895), p. 163.
\textsuperscript{17} Dudley Taylor Cornish, Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War, “History of Minority Groups in Kansas” (Commission on Civil Rights, Topeka, February, 1969).
Looking southeast toward "Institute Hill," the site of the short-lived and Industrial Institute for Refugees near Baxter Springs. Only the walls remain of the J. J. Freeman house built near Dunlap by a black settler in the 1880's.
COME!

To the Colored People of the United States of America:

This is to lay before your minds a few sketches of what great advantages there are for the great mass of people of small means that are emigrating West to come and settle in the county of Hodgeman, in the State of Kansas—and more especially the Colored people, for they are the ones that want to find the best place for climate and for soil for the smallest capital. Hodgeman county is in Southwestern Kansas, on the line of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad.

We, the undersigned, having examined the above county and found it best adapted to our people, have applied to the proper authority and have obtained a Charter, in the name and style of "THE DAVID CITY TOWN COMPANY," in the County of Hodgeman, State of Kansas.

TRUSTEES:

A. McClure.  
Stephen Essex.  
John Yates.  
Thomas Jackson.  
Thomas Biezer.  
John Gothard.  
Henry Brilee.

A. McClure, President.  
J. Woodfork, Secretary.

A circular encouraging blacks to settle in Hodgeman county.

continued. The census of 1870 revealed that the state had experienced an incredible increase in black population during the decade. The census showed a total black population of 17,108, a gain of 16,481, over 27 times the 1860 number. Negros lived in 54 counties, with county totals ranging from 4,284 to 1. The top nine counties were as follows: Leavenworth, 4,284; Douglas, 2,352; Wyandotte, 2,120; Atchison, 1,136; Doniphan, 533; Bourbon, 770; Shawnee, 729; Linn, 655; and Jefferson, 625.

These immigrants, in spite of their large numbers and the fact that most were destitute, were able to find work, were absorbed into the towns and settlements, and became self-sustaining. Many lived in the larger eastern towns, but a significant number, taking advantage of the homestead law, moved to the rural areas and settled on farms.

One of the most interesting and unique periods of black history in America was the 1870’s, when bands of Southern blacks migrated to Kansas. This movement culminated in the Great Exodus of 1879-1881. Because of the state’s unique position as the battleground for Negro freedom before the Civil War, Kansas became a spiritual and political haven in the eyes of blacks. This reputation, glorified further by the martyred John Brown’s involvement, resulted in Kansas becoming the destination of various black colonization groups in the early 1870’s. The most successful of these groups was the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association formed in 1869 with the initial purpose of influencing blacks to buy farm land in Tennessee.

Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, the founder and president of the association, was a mulatto, born a slave in Nashville, Tenn., in 1809. He claimed to have been sold "a dozen times or more" and eventually made his way to Canada and freedom. His experiences in the North revealed to him the economic dependence and helplessness of his race, and he adopted the mission of influencing blacks to strive for economic independence. His first attempt, his plan to assist blacks to acquire land in Tennessee, failed because of the opposition of white land owners and the high land prices.

At this point, convinced of the necessity of being segregated from whites, and wary of the vulnerability of the political protection of blacks in the South, Singleton decided that the best
course was for blacks to quit the South and to colonize in a new region. In his quest for new lands in 1871 Singleton turned his thoughts to Kansas. In addition to the historical appeal of “Free Kansas,” Singleton had received favorable reports from settlers already in the area of the wide-open inexpensive farm lands. Two expeditions sent by Singleton had brought back conflicting information, so in 1873 he went himself to investigate the region. Singleton was so favorably impressed that immediately upon his return in 1874 he organized a group of 300 and proceeded to found his first settlement, Singleton colony. The colony was located on about 1,000 acres of public land near Baxter Springs in Cherokee county. By 1878 good cabins, livestock, and fruit trees were present in the colony. This colony’s success has often been credited with influencing the formation of others.

The exact location of the colony could not be determined on the basis of available records. It is also not known how long the colony survived; the monthly report of the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association for May, 1880, describes some 185 families living near Baxter Springs, suggesting the colony was still in existence at that time. When the relief association disbanded in 1881, a school, the Agricultural and Industrial Institute for the Refugees, was founded in this area. Located on 400 acres of land, four miles east of Columbus, the institute closed in 1885 for lack of funds. The school lands were located in parts of Secs. 22, 23, and 26, in T. 33 S., R. 24 E., Crawford township; the only building completed was located in the NW quarter of Sec. 23.

Singleton continued his work after the founding of this colony. Aided by Columbus M. Johnson, who remained in Topeka to receive and help locate the migrants, and A. D. DeFranz, a Nashville barber who remained in Tennessee to organize the bands, Singleton made several trips to Kansas each year with groups of colonists. Singleton specifically encouraged only the migration of independent Negroes, or those with means. He was against the highly educated “political Negroes,” for “It was the muscle of the arm, the men that worked that we wanted.”

The Tennessee-based organization founded another colony in the late 1870’s. Dunlap colony, located on the eastern border of Morris county, was established in May, 1878. This colony was larger than the first, consisting of about 200 Negro families, and was situated on 7,500 acres of government land acquired at a cost of $1.25 an acre. The colony was located adjacent to the white town of Dunlap, which was founded on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad in 1870. Each colonist was required to own his own land, and the acreage varied from 10 to 160. Columbus M. Johnson, who remained in Topeka and became active in the black community there, owned 80 acres in T. 17 S., R. 9 E., of Valley township. Although the first harvest was not successful, the following years produced better returns and prosperity. The colony soon boasted two primary schools. A Presbyterian missionary, Rev. John M. Snodgrass, established a mission school and there was also an industrial school. Later, the colony became the home of the Literary and Business Academy, which was established to educate the children of the Negro colonists. Andrew Atchison was principal.

Dunlap colony received special attention because of Singleton’s flamboyant and extensively distributed circulars in which he proclaimed the advantages of the “fine rolling prairie. Plenty of stone and water, and wood on streams. Plenty of coal within twenty-five miles.” Although this was Singleton’s last colonization effort, he remained a vital worker for his race. He continued his circular campaign through the 1870’s and the exodus of 1879-1881, and he attempted to divert migrants to the colonies he had founded. In 1880 Singleton was called before the committee of the U. S. senate formed to investigate the causes of the exodus; there he outlined his early colonization efforts and his circular campaign on which he estimated having spent nearly $600. He concluded by claiming to have brought 7,432 blacks to Kansas, and asserting that he was the only reason for the exodus, and claiming the title “Father of the Exodus.”

Continuing in his work, Singleton founded in 1881 the Colored United Links, a black organization dedicated to “consolidate the race as a bond of brethren.” Disappointed with the amount of racial prejudice he found in Kansas, Singleton began to search in

34. Fleming, “Pop Singleton, Moses of the Colored Exodus,” p. 75.
Although the colony could not have much influence in county politics, its members did support Jetmore as county seat, and one of them, a man named Jackson, was the county’s first coroner in 1879. 

Vestiges of the Morton City townsite were still existing in 1952. 

Nicodemus, the most researched and best known of the black colonies, is located in Graham county on the Solomon river in western Kansas. Founded in September, 1877, by a group of Lexington, Ky., colonists led by W. R. Hill, a real estate agent, the colony grew to a population of over 600 in 1879 when five additional groups joined the original settlers. The first winter was very hard and the settlers suffered severely, but by the following year men were farming, or had found work with the railroad, and the colony became self-sufficient. By 1879 there were 25 houses and two churches, Methodist and Baptist, in the town. In the early 1880’s, Nicodemus really experienced a boom period. Anticipating the construction of the Missouri Pacific railroad, there was a great deal of construction and the village “boasted two drugstores, three grocery stores, bank, hotel, 2 newspapers, and other business enterprises.” However, the anticipated railroad construction never occurred, and throughout the rest of the century the town was in a long decline. By 1950 the population had dwindled to 16, and in 1953 the post office which had opened in 1878, closed. Nicodemus is the only Kansas black settlement which has been researched thoroughly; in 1975 it was designated as a National Historic Landmark.

There were several prominent Kansas blacks with Nicodemus backgrounds. W. L. Sayers, a pioneer Kansas lawyer, was district court clerk for Graham county and later served as county attorney, 1900-1903 and 1912-1916. Admitted to the bar in 1893, he was involved in several important cases in the county. He lived on a farm in the SE¼, Sec. 27, T. 7 S., R. 21 W.

Two other leaders of Nicodemus who are important in Kansas history are A. T. Hall and E. F. McCabe. Hall, a native of Chicago, was well educated and worked for several newspapers in the North, eventually becoming city editor for the Chicago Conservator. Because of his position, he learned of the Kansas

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1883 for other lands in which his people could colonize and live unoppressed. He considered Canada, Liberia, Cyprus, and finally Ethiopia, and he established the United Transatlantic Society to promote a separate black nation. Although the organization enjoyed widespread support for several years, no organized emigration ever took place. Singleton spent the remainder of his years enjoying his titles of “Moses of his People” and “Father of the Exodus,” and large commemorative celebrations were held for him on each birthday until his death in Topeka in 1892 at age 83. (No address was found for Singleton in the Topeka city directories 1883-1892.) Another important colony was founded in Hodgeman county in September, 1877, by blacks from the area of Lexington and Harrodsburg, Ky. The colony was located about three miles northeast of present Jetmore and consisted of 107 settlers who were later joined by a second group of 50. Proceeding with their original intention to found a town, the settlers filed articles of incorporation for the Morton City Town Company, and began to lay out streets and build shelters. The town at one time consisted of three houses, more than nine dugouts, and a frame building for the store. The settlers soon discovered, however, that it was not economically feasible to build a town in the wilderness so distant from supply stations, and thus, the colony decided to take up individual homesteads and the town was abandoned. The townsite was located on the southeast quarter of Sec. 28, T. 22, R. 23, and later became part of the C. M. Hanna ranch.


Robert Johnson opened a livery stable in Kinsley and in 1879 had 40 animals and an income of $150 a month, affluence in that era. Another prominent family was the Bradshaws who joined the colony in 1879, one of the sons still lives on the homestead, and remnants of the original dugout still exist six miles north of Jetmore, one and one-half miles east of the highway. This family reportedly also built a building in Jetmore.

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35. Ibid., p. 70.
36. Topeka Commonwealth, May 7, 1870.
37. Ibid.
38. High Plains Journal, Dodge City, January 10, 1852.
39. Ibid.
41. Interview with Prof. James Forysthe, Fort Hays Kansas State College, August 17, 1976.
43. Ibid.
as many as possible and shipped the rest westward, but the migrants arrived faster than they could be distributed. Although a large group of exodusters always was present in Wyandotte, the principal receiving point was shifted to Topeka, where, beginning March, 1879, 250 to 300 migrants arrived each week. The migrants were housed in churches, warehouses, and in buildings at the fairgrounds.

In May, 1879, the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association was organized by Governor St. John "to relieve as far as possible the wants and necessities of destitute freedmen, refugees, and immigrants . . . to provide necessary food, shelter, and clothing for them when unable to provide for themselves . . . to aid and assist them in procuring work, and finding homes, either in families or . . . on government lands. . . ." A warehouse in Topeka fronting on Gordon street, was acquired from which food, clothing, and aid were distributed, and the organization sent out appeals nationwide and to Europe for help for the refugees. By March 31, 1881, $28,965.37 had been raised by the organization.

The relief association was spearheaded by three Quaker social workers: Mrs. Elisabeth Comstock, Mrs. Laura Haviland, and Mrs. S. T. Perry. John M. Brown, a Topeka Negro, was general superintendent, and the organization had branch offices and agents in several counties. The Kansas State Colored Immigration Bureau, an organization of Topeka blacks to aid the exodusters, was formed on May 3 with John M. Brown serving as president. The Freedmen's Relief Association received some criticism; because of its success it was seen by those opposed to the exodus as an inducement to the freedmen to migrate. However, until its dissolution in April, 1881, the relief association provided a necessary service and was very successful in alleviating the immediate suffering of the newly arrived freedmen. After it was disbanded, the organization formed a school near Columbus in Cherokee county for the refugees, as discussed previously. This venture proved to be short-lived as the school closed for lack of funds in 1885.

The causes of the black exodus from the South to Kansas have been widely researched; on December 18, 1879, a congressional investigation was authorized to pinpoint these causes. Although over 1,700 pages were accumulated, the conclusions were af-

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60. Ibid., pp. 34, 35.
61. Ibid., p. 39.
View of a celebration in Nicodemus with the Baptist church to the left.

EDWARD P. McCabe
State Auditor

W. L. Sayers
Attorney

W. L. Sayers house, 609 N. Fourth, Hill City.
fected by politics. One of the most important reasons for the black exodus was the precarious position of the blacks in the southern states after the federal troops had been withdrawn. The oppression and "bulldozing" which the blacks experienced was left unrestricted by the federal authorities. Anxious to keep the Negroes in their prewar social and political position, the white South employed a stringent system of laws and personal violence including murders, lynchings, and threats to prevent the Negroes from voting and from using other newly gained civil rights. Stories of the cruelties were widely printed in contemporary accounts of the exodus and became the reason most commonly accepted as the cause of it.

Another important cause was the sharecropper and crop lien system present in the South. This system served to trap black farmers in a vicious cycle of scraping out an existence with little hope of saving any money or being able to own land. This system, coupled with several bad crop years in the late 1870's and the growing oppression and violence, caused a great spirit of discontent to grow among the Southern blacks.

However, there were other, more active forces which caused these former slaves to gather up their meager belongings and leave their Southern homes. One of the most influential was Singleton's successful colonization movement and circular campaign. As word circulated in the South of the success of his Kansas colonies and as conditions described in his circulars were compared with their lot, the desire for Kansas migration grew in Southern blacks. Another important influence was the organization led by Henry Adams, an exslave from Louisiana, who formed an association in 1870 with a committee of 500. By 1878 his organization had more than 98,000 members. Adams called a meeting of the Negro Union Cooperative Aid Association in 1877 urging "the discouraged . . . [to] join with us." Later in 1879 the organization voted in favor of a Kansas migration when an appeal for Presidential action for their protection was denied. Many of its large membership left for Kansas.

Another important factor was the influence of the emigration agents and the circulars which were distributed in great numbers in the South during this period. Land companies, railroads, and colonization societies were primarily responsible for the many circulars and colorful chromos which revealed the bountiful

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opportunities of Kansas. Many of these handbills contained false information and were at least partially responsible for the widely held assumption that free land or “forty acres and a mule” was available for anyone who reached Kansas. In addition, there was a large group of emigration agents who actively worked to influence the blacks to migrate; many of these took advantage of the uneducated by charging exorbitant sums for services or by selling nonexistent lands and goods.

In addition the historical appeal of the “Free State” of Kansas was an important factor; for the most part the blacks were an uneducated and highly religious group who were susceptible to the image of the oppressed people journeying to Canaan, and the John Brown state was an ideal candidate for a “Promised Land.” Thus, this traditional attraction, coupled with the harsh economic, political, and social realities of the South, sparked large groups of unorganized freedmen to migrate to a destination no more specific than Kansas.

After arriving in Kansas, the blacks soon established small colonies or districts in many of the state’s eastern cities. In Kansas City, Quindaro had been a black community since before the Civil War when blacks escaping from slavery in Missouri had settled on the bluffs overlooking the Missouri river. Originally a free-state town, Quindaro was projected in the 1850’s as the premier city of Kansas. However, when Wyandotte was established as the county seat, Quindaro began to decline. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, most of the settlers enlisted and the town was abandoned. The old townsite was soon taken over by escaped slaves. By 1870 the black settlement at Quindaro had a population of 709, and throughout the next decade, especially in the years 1879-1880 when thousands landed on the Wyandotte levees, large groups of blacks settled there. This early black settlement, which is now included in Kansas City’s boundaries, is still a viable black community; the old settlement’s boundaries in today’s terms are the Missouri river and Quindaro boulevard on the north and south, and 18th street and 42d street on the east and west.

Another important black settlement in Kansas City was “Mississippi Town” or “Juniper Bottoms,” which was settled by exodusters. Located within two blocks of the western end of the inter-city viaduct, east of Third street and west of Everett street, this district lasted for 40 years until 1927 when it was cleared for an industrial district. “Rattlebone Hollow” near Jersey creek, also an exoduster settlement, later became the Fairfax Industrial district. A fourth Negro district formed by exodusters was “Hogg’s Town” located at the then extreme western border of the city, and named after one of its founders, William Hogg. In 1924 this area was condemned by the city for park purposes and now is the site of part of the exclusive white residential area, West Heights Manor.

In Topeka there were several major Negro settlements. The oldest one, where blacks had lived since their first arrival in the city in the 1850’s and 1860’s, was a four-block area on the south bank of the Kansas river, which was known as “the Bottoms;” this area was destroyed by Urban Renewal in the 1960’s. Another old district was a tract of land known as “Ritchie’s Addition,” located south of 10th street and east of Jackson; the construction of Interstate 70 has destroyed much of this settlement. A settlement formed in the early stages of the exodus was “Redmonsville” in North Topeka. A district in southeast Topeka known as “Mudtown” was located in the Shunganunga bottoms near the intersection of 15th street and Adams adjacent to the Highland Park-Pierce area. Another area settled by approximately 500 refugees from Tennessee was “Tennessee town,” part of which still exists. Located at the then western city limits in an area called “King’s Addition,” it was bounded by Buchanan and Washburn, 10th street and Huntoon.

Labette county received a large number of exodusters, mainly from Texas, in October and November of 1879. Most of them settled in the towns of Chetopa, Oswego, and Parsons. An estimated 1,500 to 2,500 migrants came to Parsons alone and settled in the areas referred to as “Scuffletown” and “Mudtown.” Winfield, in Cowley county, also received a sizable number of exodusters.

One of the main objectives of the refugees coming out of the South was to own land. Like Singleton they attempted to form all black colonies in which each man would acquire a tract of land

67. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p. 66.
71. Ibid., p. 66.
72. Ibid., p. 66.
for farming. One such colony was the group of about 125 Texas Negroes who arrived in Burlington, Coffey county, in the spring of 1879. At first these migrants were housed in the town and found employment as laborers, but soon some of them moved to 1,000 acres of school land in Sec. 36 and 25, T. 21, R. 13, Pleasant township. They were unusual because they brought with them 30 head of oxen, several teams of horses, 20 wagons, and household goods. In spite of this the colony was not long-lived because of an epidemic which broke out among the cattle. White farmers forced the diseased cattle to be shipped back to Texas. After this most of the Negroes in the area migrated to Independence and Coffeyville.

Another colony of the exodusters sponsored by the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association in 1879 was located on 1,280 acres of university land about 50 miles west of Topeka. It was called the Wabaunsee colony. About 30 families were placed on 40-acre tracts which were purchased at a cost of $2.65 an acre. The association furnished teams, agricultural implements, rations, and built a common barracks. By December, 1880, this colony was reported as self-sustaining. According to public records it was evidently located in Secs. 13 and 23, T. 14, R. 9.

The most prominent member of the colony was Isaiah T. Montgomery, a wealthy Mississippi Negro and former slave of Joseph Davis, brother of Jefferson Davis. Montgomery had owned at one time the former Davis plantation at Davis Bend, Miss. Curious about the exodus of his plantation's workers, Montgomery traveled to Kansas City where he encountered his former employees. Learning of their desire for land, he was influential in organizing the colony. Montgomery bought 640 acres of land and also located nine families at the colony. Soon after, he returned to Mississippi and established the well-known all-black town of Mound Bayou, in Bolivar county.

A very small colony was formed in Saline county in 1879 when a number of black families, part of a caravan of 500 blacks bound for Nicodemus, separated from the caravan and colonized on three sections in Summit township near the Swedish colony of Falun. They had pasture land for themselves and for neighbors and owned livestock. These colonists became part of the Falun community, trading at the businesses, and attending District 67 grade school. The colony slowly declined as the farmers left the area, and the last black to leave Summit township, David Price, sold his homestead to the U.S. government for a bombing range in 1942.

Another colony formed at this time was the "Daniel Voitaw Colony" founded in 1881 in Montgomery county in the SW 1/4 of Sec. 24, T. 34, R. 16, about two miles north of Coffeyville. Voitaw, a Quaker social worker and an agent for the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association in the Independence area, organized the colony which was made up of a group of Texas Negroes under the leadership of Paul Davis. Some of the settlers raised cotton, producing several successful crops. The colony disbanded in 1900 because of the floods of the Verdigris river and Big Hill creek and because of the death of Davis.

Another colony in southeastern Kansas was the Little Coney, incorporated May 27, 1881, with Rev. Alfred Fairfax as president. In 1880 Fairfax brought about 200 families to southern Kansas, and many settled in Chautauqua county. The colony was located in Little Caney township and its 56 families were assisted by the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association.

Fairfax himself was to become very prominent in early Kansas politics. Born in slavery in 1840, he was sold from Virginia to Louisiana and in 1862 escaped from his master and joined the Union army. During reconstruction, Fairfax became active in Louisiana politics, rising from parish commissioner in 1870 to the educational board in 1872 to the assistant appraiser of the port of New Orleans in 1874. In 1878 he was elected to congress but was forced to flee under threats from Democratic mobs in New Orleans intent on preventing him from holding office. In 1880 he moved to Chautauqua county and acquired a 200-acre farm. He put 20 acres into cotton, operated a cotton gin, and won the first premium for his cotton at an exposition in New Orleans, which

84. Black Word It, Salina, v. 5, no. 4 (June, 1975).
85. Ibid.
88. American Citizen, Topeka, February 1, 1899.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
set off discussion about a new cash crop in Kansas. He was pastor of the New Hope Baptist church in Parsons and was moderator of the Baptist Association of Kansas. During the last year of the exodus, he was active in the work of the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association, serving as one of its two black directors. In 1889 he was elected representative from Chautauqua county and became the first black ever to sit in the Kansas legislature. (He was also the last to serve until the election of W. M. Blount in 1929, 40 years later.) The exact location of his farm has not been determined; however, it was in Little Caney township and his post office address was Matanzas. While in Topeka, Fairfax boarded at the Rollings House, 205 West Sixth.

Several Negroes were prominent in the black community in Topeka during this period. William L. Eagleson, a pioneer Negro journalist in the West, started what is often considered the first real Negro newspaper in Kansas, the Colored Citizen. It began publication in Fort Scott in 1877 and moved to Topeka in 1878. Eagleson also served as first assistant doorman in the legislature in 1879. When Oklahoma was opened for settlement, Eagleson, along with others, formed the Oklahoma Immigration Association in Topeka. This organization attempted through circular campaigns to spur migration of Southern blacks to the new territory. He accompanied E. P. McCabe to Langston where he published the Langston City Herald and was justice of the peace and a member of the city council. Returning to Kansas in 1892, he served as a messenger to Governor Leedy from 1897 until his death in June, 1899. Eagleson lived at 1425 Quincy in Topeka.

Rev. T. W. Henderson, the coeditor of the Colored Citizen while it was being printed in Topeka, a native of Greensboro, N.C., migrated to Kansas from Oberlin, Ohio, in 1868. He was pastor of the African Methodist churches in both Lawrence and Topeka and served as chaplain of the house of representatives in the early 1880’s. A leader of the Topeka black community, Henderson was a founder, along with Eagleson, of the Kansas Colored State Emigration Bureau, and was also one of the black directors of the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association.

John M. Brown, the general superintendent of the Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association and president of the Kansas Colored Emigration Bureau, was one of the most prominent blacks in the state. A graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio, Brown first was active in Mississippi where he taught school, served as sheriff in Coahoma county, and was colonel of the first Mississippi Colored militia. In Kansas he was county clerk of Shawnee county for two terms, 1889-1893, and was an unsuccessful candidate for state auditor. He was appointed major of the 23rd regiment by Gov. John Leedy. Brown owned a 100-acre farm immediately north of Topeka valued at $200 an acre in 1900; the Brown farm and residence was located in the northwest corner of Sec. 7, T. 11 S., R. 15 E., in Soldier township. Brown died January 11, 1923.

Two other blacks with Topeka backgrounds who were involved in the exodus were Green J. Currin and Albert C. Hamlin. Currin, born in Tennessee about 1847, came to Kansas in 1877 and settled in Topeka where he was a member of the police department in 1885. Soon after he joined pioneer journalist W. L. Eagleson in the Oklahoma Immigration Association and became vice-president. In 1890 Currin moved to Kingfisher county and soon afterwards was elected as Oklahoma territory’s first and only Negro legislator. After serving his term, Currin probably returned to farming although some sources state he became a deputy United States marshal. In 1910 he was denied registration under Oklahoma’s “Grandfather Clause” and he testified in a suit in the circuit court of appeals in 1915. In 1916 the U. S. supreme court found the “Grandfather Clause” unconstitutional. According to the 1885 city directory, Currin lived at 818 Central in North Topeka.

Hamlin’s career was very similar to Currin’s. Hamlin’s parents, ex-slaves from Tennessee, joined the exodus to Kansas in 1850 and settled in Topeka where Hamlin was born February 10, 1881. The family lived in Topeka for 10 years and then joined the migration movement to Oklahoma territory, settling on a farm in Logan county. In 1908, after holding various local offices, Hamlin was elected the first Negro to sit in the state legislature. A 1910 state constitutional amendment unfairly administered so as
to disenfranchise Negroes caused Hamlin to be the last Negro in the legislature until 1964.102 Hamlin died in August, 1912. In Topeka Hamlin had lived with his family at 618 West E (later Gordon) street.

Nearly 20 years after the colonization efforts of Benjamin Singleton, there was another move to bring organized groups of blacks to Kansas. In 1898 Kansas was a significant coal-producing state, ranking third in the nation in coal production. The industry, centered in Crawford and Cherokee counties, was having severe labor problems, and at the outset of a strike in 1899 the major coal companies decided to import black strikebreakers. Centering their efforts on Birmingham, Ala., where black miners were being edged out of their jobs because of the increased use of convict and foreign-born labor, they found the blacks anxious to relocate because of deteriorating protection of blacks’ rights in Southern society. The immigration agents were successful and from June to September, 1899, a series of trains carrying approximately 1,300 blacks left Birmingham for Fort Scott. Arriving in southeastern Kansas, the immigrants were distributed to the mining camps of Weir City, Fleming, Mineral, Yale, and Nelson. Reactions to the blacks varied, but the union smoothed the major differences by striving to convince the blacks to join up. This effort was successful; the blacks became loyal members of the union and were involved in the negotiations which ended the strike in 1901. The union bylaws had regulations forbidding discrimination in employment and these were obeyed. Slowly, as discrimination was minimized in the mines, the blacks began to carve a niche for themselves in local society. Permanent homes were built, churches organized, and a Negro school was started. Although not accepted completely as equal, the black coal miners in southeast Kansas had escaped the racist conditions of the South, and become an integral part of Kansas society. With the coming of the 20th century and strip mining, deep shaft mining in Kansas became unprofitable, and as employment opportunity declined, most of these blacks moved to Northern cities.106

A Negro lawyer, politico, and journalist who was very active in late 19th century Kansas was William Bolden Townsend. He was born a slave near Huntsville, Ala., in 1854. His owner, who was also his grandfather, freed him and he was allowed to complete a common school education. He taught school for a period, but

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105. Ibid.
106. John M. Robb, The Black Coal Miner of Southeast Kansas, "History of Minority Groups in Kansas, No. 2" (Commission on Civil Rights, Topeka, October, 1960).
JOHN M. BROWN
Gen. Supt., Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association

JOHN L. WALLER
Editor, Lawyer, Politician

W. M. BLOUNT
Physician, Legislator

LUTIE A. LYTLE
Lawyer

(Above) Oscar De Priest house, 819 West Walnut, Salina.
(Below) Childhood home of Lutie Lytle, 1435 Monroe, Topeka.
soon migrated to Leavenworth where he was a letter carrier and held several county and state appointive offices. Townsend became very active in Republican politics and worked to place such black politicians as E. P. McCabe on the Republican ticket. He made use of his position as editor of the Leavenworth Advocate, which he assumed in late 1888, to accomplish this goal. In 1889 Townsend resigned as letter carrier to study law at the University of Kansas, where he earned his L.L.B. in 1891. From 1891 to 1900 Townsend practiced law in Leavenworth; he was assistant prosecuting attorney of that city from 1895 to 1897, and in 1898 was an unsuccessful candidate for state auditor. In 1901 he was involved with the case of Fred Alexander, a black who was accused of attempted assault and burned to death by a white mob. Townsend was forced to flee Leavenworth after his house was burned in February, 1901, and he moved to Pueblo, Colo. Townsend had a “beautiful residence in West Leavenworth” which was “conceded to be one of the handsomest city homes owned by colored men in Kansas.” The house was located at 1023 Kiowa.

Also very prominent in Kansas politics in the late 19th century were two black lawyers who rose to important government diplomatic positions. Charles H. J. Taylor was born in slavery on April 21, 1856, and was educated at Oberlin College and Ann Arbor College (University of Michigan) where he studied law. Taylor migrated to Leavenworth where he practiced law, but his support of the Democratic party, a real rarity for a Negro in Kansas, earned him an appointment from President Cleveland as minister resident and consul general to the Republic of Liberia where he served from March 11, 1887, to November 11, 1887.

Returning to Kansas in 1891, Taylor, along with John L. Waller, gained control of the newspaper the American Citizen which Waller had founded in 1888 but had subsequently sold. The same year Waller was appointed to a diplomatic post so Taylor became sole editor of the paper, which had been moved to Kansas City. In
addition Taylor served as assistant city attorney for Kansas City and ran unsuccessfully for the state legislature in 1892. In 1893 President Cleveland nominated Taylor to be minister to Bolivia, but this appointment was not confirmed by the Senate. Cleveland subsequently appointed him recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia, a job Taylor held until the Republicans won the election of 1896. While in Kansas City, Taylor lived at 822 Oakland (Kansas City directory of 1890).

John L. Waller, a lawyer, editor, and politician, is proof that some of the Negroes who came to Kansas in the exodus movement were not destitute and uneducated. He was born in New Madrid, Mo., in 1850 of slave parents. In 1862 the Waller family was confiscated by the 32d Iowa infantry, and sent to Tama county, Iowa. In that state Waller studied law and was admitted to the Iowa bar in 1877. He came to Kansas in 1878 and settled in Leavenworth. There he practiced law, the first black to practice in the Leavenworth courts, and became active in Republican politics. He moved to Lawrence in 1879, and in 1880 was a candidate for the state legislature, losing by a narrow margin. In 1883 he started publishing the Western Recorder and became a member of the Lawrence Board of Education. He was chosen a member of the Republican state central committee in 1880. In 1888 Waller started the American Citizen in Topeka, a notable black newspaper which was published until 1907. During this period, Waller continued his involvement in politics; he served as deputy county attorney for Shawnee county and in 1888 was elected as an at-large Republican elector for the presidential election (one of the first Negroes to serve on the electoral college). On February 12, 1891, Pres. Benjamin Harrison appointed Waller as consul to Madagascar, a position which he retained until 1894. During those years France was attempting to establish a protectorate in the country and after Waller was relieved of his official duties, he was arrested for giving French military information to the local government officials. In a three-hour trial before a military tribunal, he was given a 21-year sentence. The American government took up Waller's case and he became the object of congressional and presidential resolutions.

He was released and, upon his return to the United States, he filed suit against the French government for $100,000 damages for false imprisonment; this suit was compromised out of court for $10,000.

During the Spanish-American War, Waller served as captain in the 23d Kansas, the Negro regiment organized by Governor Leedy. In 1899, as the American quest for territorial expansion was burgeoning, Waller presented a plan in which he advised "Negroes with capital or particular skills to emigrate to America's newly acquired overseas possessions," and in the same year he announced the formation of the Afro-American Cuban Emigration Society. Waller died October 13, 1907, in New York.

While in Leavenworth, Waller lived on the south side of Metropolitan avenue between 13th and 14th (Leavenworth directory of 1888). In Lawrence, he lived on the west side of Delaware between Quincy and Beckley (10th and 11th). In Topeka, he boarded at the Rollings House, 205 West Sixth.

George Washington Ellis, lawyer and acclaimed author on African culture, had a Kansas background. He was born at Weston in Platte county, Missouri, on May 4, 1875, but his family soon moved to Atchison where he attended high school. Ellis then studied two years of law at the University of Kansas where he received the L.L.B. in 1893 and was admitted to the Kansas bar. For the next four years he studied for his liberal arts degree at the university and practiced law to defray expenses. In 1897 he went to New York where he studied economics and sociology for two years. In 1899 he passed the examination of the United States Census Board and was appointed to a position in the census division of the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. There Ellis attracted the attention of Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, who, with Senate confirmation, appointed him secretary of the legation of the United States to the Republic of Liberia.

He spent the next eight years in Liberia and under instructions from Washington made numerous expeditions into the hinterland to study various tribes of West Africa. Resigning in 1910, he returned to the U.S. and settled in Chicago where he established...

112. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
125. Ibid., University of Kansas, Twenty-Seventh Annual Catalogue (Topeka, 1893), p. 87.
127. Ibid., v. 17, p. 400.
a lucrative law practice. During his career he tried cases in the supreme courts of both Illinois and the United States and in 1917 was elected assistant corporation counsel to the city of Chicago. Ellis's greatest achievements perhaps are his writings, he continued his interest in sociological work and authored various books and articles dealing with his West African observations. Among his most famous are *Negro Culture in West Africa* (1914), his highly acclaimed study of a typical tribe of the African Black Belt, and his *Negro Achievements in Social Progress* (1915). In addition, he was contributing editor to the *Journal of Race Development*, Clark University, Worcester, Mass., in which many of his best articles were published. While in West Africa, Ellis collected proverbs, folklore, and ethnological specimens representative of all facets of African life and culture, and this collection, one of the largest in the world, was lent to the National Museum in Washington, D. C.

Only the Atchison directory of 1891 has the Ellis family listed, and there is no residence given. In 1891 Ellis's father, George W. Ellis, was a waiter at the Union Depot Hotel. While in Lawrence, Ellis roomed at 814 Vermont; his office was at 731 Massachusetts (1896).

Among the first black settlers in Salina was the De Priest family who came to Kansas in 1870 from Florence, Ala. Sidney De Priest was a full-blooded Frenchman from Paris, and Narcissus Patton De Priest was reportedly the mulatto daughter of Gov. Robert M. Patton of Alabama. De Priest, trained in the skill of interior decoration, opened a paint store on Santa Fe street in Salina, and this profession was continued by the family after his death. One of De Priest's sons, Oscar De Priest, was born in Florence in 1871, attended the public school and normal school in Salina, and learned his grandfather's trade. In 1889 young De Priest moved to Chicago where he entered into real estate contracting and where he began to gain power in the predominantly black Third ward. He was a member of the Cook county commission in 1904-1908, of the Illinois Commerce Commission, and became the first Negro member of the city council, serving two terms, 1915-1917 and 1943-1947. He was a delegate to the national Republican Party conventions in 1928, 1932, and 1936, and was a member of the Cook county Republican central committee from 1928 to 1948. The ex-Kansan's greatest achievement, however, was his election to the U. S. house of representatives. Although the black population had more than doubled in the United States since the reconstruction era when 22 blacks had served in the congress, not a single black had been elected to that body from 1901 until De Priest took his seat in 1929. De Priest was elected to the 71st, 72d, and 73d congresses from the First Illinois district, serving from 1929 to 1935. De Priest died May 12, 1951, in Chicago. The former De Priest home in Salina is still standing at 819 West Walnut. (City directories also show De Priest homes at 152 S. 11th and 924 Spruce.)

Another progressive black politician was Dr. William Marshall Blount, who was born in 1883 near Lufkin, Tex., and studied medicine at Meharry Medical School in Nashville, Tenn. From his graduation in 1908 until 1921 he practiced medicine in Oklahoma City and Texas, and then moved to Kansas City where he practiced until his death, March 15, 1965. In Kansas City Blount served as deputy coroner and assistant Wyandotte county physician, and in 1929 he was elected to the state house of representatives from the Eighth district of Wyandotte county. The first black to serve since Rev. Alfred Fairfax in the 1890's, Blount was reelected to a second term in 1932 and became the chairman of the committee on hygiene and public health. His office in Kansas City was at 428 Minnesota and his home for many years was at 402 Quindaro boulevard.

Another prominent Kansas Citian was Bishop John A. Gregg of the African Methodist Church. A well-known educator, he was a 1902 graduate of the University of Kansas. He served as president of Edward Waters College in Florida, Wilberforce University in Ohio, and Bethel Institute in Cape Town, South Africa. Later he was the first black ever elected to the presidency of Howard University in Washington, D. C. From 1936 to 1952 he was bishop of the fourth district and lived in Kansas City. During World War II Gregg devoted considerable time, as a personal representative of Pres. Franklin Roosevelt, to visiting Negro troops at the war fronts in both Europe and the Pacific.

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130. *Ibid*.
141. Kansas University *Alumni Magazine*, March, 1953, p. 34.
mission was to bring messages from home and to build morale. Upon his return in 1945, he wrote Of Men and of Arms, which recounted his travels and experiences. Born in Eureka, Kan., February 18, 1877, he held pastorates in Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, and South Africa, and at the time of his death, February 17, 1953, he was a senior bishop of the African Methodist Church and presiding bishop of the 11th Episcopal district in Florida.

In 1948 Gregg received the army’s Medal for Merit for his activities during the war. Gregg lived in a large brick house at 1150 Washington boulevard in Kansas City.

Topeka had its share of early notables in black history. John Freeman, a Topeka cobbler in his later years, was involved in a very important law suit which tested the fugitive slave laws. Born in slavery in Jamestown, Va., in 1807, Freeman learned that since his grandmother was a full-blooded Indian, he was entitled to his freedom.

He moved to Monroe, Ga., where he established a successful livery business, and then proceeded to Indianapolis, Ind., in the 1840’s where he became the sexton of Henry Ward Beecher’s church. Freeman grew close to Beecher and his sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and it has been suggested that he was a partial model for the character in her famous novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin.

In 1852 when indignation over the fugitive slave act was growing, a planter from Kentucky had Freeman arrested after identifying him as a slave who had run away from his plantation. A lengthy court battle ensued and the case received national attention because of the importance it had for the fugitive slave law. An estimated 10,000 people gathered for the first day of the trial. The best legal talent was employed on both sides, and Benjamin Harrison, the rising young lawyer who later became President, was involved at one point. Freeman was finally liberated after witnesses from Georgia affirmed his identity, but he was forced to pay lawyer’s fees of $1,238 to prove his birthright. Shortly afterwards Freeman accompanied Beecher on some of his antislavery tours as a symbol of the evils of the fugitive slave act. After the death of Lincoln, Freeman fled to Canada, but in 1869 he migrated to Topeka. There he owned and operated a shoe repair shop at 114 Kansas avenue until his death October 5, 1902. He also owned a “fine brick residence” at 203 Jackson street. Neither building is standing.

Another accomplished black person in Topeka was Lutie A. Lytle, “the first colored woman admitted to the practice of law.” The daughter of a Topeka barber, Lytle was a graduate of Topeka High School, and first became interested in a law career while working for a black Topeka newspaper. At the age of 21, she proceeded to Chattanooga, Tenn., where she taught school for years, and then in 1897, after three years of study, she graduated from the law department of Central Tennessee College at Nashville. A year later she became a teacher in this law department, teaching law of domestic relations, evidence, real property, crimes, and criminal procedure. She was reported the only woman law instructor in the world at this time. Miss Lytle later married a Mr. McNeil and lived in New Paltz, N.Y. In Topeka, she lived at 1435 Monroe street with her family.

At the turn of the century, Topeka also had several important newspaper editors. One of the most colorful was Col. Fred L. Jeltz, a native of Jackson, Miss., who migrated to Topeka in 1889 at the age of 24 years. Jeltz taught in the public schools and also wrote a column in the Topeka Daily Capitol which was to become well known throughout the state, “Jolts from Jeltz.” In 1892 he resigned his position as teacher and founded the Kansas State Ledger, a Negro weekly newspaper which was published until 1906. Jeltz’s colorful and sometimes controversial editorship of this paper earned him a reputation as an able journalist and writer. In Topeka Jeltz lived at 612 Lane from 1910 to 1917, and at 929 College from 1924 until his death, March 9, 1937. Another Topeka editor who was also a political and social leader in the state, was Nick Chiles, a highly successful businessman and Topeka citizen who came in 1899. Chiles, a native of South Carolina, owned a hotel, saloon, and considerable real estate. His hotel at 116 East 7th was described as the leading black establishment in the city, and his real estate holdings included three large buildings on East Seventh street and a farm in the Kaw valley. In January, 1899, Chiles established the Plaindealer and this soon became the most successful black-

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144. Kansas City (Mo.) Journal, September 9, 1895.
145. Ibid.
146. Ibid.
147. Topeka Commonwealth, July 4, 1888.
148. Topeka Daily Capital, September 15, 1897.
149. Ibid.
150. Ibid, October 27, 1898.
owned paper in the state and one of the strongest in the country. By 1905, probably because of Chiles’s reputation, the paper’s circulation had spread to 11 states and had the largest number of subscribers to a Kansas black paper to date.\(^{154}\) Chiles’s paper set new standards for the black press. By employing competent reporters and printers, he raised the quality of both content and presentation.\(^{155}\) The paper also set new records for longevity for it was published for 30 years under Chiles’s editorship. After his death in October, 1929, it was continued until November, 1958, by a Kansas City corporation, making it the longest running black paper in Kansas history.\(^{156}\)

Chiles’s paper was very outspoken and militant in its approach to the race problem. Chiles led a continuous crusade against lynching, discrimination, and segregation and firmly advocated meeting violence with violence. His support of Negro revolt and militance caused his paper to be banned in some areas of the South and led in one instance to charges being filed against him for inciting a riot, when his paper spurred an uprising of sharecroppers in Arkansas.\(^{157}\)

Chiles was also active in other areas. He aided Carry Nation by serving as business manager for a newspaper supporting her prohibition effort, the Smasher’s Mail.\(^{158}\) In 1926 he was an unsuccessful candidate for the U. S. senate.

Chiles’s printing plant was at 1129 Kansas avenue. He lived in a large frame house at 914 Buchanan street.

Another prominent Topeka journalist active at this time was Paul Jones, who came to Kansas in the exodus in 1879 not as a refugee but as one interested in providing for the relief of the migrants. Jones had become interested in this movement of his people and had taken the position in Chicago of local secretary of a national organization for the relief of the black Kansas refugees. In 1879 he joined E. P. McCabe in bringing funds and supplies to Governor St. John in Topeka.\(^{159}\) Jones was one of the first Negroes to enter Northwestern University in Chicago. He studied law in Chicago and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1880. He moved to Kansas City, Mo., where he practiced law for 15 years.\(^{160}\) In 1899 he moved to Topeka where he worked in the state auditor's

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\(^{155}\) Ibid., p. 96.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., p. 91.


\(^{158}\) Garvin, "Benjamin Singleton and His Followers," p. 19.

\(^{159}\) Topeka Daily Capital, March 8, 1952.
Western University, ca. 1925.

(Above) H. T. Kealing house, 2805 Sewell, Kansas City.
(Below) Douglass Hospital, 3700 North 27th street, Kansas City.

W. T. Vernon house, 2715 Sewell, Kansas City

John Brown statue, 2804 Sewell, Kansas City
office. Later he was an investigator in the attorney general's office.

In 1907 Jones commenced the publication of *The Paul Jones Monthly*, a 40-page magazine with a wide circulation among both races. The publication was of high quality and dealt with both political and social issues. Jones published the magazine until 1936 when ill health forced his retirement. He died in March, 1952, at the age of 97. The editor's house was at 1407 Monroe in Topeka.

A black businessman who gained national recognition was Anthony Overton, a native of Louisiana, who was active in Kansas early in his career. Overton attended Washburn College and in 1888 graduated with an L.L.B. from the University of Kansas. That same year he was admitted to the Kansas bar, and in November was named judge of the municipal court of Shawnee county, serving one year. Overton later moved to Oklahoma where he was involved in business and in 1892 was elected Kingfisher county treasurer. In 1898 he established in Kansas City the Overton-Hygienic Products Company which successfully produced and sold baking powder, flavor extracts, and toiletries. In 1911 Overton moved the company to Chicago where he developed a full line of cosmetics and perfumes under the name of High-Brown products. By 1920 the company was in the million-dollar class. In 1922 Overton established in Chicago the Douglass National Bank which operated until 1932. The bank was located in the Overton building at 36th and State streets. Overton was involved in two other ventures, the Victory Life Insurance Company, Chicago, which did business in 12 states, and the Chicago *Sunday Bee*, which became popular on Chicago's south side. Overton received the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Harmon award for distinguished achievement in 1927 and in 1929 was the first businessman to receive the Spingarn award as the individual who contributed most to the progress of the Negro race in the past year. Overton died July 3, 1946.

In Topeka, Overton lived at his parent's boarding house "Overton House" 10 Kansas Avenue North (1883). As a student in

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161. Ibid.
164. Ibid.
166. Ibid.
formed in an old brewery building near the ruins of Quindaro. In 1867 the state legislature first took note of the school by relinquishing all taxes and by donating the 700 acres of the old townsite to the school. Realizing the need for a school for the Negroes in the state, the legislature in January, 1872, set up a normal school at the university and appropriated funds to operate it. The appropriations ceased in 1873, and the school declined and finally closed after Blachley’s death in 1877. Blachley, hoping that the school would continue after his death, deeded 79.03 acres of land near the old ruins to the institution. Various people tried to reopen the school but they met with little success until 1881 when the African Methodist Church, which was deeply interested in the problem of black education, reopened the school on a portion of the 700 acres. The school was renamed Western University because of its geographical location relative to the first AME school, Wilberforce University in Ohio. By 1890 the school was progressing steadily, and in 1896 William T. Vernon, destined to bring honor and recognition to the institution, was appointed president. Vernon was a follower of the Tuskegee philosophy that blacks needed to acquire occupations before professions. To further this goal, he utilized his political connections to influence Gov. William E. Stanley to provide state support for the school. Vernon’s efforts were successful and in 1899, a state industrial department was formed. Fifteen acres were deeded to the state and buildings were built to house the department. Politics continued to be an important factor in the school’s funding, and Vernon took advantage of this. More and larger appropriations allowed new buildings and in a period of little more than a decade, Vernon transformed an institution of one building and 12 students into a progressive vocational school with eight modern buildings and hundreds of students. The school operated successfully until dwindling enrollment and the withdrawal of state appropriations caused its closing in 1943. The 133-acre campus overlooking the Missouri river at 27th and Sewell is today the site of a nursing home and the Douglass Hospital. The only university building still standing is the girls’

178. Ibid., p. 22.
181. Ibid., p. 33.
182. Ibid., pp. 35, 36.
dormitory, Grant Hall, named in honor of Bishop Abram Grant of the AME Church. Built at a cost of $102,000 in 1909, the brick and stone building is four stories high and had 70 rooms and 17 baths. The building is located at 3700 N. 27th street and now houses the hospital.

W. T. Vernon, president of Western University, later acquired national prominence as a Negro leader and earned the title “Booker T. Washington of the West.” Born in Lebanon, Mo., on July 11, 1871, he was educated at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Mo., and Wilberforce University. Assuming the presidency of the struggling Western University at the age of 25 in 1896, he established his reputation as an able educator and also became active in Kansas politics. He became known as an accomplished speaker and leader of his race and received much attention by crossing racial lines when he spoke at the Kansas Day Club celebration, a traditionally white Republican affair. In 1906 Vernon was named registrar of the treasury by Pres. Theodore Roosevelt. This post was at that time the highest position in the country ever held by a Negro, and Vernon was the third black to be named to it. Vernon was retained in this position under Pres. William Howard Taft. During his tenure in Washington, he acted as liaison between the black race and the President and was important in securing black support for the administration.

In 1912 Vernon was elected president of Campbell College at Jackson, Miss., where he served for four years. In 1920 he was elected bishop of the AME Church by the General Conference and was assigned to the Transvaal district, South Africa. In 1924 he returned to the U. S. and was assigned to various conferences. Vernon returned to Western University in 1933 as superintendent of the industrial department by appointment of Gov. Alfred Landon. He retained this position until his retirement in 1938. He died July 25, 1944. Vernon lived for many years at 2715 Sewell, across the street from Western University campus, and adjacent to the Vernon Elementary School at 2701 Sewell.

Western University had other prominent presidents; one of these was H. T. Kealing who was at the institution from 1910 until his death February 25, 1918. A native of Austin, Tex.,

Kealing was educated at Straight College in New Orleans and at Tabor College in Iowa. Returning to Austin, he was supervisor of public schools there, and later was principal of Paul Quinn College in Waco, Tex. Before coming to Kansas City, Kealing was the editor of the AME Journal in Nashville, Tenn., for 16 years. Kealing lived in a large white house across the street from the campus at 2805 Sewell; the house is still owned by the Kealing family. Kealing School, named after the educator, is located at Fourth and Parallel boulevard.

Another very influential Negro who was active in the Quindaro area at the turn of the century was Rev. Abram Grant. An educator and bishop of the AME Church, Grant was born in slavery in Florida in 1848, but after being sold several times, he escaped to the north. After the war he returned south, was educated at Cookman Institute in Florida, and eventually settled in Texas where he was pastor of churches in Austin and San Antonio. In 1888 he was elected bishop by the General Conference, the second youngest elected up to this time. He presided over two districts before being assigned to Kansas City. Grant was also an accomplished educator and served as vice-president of Paul Quinn College, president of the board of trustees of Wilberforce University, and later president of the board of trustees of Western University. Because of his work at Western University, the girls’ dormitory was named Grant Hall in his honor. Grant lived in Kansas City at 532 Washington boulevard. Devoted to educational endeavors, Grant left his quarter-million-dollar estate to two colleges upon his death in January, 1911.

Grant’s accomplishment which is best remembered is his drive for a statue of John Brown to be erected on the Western University campus. The fund drive began in 1909 and two years later, the statue, costing $2,000, was erected. All money for the statue was donated by blacks, in amounts ranging from 50 cents to $10. The statue, a standing figure of John Brown, was sculptured in Italy from Carrara marble. There is an inscription on the base: "Erected to the Memory of John Brown by a Grateful

189. Kansas City Advocate, March 1, 1918.
190. Ibid.
192. Ibid.
193. Unidentified Kansas City newspaper, January 23, 1911, bound in "Negro Clippings," v. 6, p. 72, Kansas State Historical Society library.
194. Ibid., January 25, 1911, bound in "Negro Clippings," v. 6, p. 74, Kansas State Historical Society library.
People." A large dedication ceremony was attended by over 2,000 people, including the governor and state officials as well as nationally prominent blacks. The statue is in good condition and is standing on the former site of the Western University campus in front of the Villa Primrose Nursing Home, 2804 Sewell. At the time the monument was erected, it was the only full-sized statue of the famous abolitionist in the United States.

At the turn of the century, blacks in Kansas City had difficulty obtaining medical care and training in the white facilities. To alleviate this situation, two Negro physicians, a minister, and a lawyer met in September, 1898, to organize and establish a hospital and nursing school for blacks. The four were Dr. Solomon H. Thompson, Dr. Thomas C. Unthank, Attorney Isaac F. Bradley, and Rev. George W. McNeal. On December 5, 1899, as a result of the meeting, the Douglass hospital was chartered. In 1905 the AME Church under Bishop Grant assumed the sponsorship of the organization, and in 1915 the hospital affiliated with Western University. Douglass Hospital was the first Negro hospital west of the Mississippi. The hospital has had three locations in its 77 years of existence; the first was a frame house at 312 Washington boulevard and the second was a considerably larger building at the northwest corner of Springfield and Quindaro boulevard. In 1945 the hospital moved into its third and present location in Grant Hall, the Western University dormitory building at 3700 N. 27th street.

One of the hospital founders, Solomon H. Thompson, was a pioneer physician in Kansas City. Born in 1870 in Charlestown, W. Va., he was educated at Stover College and Fordham Medical School. From 1889 to 1892 he attended Howard University School of Medicine and won the honor of resident student to the hospital. Upon his graduation Thompson was appointed assistant surgeon to the hospital. Moving to Kansas City in 1892, Thompson became the second Negro physician to practice in the city. For the next 54 years, until his retirement in April, 1946, the pioneer physician enjoyed a large practice. Thompson was particularly well known for his work in combating a plague of spinal meningitis in 1912 and the Spanish influenza epidemic in 1918.

Thompson served as superintendent and chief of staff of Douglass hospital for many years.

Thompson was active in civic affairs; he served on Kansas City's first planning commission, retaining this position for many years. He was active in church affairs and was grand chancellor for the Kansas Knights of Pythias for 24 years. Thompson built his family home at 1321 North Eighth in 1901 and lived there until his death, December 11, 1950.

Another founder of the hospital, Isaac F. Bradley, was a prominent pioneer attorney in Kansas City. Born in 1862 in Cambridge, Mo., Bradley attended Lincoln Institute, Jefferson City, and the University of Kansas where he graduated with a law degree in 1887. Bradley moved to Kansas City and was city justice of peace 1889 to 1891 and assistant county attorney in 1894. In 1900 he was a presidential elector for the Republican party and in 1908 was nominated for attorney general. Bradley was a charter member in 1905 of W. E. B. DuBois's Niagara movement which in 1910 became the NAACP. He was an original member of the Afro-American council, Washington, D. C. Bradley was also well known as an author; The Reign of Reason (1912) and The Lion and the Lamb (1922) are his best-known works. He was very active in civic work and was responsible for the formation of the Civic League of Kansas City, an organization dedicated to improving interracial relations in the city. This organization under Bradley's direction was responsible for the statute placing blacks on the Kansas City police force. In January, 1928, Bradley started the Wyandotte Echo, a weekly paper popular in the Kansas City area, which was printed until 1938. Bradley died November 8, 1938. He lived at 400 Haskell avenue in Kansas City.

An important Kansas City businessman and founder of the first bank to be owned and operated by blacks in the Midwest, Henry Warren Sewing, grew up in humble circumstances in Bremond, Tex. After attending school in Austin, Tex., and Nashville, Tenn., Sewing moved to Kansas City in 1920 and eventually

204. Interview with S. H. Thompson, Jr., August 16, 1976.
207. Ibid.
208. Ibid.
209. Ibid.
entered the life insurance business. In 1934 he organized the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company, and in 1946 he formed the Douglass State Bank, serving as its president for many years. Sewing also founded the H. W. Sewing and Company, Inc., real estate and insurance firm. He later worked for the establishment of a federal savings and loan association and served as the first president when the Twin City Federal Savings and Loan Association was chartered in February, 1954. Sewing lives (1976) at 3512 Oak in Kansas City.

The Kansas Technical Institute, originally the Topeka Industrial and Educational Institute, grew from very humble beginnings. Initially formed as a kindergarten, sewing school, and reading room in the spring of 1895, it was located in a one-room house on the banks of Shunganunga creek near Washington street. In the fall of 1898 the school purchased a two-story brick building at 1725 Kansas avenue and in 1899 the legislature recognized the institution’s work and started state support. In 1901 under the direction of Booker T. Washington, the school was reorganized and William R. Carter was appointed principal. In 1903 the present site of 105 acres east of Topeka was purchased. The school progressed through the years and a campus of seven large stone buildings was built. The name of the school was changed to the Kansas Vocational School in 1925 and again in 1951 to the Kansas Technical Institute. The school closed after the 1955 school year was completed when the legislature cut off state appropriations. The campus is now the site of the Kansas Reception and Diagnostic Center.

Five of the original buildings survive today. Some of them were built of stone quarried near the campus by students of the school. The buildings still standing are the Nellie Johns hospital, the J. B. Larimer girls’ dormitory, the Boys’ Trades building, the gymnasium, and the Girls’ Trades building.

In addition to the school buildings themselves, the president’s house and two teachers’ cottages are still standing on the highway near the entrance to the campus.

Kansas has produced several blacks in the 20th century who have been important in the development of the arts in America.

One of these, Gordon Parks, rose from a poor dirt-farm background to become one of the nation’s best known and most versatile photographers. Born on a small farm outside Fort Scott in 1912, Parks was the youngest of 15 children. He attended school in Fort Scott until the family broke up after his mother’s death in 1928, then he moved to Minnesota. There he held down various jobs and tried his hand at sculpture and painting.

In the late 1930’s Parks became attracted to photography, and realizing its potential for expression, began work with a $12.50 camera from a pawn shop. In 1941 his photographs of ghettos conditions of south side Chicago won him a Julius Rosenwald scholarship which enabled him to study photography seriously for the first time. In 1948 he became a Life magazine photographer, one of the first blacks to hold a photographer’s position for a major magazine, and for the next two decades he won acclaim for his photographs, including his pictorial essays on segregation in the South, crime in the United States, and slum children in Brazil. In 1963 he published The Learning Tree about the experiences of a black youth growing up in Kansas, and in 1966 he wrote A Choice of Weapons. More recently Parks has written various collections of poetry which have been well received. Since 1953 he has written various musical compositions, including his most famous, “Symphonic Set for Piano and Orchestra.” Parks also has been a consultant for various film productions, made several documentaries, and in the 1970’s directed several black culture films, the best known of which was “Shaft.”

In Fort Scott, Parks lived (1926) with his parents, Andrew J. and Sarah Parks, at 623 Burk.

Another Kansan who became one of the nation’s most honored authors was Langston Hughes. Born in 1902 in Joplin, Mo., Langston and his mother, Currie Hughes, moved from place to place looking for work. In 1908 they lived in Topeka, but a year later Hughes went to live with his grandmother, Mary Langston, in Lawrence, where he spent the rest of his childhood. Hughes’s literary talent was first recognized in high school in Cleveland, Ohio, and his verses were printed in the school paper.

212. Ibid., p. 220.
213. Ibid., p. 220.
214. Ibid., p. 221.
216. Ibid.
217. Topeka Daily Capital, March 12, 1901.
221. Ibid.
223. Ibid., October 18, 1973.
Black Historic Sites

Hughes then attended Columbia University in New York and Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, graduating in 1929. The writer was a great traveler, having lived at different times in Haiti, Mexico, France, Italy, and Russia. An amazingly prolific writer, Hughes had published since his college days more than 40 volumes including novels, poetry, plays, and biographies. One of his best-known works is *Not Without Laughter*, a sometime autobiographical account of the life of a poor Negro family in the Midwest. Hughes was awarded various honors including Rosenwald and Guggenheim fellowships, the Harmon award for literature, and in 1960 the Spingarn Medal for contribution to the progress of the Negro. He died May 22, 1967.

In Topeka Hughes and his mother lived in a room over a plumbing shop at 115 W. 5th. In Lawrence Hughes lived at 732 Alabama.

POSTSCRIPT

A number of blacks who have gained renown in various fields during the more recent decades of the 20th century had associations with Kansas. Gwendolyn Brooks, who won a Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1950, was born in Topeka. Coleman Hawkins, an innovator in the world of American jazz, although not a native Kansan, was educated at Washburn College in Topeka. Charlie Parker, another jazz great, was born in Kansas City and got his start playing with various Kansas City jazz groups. Hattie McDaniel, the first black actress to win an Academy Award, was born in Wichita.

The recital of names of others attaining recognition in many fields, the arts, education, athletics, business, industry, etc., could be continued, but that will be left for others. The intent of this work is to provide a background for identifying buildings and sites of the black heritage in Kansas, particularly of the 19th century. If this report encourages others to research further in this field, then the purpose of its publication will have been served.

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