Popularizing the Plains: News of Kansas in England, 1860-1880

by Brian P. Birch

By the mid-1870s when most Americans still thought of Kansas as lying in, or close to, the Great American Desert, the state had already gained a reputation among the English as a place offering possibilities for settlement and investment. Yet those same English people of the more educated and wealthy classes had only a few years before associated the Kansas plains with little more than buffalo-hunting and sport. Part of the reason for this rapid transformation of the Britishers' image of Kansas from a mere hunting ground to a limitless and fertile farmland was the result of publicity gained by various prairie settlement schemes which were promoted at this time in Britain—of which George Grant's Victoria colony was the most famous. But as each of these settlements collapsed soon after its inception a longer shadow was cast in England over the broadening appeal of Kansas as a possible home for emigrant Englishmen.

A more substantial role in popularizing the Kansas plains to the English, however, was played by the travel writers who provided their readers with a regular flow of information and impressions on the developing West. Many of those writers, like some who produced books and others who wrote for promotional journals, probably had a restricted impact except on those English who would seek out such material. Generally, such readers already would be favorably disposed towards emigration to Kansas. More significant as popularizers of Kansas were the travel-writers in the more serious but popular magazines which enjoyed a much wider circulation throughout the literate classes. The readership of those journals was not only large but diverse so that a regular diet of information on the West in general, and on Kansas in particular, was fed to the English to shape popular opinion on these developing areas, as well as to persuade a smaller number to emigrate or invest in the West.

Most notable of these popular but influential British journals was The Field which for a decade ran a regular travel column about the American West. For much of the time Kansas featured strongly in this column. It was also during these years that Kansas enjoyed its greatest popularity in Britain and at this time more Britons settled in the state than at any other period. The role of The Field in this period is therefore worth further examination.

The Field was first published in 1853 and its owner, Horace Cox, set out to raise its circulation to challenge The Times as Britain's premier newsjournal. Promoting

3. Most noteworthy of those outlets in Britain for promotional material on Kansas and other western areas was the London newspaper, The American Settler. First published as a monthly in January 1872, it became a weekly in 1873 and continued with various changes of title and format until 1892.
4. Apart from occasional news items on Kansas and the West in The Times, and the regular flow of information in The Field, several other English and Scottish newspapers ran columns for short periods on emigration to the West, such as The Eastern Daily Herald, a Hull journal. See Brian P. Birch, “The Editor and the English: George Sheppard and English Immigration to Clinton County,” The Annals of Iowa 47 (Spring 1985): 623-42. Macmillan’s Magazine also carried occasional articles on the West and its attraction to the more wealthy classes in England.
5. R. N. Rose, The Field, 1853-1953 (London: Michael Joseph, 1953), 30. The full title of the newspaper was The Field, the Farm, the Garden, The Country Gentleman’s Newspaper. It is still in publication but under its shorter title.
his magazine as “next to The Times...the largest and most influential paper in Great Britain,” Cox could only hope to challenge its well-established rival by taking it on in the areas of reporting where it was weakest and where Cox believed there was a large potential readership. The strength of The Times, as a daily newspaper, lay in its accurate and full accounts of events across the wide spectrum of the national and world scene. The Field, as only a weekly with a small staff, could not rival The Times in these areas and could only gain a wide circulation amongst the same literate, influential middle and upper classes as The Times if it concentrated on satisfying their growing interest in travel, leisure, and country pursuits. The Times largely ignored these. So The Field subtitled itself “the country gentleman’s newspaper...devoted to sport, pastimes, natural history and all country pursuits,” and claimed to have “correspondents in all parts of the world and the colonies to communicate their experiences in hunting, shooting, angling, etc.”

This formula proved popular, and throughout the late 1850s and 1860s, as circulation rose, Cox was able to greatly enlarge the size of the magazine and the number of interests and leisure pursuits covered. In the early 1860s, for example, articles on foreign travel, mainly for sport hunting, began to appear with increasing frequency. More and more letters also were being published from readers anxious for information on particular parts of the United States, as well as Canada, Australia, and southern Africa which they wished to consider as possible areas of emigration.

With travel and emigration articles proving a popular feature of his magazine, Cox in 1869 established a separate department to commission and produce a regular flow of articles under the heading of “Travel and Colonization.” This soon became a weekly feature and, significantly, led Cox in 1872 to base a travel correspondent in the United States who was assigned to report back mainly on settlement possibilities for Englishmen. It was this innovation by The Field that probably did more than any other event to bring Kansas to the attention of the more wealthy sections of the British population in the 1870s as a favored part of the American West for settlement.

Rereading the pages of The Field for the decade after 1872, when the first of its three American correspondents began his despatches, it is clear that each of its reporters in turn was largely given a free hand by The Field’s editor to travel at will across the American West. All that The Field required of its correspondents was a regular flow of accurate, full and unbiased information on the progress of settlement in the various areas visited, and the settlement and farming opportunities these areas seemed to offer British emigrants and investors. As a result of the considerable freedom each of The Field’s correspondents enjoyed to choose where to visit and what to report about various parts of the West, the relative attraction of states and districts waxed and waned. But overall it was Kansas which, at least until 1880 when


The title banner of The Field underwent several modifications during the first thirty years of the newspaper's existence, but it always depicted the interests in hunting and outdoor pursuits the newspaper mainly tried to cater for. In the 1860s this range of interests was widened to include foreign travel and emigration.
the magazine appointed its third western reporter, was featured most frequently and depicted most favorably in the columns of *The Field*.

The magazine's first permanent American correspondent, E. A. Curley, began his flow of reports late in 1872, and for the three years he held the post he visited and described every midwestern and western state across to the Rockies. He did not pen his first report from Kansas until April 1873. Yet it was only when he reached this part of the West that his earlier hesitancy on the potential for British settlement in any part of rural America was displaced by outright enthusiasm, an enthusiasm particularly for Kansas.

In 1876 S. Nugent Townsend, writing under the pseudonym of St. Kames, replaced Curley as *The Field*'s traveling correspondent. Over the next six years he revisited many of the districts on which Curley had reported, as well as extending into other areas such as Texas in which he thought the English might wish to settle. Again what is significant about Townsend's writing, at least in his later reports, as with those of Curley before him, was the favorable but not uncritical light in which he depicted Kansas as a possible home for British emigrants; he also suggested that areas beyond the Rockies and in the Southwest offered some opportunities for British settlers.

In the early 1880s Townsend was replaced by W. Baillie Grohman. As a noted sportsman and alpinist he focused his readers' attention firmly on the far western states, as Townsend had started to do, and *The Field*'s brief flirtation with Kansas as a home for Englishmen was at an end. Yet during the 1870s, which roughly coincided with the years when Curley and Townsend were regularly proclaiming to their British readers the attractions of Kansas, the state saw its British population more than double to twenty thousand (excluding the Irish), the largest influx of English, Scots, and Welsh the state ever witnessed.

While Curley may be credited with doing the most of all three writers after 1873 to advertise amongst the British the opportunities for settlement in Kansas, readers of *The Field* had been made aware of some of the other attractions of the Kansas frontier fourteen years earlier. The first series of articles that *The Field* commissioned on the American West appeared as early as 1860 and also focused on Kansas. The Hon. Granville F. Berkeley, a noted English huntsman, made a three-month visit to the American West for the magazine. He was to report on the hunting opportunities and chose to spend most of his time on the empty prairies west of Kansas City. To the ordinary American, who might have come across Berkeley on his long journey west, this English gentleman must have seemed an eccentric and fractious character with his four hunting dogs, several guns, and aloof manner—all of which he had brought with him from England. He found much to dislike in New York and on the journey west. On the train to St. Louis he complained that in a country where dogs were treated little better than curs the tickets for his four cost more than his own. Yet their welfare was clearly his primary concern, a fact that amused some of the passengers on the riverboat to Kansas City who had never before seen a British aristocrat or realized how strong could be his attachment to his hunting dogs.  

7. Berkeley's narrative on his hunting trip to Kansas appeared weekly in *The Field* from January 21, 1860. He later wrote up his experiences in Granville F. Berkeley, *The English Sportsman in the Western Prairies* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1861). His Kansas trip only got a brief mention, however, in his four-volume biography *My Life and Recollections* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1865), 262.
English sportsmen were eager to read about hunting in the American West, and *The Field* obliged with reports from such outdoorsmen as Grantley Berkeley. His reports appeared in an eighteen-week series, and Berkeley later published a book on his exploits. "Something in the Reeds" and "Stalking the Buffalo" were just two of the many illustrations included in Berkeley's volume.
But on the Kansas prairies—which he crossed as far as Fort Riley—Berkeley encountered country that in no way disappointed him and he found plenty of the sport which had attracted him there. Over the space of a month he hunted and shot ten bison, writing several detailed reports on his hunts for the readers of The Field. In fact so prolific were his accounts and so engaging his descriptions of his whole expedition to Kansas that The Field ran his reports as a series over eighteen weeks and on his return to England made him a regular correspondent on hunting matters.

There is no doubt that Berkeley's accounts of his hunting trip to Kansas caught the interest of many readers of The Field and led several to emulate his adventure. Over the next few years numerous other Field articles appeared on the hunting prospects in various parts of the American West. Readers' letters were published, seeking more information about the region's sporting qualities. But reader interest in the West as an area to be considered by Englishmen for farming opportunities grew rather slowly out of the initial enthusiasm for the region's hunting attractions, although the editor of The Field was quick to spot the early signs of this enlivened interest and to cater for it by commissioning articles from travel writers and others familiar with the West. In 1865 John Coleman, a professor at one of England's leading agricultural colleges, was commissioned by The Field to report regularly on farm matters including farming opportunities in America. Yet it was not for another four years that there were signs that some of The Field's readership were keen to receive such information. It seems, therefore, that the magazine did as much to aroused interest amongst its readers in opportunities to settle and farm in America as to respond to readers' demands for this type of information. In 1868, for example, three years after Coleman was appointed to write about farming in America and elsewhere and only a year before The Field set up a new department to run a regular feature on travel and colonization, the magazine carried only seven letters from readers either seeking or giving information on the American West and most of these concerned hunting. In the following year the number of letters and articles doubled, and, additionally, articles on settlement opportunities in Minnesota, Colorado, and Kansas were included. By 1870 an item on America was appearing virtually every week and covered a range of topics from hunting to settlement opportunities and covered all areas of America from the East Coast to the Pacific.

In 1871, with items on the suitability of the American West purely as a field for emigration now appearing regularly in The Field, a debate began to emerge which was to dominate this aspect of the magazine's reportage for the next three years. This debate was between those who wished to encourage Englishmen to settle within the forested and better-known environments of the eastern states, notably Virginia, and others who saw greater opportunities on the western prairie frontiers, particularly in Kansas. Letters in favor of Virginia as a suitable emigration field for Englishmen far outnumbered all other items on the United States in the magazine's columns during the early months of 1872. The outpouring was such that in July the editor announced that he would publish no more contributions to the argument. But he was not closing a debate that was tiring him or his readers. He was merely preparing the ground for a new regular weekly feature on travel and colonization in America.
None of Curley’s articles in The Field were accompanied by sketches of the places he visited, but he included a few in his book on Nebraska. Each carried a simple message like this one entitled “The beginning of a Nebraska town.”

In August 1872 appeared the first of over one hundred articles by the newspaper’s first resident correspondent in America, E. A. Curley, who was sent out from England primarily to report on the suitability of Virginia and other eastern states for farm settlement. Landing at Quebec he traveled first through New England where he filed five reports on his first impressions of the Northeast. These The Field published at weekly intervals. With his “enthusiasm in a strait-jacket and condemned to heavy, dull, dry accuracy,” he followed with seven reports on Virginia and Kentucky neither of which he considered suitable for English settlers. While they offered cheap labour and the possibility of setting up estates reminiscent of England close to other settlers already from the home country, Curley felt that land prices were inflated, educational standards were poor, and the legacy of slavery remained. In short, he concluded, the area had been oversold and the future of the English who had already purchased land there remained uncertain. As he wrote: “Most of the new settlers from England have invested much beyond their immediate means and in some cases they are being sold up through the courts.”

Early in 1873 Curley moved on to report on Ohio, Illinois and Missouri, but he found little in these states, including their legendary prairies, to impress him. From St. Louis he reported that while “cheap fertile and easily cultivated land is the one never-ending text of those persons whose special interest is... the conquest of the wilds of the west, my investigations prove that, to a great extent, this is a delusion and a snare.” Settling on these new prairies, he wrote, presented several hazards. In Illinois one needed to avoid the bottomlands where disease was rife, while in northern Missouri the settler must expect to spend money on fencing his land to keep out the free-ranging stock.

By April 1873 Curley, as yet unimpressed by much of what he had seen of the middle west, reached Kansas and here for the first time he believed he saw promising opportunities for settlement by Englishmen which warranted his spending more time there. As a result, on this first visit he devoted no less than fourteen weekly reports to various aspects of the state, twice the number he had written on Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri combined. Traveling widely across Kansas, his favorable view of it became apparent even in his first report, written from Topeka. In that, he attempted to disabuse his English readers of any image they carried of the monotony and dryness of the Kansas landscape. Proclaiming that in Kansas “no two bottoms or bluffs or prairie hills are alike,” he also assured potential settlers

8. The Field, January 15, 1873.
9. Ibid., February 8, 1873.
10. Ibid., March 15, 1873.
that the climate was getting wetter as more of the prairie was plowed up, allowing the land to retain more moisture.\textsuperscript{11}

It seemed, he wrote, as if nature smiled on the improvements the settlers were making. In Marion County the character of the prairie made road-building easy:

mere waggons [sic] tracks never improved by an hour's work, were solid and good, superior to average English cross-country roads, excepting only the crossings of streams and occasional ravines where... a trifling sum expended on small bridges and culverts would give a decidedly superior character to these natural roads.\textsuperscript{13}

And unlike uncultivated prairies in other states Curley noted that:

the untilled plains of Kansas are exceedingly healthy... their dry atmosphere a sovereign elixir for consumption and kindred diseases [sic]... free fromague and other complaints which are specially active in new and marshy countries.\textsuperscript{15}

He also believed that other obstacles to the establishment of civilized society would disappear as the frontier of settlement moved on. Malaria, which he admitted was more common in the newly occupied areas of the state, would, he said, be eradicated as more of the land was plowed. Meanwhile Curley advised English settlers to take quinine, boil any surface water they had to drink, and dig a well as soon as possible upon their arrival to secure potable supplies.

Similarly he believed that increasing settlement improved the beauty of the prairie and led to the replacement of the rougher elements of frontier society by “civilized calm.” In one report he noted this transformation occurring in Peabody, the approach to which from the south, he wrote,

presents a very beautiful sight. There are some nice private residences in the foreground, then comes the creek with its grove and fingers of timber and a neat bridge... in the distance are a commodious schoolhouse, a church almost as large, the tradesmen's shops and the residences... This is the result of two year's growth, the first of which was rough, wild and murderous. But the gamblers and ruffians have found it necessary to clear the track and Peabody is now a model of peace and quietness.\textsuperscript{14}

There seemed to be no limit to Curley's enthusiasm for Kansas and he continued to produce articles on it even after he had left for leave in England at the end of his first tour. In one article he wrote:

Neither time nor space permit me to deal with Kansas as it really deserves. It is admirably adapted for the farmer with capital and the man of small means. I believe that it deserves its present proud pre-eminence in rapidity of settlement... I hope that many Englishmen will visit Kansas and I trust that none will have occasion to indict me for wilful misrepresentation or over-enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{18}

Towards the end of 1873, after a three-month break in England, Curley returned to New York to commence the second of his three tours for The Field. As on his previous tour his first few reports were filed from the East Coast. Some of these described farming opportunities in New York and Pennsylvania, although he still advised his readers to go west to get better land more cheaply, particularly at this time when money was tight and those selling land were cutting prices to cash buyers. Other reports were sent from Missouri where for a month he made an extensive tour of all districts only to conclude that it was a poor state which “does not compare with Kansas, Iowa or even southern Illinois” and where the people “are very dirty and disagreeable in their habits.”\textsuperscript{16} He would only recommend its northern parts to British settlers of more moderate means who were not, generally speaking, the audience for which he wrote.

The 1874 New Year issue of The Field carried a lengthy report by Curley of his visit to Victoria in Ellis County, where he detailed the limited progress made by George Grant in establishing a stock ranch and a colony of English and Scots gentlemen-farmers on the Kansas plains. “One cannot doubt,” Curley wrote, “the adaptability of Victoria for stock-raising,” although he did note that none of Grant’s twenty-four hundred sheep and cattle were yet on his ranch. Instead, they were being wintered on the rather less exposed prairie around Wakefield, 120 miles to the east.\textsuperscript{17} At this time other signs also began to appear in Curley’s reports that he doubted the soundness of all aspects of Grant’s scheme and, indeed, was tempering some of his own earlier enthusiasm for Kansas as an emigration field for the British. He queried the wisdom of the Victoria colonists raising grains in such a dry district: “I cannot say whether there is adequate or suitable rainfall at Victoria to render maize and small grains sufficiently safe and profitable.”

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., April 19, 1873.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., May 24, 1873.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., July 5, 1873.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., May 24, 1873.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., July 26, 1873.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., December 6, 1873.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., January 3, 1874.
And, on leaving Victoria for Wakefield to see Grant’s stock, he got caught in a sandstorm which obliterated his track. This was “one of the occasional drawbacks of a new prairie country.”

Winter had now firmly set in, showing him a different and more sombre view of the Kansas plains. He cut short his travels there. Two more weeks were spent in southeastern Nebraska where, as the snow lay thick, he decided to take the train to western Nebraska and Wyoming to see how the cattle and sheep farmers coped with the winter severity. There, over the next six weeks, he found for his readers new opportunities, and for himself new delights, in the western environment which were reminiscent of those which nine months before had kindled his enthusiasm for Kansas. Noting that the stockmen in Wyoming “generally succeed with astonishing rapidity,” he reckoned that the free range would continue to offer high profits for another ten years so that there was room for new British investors. While an Englishman might shrink from the isolation and “the tameness of the landscape,” there were other spiritual compensations in these western environments—clear, healthy air and superb skies. He noted one evening in western Nebraska:

As we journeyed towards Ogallala the sun approached the horizon, and the sky and the numerous clouds assumed colours of strange and wonderful beauty... some of the clouds were solid masses of deepest indigo, while a few were black, purple, crimson, gold... Had my equestrian discomforts been the necessary means of seeing these ethereal splendours I should count the sight very cheaply purchased... There is no monotony in the glorious dawns or the beautiful sunsets... but they are as little regarded by the people as an English landscape, with its trees and hedges and fields and varied scenery in miniature, is esteemed by the average peasant.18

As winter progressed Curley traveled east into southeastern Nebraska mainly to report on areas where Englishmen had settled. Seeing the success which some of them had enjoyed seemed to re-imburse him with some of the enthusiasm he had temporarily lost for the prairies as an emigration field. On visiting one English settler farming 320 acres in Saline County, Nebraska, he again stressed to his readers the need for British emigrants to come west with sufficient capital: “I could not advise any man with a family to leave steady employment at reasonable English wages and to come here without money, or friends or guaranteed employment.”19

Everywhere he went he was struck by the fertility of the soils. He began to feel that the farmers put too much store by the best bottomlands—which were often malarial—and underrated the value of the hillsides. In Adams County, for example, he quipped that the farmers would never derive the full benefit from the six-foot depth of a bottomland soil “till we get the knack of setting it up edgewise and cultivating both sides.” On the other hand, farmers ignored the value of hillsides.

If a plough cannot be run in every direction over a field its value in the market is very considerably diminished. I am inclined to think that one or two deep ravines are an advantage in a farm than otherwise, for they will afford much shelter for stock.20

By February 1874 he was back in Kansas. He first visited around Hutchinson, where he had been eight months before, to see what success farmers had had in breaking the prairie sod. Then he was on to the Nickerson area which he thought was well suited for an English group colonization scheme; and then he traveled by way of the Neosho Valley to the district around Emporia where he saw land still for sale that would, like many other parts of Kansas, be excellent, he thought, for sheep farming.

I know of no part of the world, excepting only the western part of North America, where money can be invested in so solid a way as this to yield, with a reasonable degree of safety, about £4500 a year... to as many fairly skilled persons with the requisite means as could well tear themselves from British homes...21

In short, Curley’s second tour of Kansas, which ended at this point, had done little to dampen the initial enthusiasm it had aroused in him a year earlier. The severity of the winter had undoubtedly troubled him but riding through the rolling prairies around Council Grove in the spring sunshine again convinced him that this part of Kansas was yet one more area that offered great potential to English farm emigrants.

The results of my investigations are eminently favourable. It is extremely well wooded for a prairie country: its valleys are very rich; many of its uplands approach perfection, while others that are rough for tillage afford excellent pasture... the whole of it far more easy of access than a very large proportion of the lands that are pressed upon our attention in various British colonies, and in several of the states and territories of the United States... the capacity of the country for producing apples, peaches, pears, grapes and other fruit are such

18. Ibid., January 17, 1874.
19. Ibid., February 14, 1874.
20. Ibid., February 21, 1874.
21. Ibid., April 25, 1874.
Go West Young Man. Go West. Extra Inducements to Emigrants for this Season Only. Hurry up. Hurry up.

The ravages of the grasshopper featured little in Curley’s reports in The Field on Kansas and the West. But he devoted a chapter of his book on Nebraska to “the hateful locust” where he adapted a sketch by the caricaturist Thomas Nast to warn of this hazard to western settlement.

In May 1874 Curley moved on to Missouri where he toured the southwestern part, visiting a number of English farmers before making a brief visit back to England. By July he was back in America. He went directly to Nebraska, a state for which he was writing a guidebook for British settlers and clearly one that he favored almost as much as Kansas. On this visit he made his way across the center of the state from Omaha to North Platte, filing reports as he proceeded. It was in this area that he, for the first time, came across the ravages caused by the grasshopper plagues. But his instinct was to play these down as a risk to farmers settled in such an attractive environment as Nebraska’s with “landscape as charming in its quiet beauty” (as that around Lincoln) and a climate which he noted around Kearney “as healthy, and on the whole more enjoyable than that in England.” Grasshoppers, he admitted, could cause great damage but the advantages of farming on these plains far outweighed threats of this kind.

Notwithstanding the havoc which is sometimes produced by these pests, I should make them a small element in my calculations were I a farmer about to settle in the Far West. The farmer’s business is pre-eminently one of averages, and the average results of decently good farming are such as will satisfy any reasonable man. Bad harvest weather—which is almost unknown in Nebraska—destroys, damages, or costs in extra work, for the farmer in England at least, six times as much in proportion as the grasshoppers cost the farmer in Nebraska.

By the fall he was back in Wyoming first visiting ranches around Laramie, then advocating opportunities for small farmers to set up near the forts and supply the personnel with fresh vegetables, and finally enjoying the sport and relative sophistication of Fort Bridger which he left “with reluctance.” He spent the winter of 1874-1875 in Utah visiting the Mormon irrigation settlements which greatly impressed him, and at the Rocky Mountain front in Colorado he found more land that he felt well suited the needs of British farmers and graziers. Here he returned to an earlier theme on the benefits of cooperative emigration schemes for British farmers. By the spring of 1875 Curley was back in England having completed his third and final tour.

All records for this time of how the journal was run, and how decisions were made, were lost during the Second World War when the London offices of The Field

22. Ibid., May 9, 1874.
23. This appeared as Edwin A. Curley, Nebraska: Its Advantages, Resources, and Drawbacks (London: Sampson Low, Marston Low and Searle, 1875). In this book Curley described himself as “a special commissioner from The Field.”
24. The Field, September 12, 1874.
were bombed. It is therefore not possible to say why Curley relinquished his post and why it took the editor a year to replace him. After Curley returned to England, no regular feature on the American West appeared in the Field for more than twelve months. Then, in July 1876, a new column, entitled “Notes from the American West,” was started. Written by S. Nugent Townsend under the pen name, St. Kames, this mainly ran as a weekly feature—with occasional breaks—through to the early 1880s. Like Curley, Townsend adopted a policy of traveling widely across the West, visiting districts likely to offer farming and settlement opportunities to British people, revisiting areas to report on progress made and generally commenting on the West’s development.

But in other ways Townsend’s style of reporting was different. It is immediately clear, on reading his reports, that he was more cautious than Curley in recommending a particular district as suitable for settlement by his British readers. Three reasons seem to account for Townsend’s prudence. One resulted from his policy of revisiting many of the areas Curley had reported so favorably on a few years before. He often found that so much settlement had occurred in those areas, since Curley had visited them, that they no longer offered good opportunities to new settlers. But he had to exercise care in appearing to contradict his predecessor’s enthusiasm for a particular place in case it confused readers who were planning to emigrate there, or brought a reproach from his editor, or from Curley himself who still contributed occasionally to the Field.

A second reason for Townsend’s wariness towards outright approval of Kansas, Nebraska, or the other western states he visited resulted from various obstacles to successful settlement which had become more apparent since Curley first visited them. The grasshopper infestations which had been noted by Curley in 1874 as being no real threat to farmers in Kansas and Nebraska had reached plague proportions by the time Townsend was reporting from these areas. As a result, he turned his attention more to opportunities in Texas and other drier, less-settled states free of this threat. No honest reporter could be entirely confident, of course, that the British would thrive in these far western areas, but they now seemed more risky than Kansas and the other plains states. After all, in 1877 Townsend had to report on the impending failure of Grant’s Victoria colony, only three years after his predecessor had praised its promise.

A final reason that Townsend’s judgments on the West were less wholehearted endorsements than Curley’s might be found in the different characters of the two reporters. Curley was clearly a very methodical journalist who developed forthright views on several subjects. He was able to write in great detail about a place he was visiting and convince readers of its possibilities and drawbacks for settlement. He also kept detailed notes on places he visited so that he could write about them later. Several of his articles were written long after he had returned to England.

Townsend, his replacement, was also a gifted observer but he was neither as methodical nor opinionated. He often would write an article about a particular district one week, interspersed between a couple of articles about another place. Nor was he prepared to impose his opinions on the minds of his readers. As he wrote: “I have gone about with no cloak of impenetrable prejudice, but in a very seedy tweed coat, with my eyes open, and accepting every invitation to go anywhere and see anything.”

He later elaborated on his approach:

I have been accused of stopping short after my descriptions of places and not summing up that evidence...this course, if a sin on my part, is one of omission...When I have seen every state and every British colony I shall then feel justified in summing up emigration matters...but until then I shall not consider it right to present more than full evidence and details to my readers, and let them draw such conclusions as the cases warrant...immigration is too vital a subject to draw hasty conclusions on..."

Townsend’s first few articles in the Field gave no hint of the wide-ranging surveys for emigration sites he was later to make across the western states. Beginning his regular weekly column in July 1876, soon after first setting foot in the New World, he devoted no less than five articles to various East Coast regattas being staged as part of the centennial celebrations. Then, after a brief visit to Kentucky and Tennessee where he described some of the country and detailed its land prices, he entrained direct to Topeka.

From his first report it is clear that his enthusiasm for Kansas would be more restrained than Curley’s. He was quick to acknowledge that Kansas was more varied in its landscape than was commonly thought, but to a newcomer, like himself, “the entire state looks much the same—a brown, regular rolling prairie.” In a similar

25. Personal communication from the current editor of the Field, January 25, 1984. The loss of the records also means that no information is available on how the duties of the journal’s American correspondents were defined.

26. The Field, April 7, 1877.
27. Ibid., December 1, 1877.
28. Ibid., November 11, 1876.
equivocal style he commented on the climate as being "very healthy, but to a European not at all agreeable." His second report described his visit to the Peabody district which he recalled had so impressed his predecessor three years before. Curley had suggested that at Nickerson was a near perfect spot for British settlers, but Townsend now found much of the land had been taken up for settlement.

Perhaps it was because his first impressions of Kansas had not lived up to expectation—with opportunities for British settlers limited—that Townsend's initial visit was so brief. He only stayed in the state long enough to file three reports which were published in The Field in October 1876. He then continued his search for English settlers, and opportunities for their settlement, in Colorado from which his next twelve reports came. Several of these described visits to ranches, some of them British-owned in the Rockies. Here he found the English so well set up "in those beautiful solitudes" that he believed a description of them "would lack novelty: here is no deterioration of home manners, culture or ideas, for the settlers have brought homes with them."29

This pleasant montane interlude had to end, however, because in March 1877 Townsend had arranged to travel back from Denver to Kansas with George Grant to view the progress made at Victoria since Curley's visit three years before. The few days Townsend spent there and in the surrounding districts only confirmed in his mind the difficulties now facing English settlers in Kansas. None of Grant's followers, he reported, had yet made a profit. Grant had lost most of his sheep and the threat of locust reinvasions discouraged attempts at cropping.30 He was more encouraged by what he saw around Larned of the prospects for grazing the open range, but, in view of the grasshopper threat, he concluded of Kansas agriculture in general: "the less anyone has to say of it the better, and this applies with equal force to every state around Kansas."31

By May 1877 Townsend had moved on to southwestern Texas, and he was to spend the remainder of the year there, gaining impressions of prospects in the state. These he drew together into over twenty articles, one appearing each week in the columns of The Field. As a field for emigration previously little considered in England, Townsend believed southwestern Texas offered two main attractions to settlers. It was free of the grasshopper menace than the previously favored midwestern states. It also had advantages for sheep farming which he considered a sounder basis than cropping for English settlement in the West. As he wrote from San Antonio: "No one can do wrong by going to farm in Kentucky or to keep sheep in southern Kansas, but Texas may prove better than both. . . . Time will tell. . . ."32

At the end of the year Townsend completed his extensive seven-month tour of Texas and returned north to gather material for a series of reports on Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado. His second and more lengthy tour of these states now led him to reevaluate some of his earlier impressions, especially of Kansas. Part of this reassessment was based on comparing Kansas with Texas, for, having experienced a Texan summer, the heat of Kansas did not seem so bad. He still believed, however, that market accessibility gave the Texas farmer the edge.

Were it not for the markets of Texas, I think that its summer climate, being so enervating . . . would predispose the settler in favor of Kansas. . . . I by no means say that north Texas is preferable to Kansas; its society is not so good but undoubtedly its markets are much better and its crops, if not quite so luxuriant, are always good and easily raised.33

But part of Townsend's reassessment of his earlier impressions of Kansas resulted from other comparisons he made with its immediate neighbors. On his previous tour to Colorado he had noted that whereas Colorado had the better climate, Kansas had the better soils. To this comparison Townsend on his second tour of the two states now added others which seemed to tip the balance towards Kansas as the state that he favored more for British settlement. "While the mountain environment of Colorado is very pleasant," he wrote, "the confining valleys make it hard for the farmer to extend his land and enlarge his income." And, on a second visit to the Nickerson area in central Kansas he concluded:

I have no hesitation whatever in saying that that district—of which Nickerson is almost the center—offers about the best possible chance to intending agricultural emigrants of anywhere in the western states. . . .34

So impressed had he become with some parts of the state that he admitted that "for a long time I have meditated over the subject of an agricultural colony in southern Kansas." While the environment was favorable, the sad history of discord in previous British group settlements set him against such a colony, but

29. Ibid., March 3, 1877. Colorado made a big impact on Townsend and the first of two books he wrote on the American West focused on that state and was based on his newspaper reports. S. Nugent Townsend, Colorado, Its Agriculture, Stockfarming, Scenery, etc. (London: The Field, 1879).
30. The Field, March 10, 1877.
31. Ibid., April 21, 1877.
32. Ibid., June 16, 1877.
33. Ibid., January 5, 1878.
34. Ibid., January 12, 1878.
if I could run it with the lights I have, success would be assured; but the disastrous histories of nearly all
English colonies out west show what an unfortunate and
unmanageable lot my fellow countrymen are....

As he extended his tour into Nebraska, some of this
newfound enthusiasm for the Kansas prairies spilled
over into the state's northern neighbor. Not only did he
praise the fertile soils around Omaha, but thought the
Missouri Valley landscape "richly picturesque." A little
later he concluded of the state:

The only prejudice I had against it was an account of its
winters, but since I have seen them, I think them by no
means disagreeable. It is a splendid and rich state and
the settlers are of a good class.

And, as he returned into Kansas to visit other districts,
he commented on both Nebraska and Kansas: "no one
that has seen them both can think anyone ill-advised to
settle in either."

By May 1878 Townsend had embarked on a second
long southern tour through Arkansas, which he found
"uninviting," to the lands of the Anglo Texas Colonization
Society of London near San Antonio, Texas. He
returned to Kansas five months later although for some
weeks after he left Texas he continued to write articles
mainly on the southern cattle trade.

In Kansas he made return visits to Nickerson—now
dotted with 150 houses where only a handful stood a year
before—Larned, Florence, and other places which had
impressed him on his previous visits. With the locust
crisis now receded, he was able to report that agriculture
was progressing well in most parts of the state and
opportunities for emigrants from Britain and elsewhere
looked bright.

By late 1878 Townsend's articles had become much
less frequent and more of them were based on notes
and recollections of visits he had made weeks or even months
before. An article about Texas, written in Topeka, would be
followed by one on Kansas, filed from St. Louis, only
to be followed by another a few weeks later, on Texas.
This declining flow of material fell to a trickle by the
middle of 1879. After three years of almost continuous
travel Townsend's first and arduous tour as the American
correspondent of The Field was coming to a close. As
he crossed eastwards from Kansas to New York to sail
back to England, he stopped off to pen articles on Illinois
which he described as "a land of plenty" and southern
Indiana whose landscape, he thought, was "pretty and
diversified."

No more articles by Townsend appeared in The Field
for nearly a year until November 1880 when he began a
series on Washington and Oregon. But these ran for
only three months and were followed during the next
two years by only very occasional contributions on a
variety of topics connected with America, ranging from
emigration to cattle imports. It is, however, worth noting
that amongst these last articles was one on Close's colony
for young English gentlemen in northwestern Iowa
which Townsend believed offered prospects as good as
Kansas and Nebraska to the emigrant rancher from
Britain.

For the ordinary farmer who has some means to buy
cattle, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa will always, or until
their lands rise to double their present value, offer the
most solid and safest homes. For gentlemen's sons, who
have no knowledge of farming who are determined or
fated to lead a wild life and to purchase each experience,
dearly the great cattle plains are probably the best
places.

Before Townsend finally bowed out, a third corre-
respondent to report on the West had been taken on by
The Field. W. Baillie Grohman, a noted alpinist, began
his association with The Field with a series of articles in
1880 on cattle ranching in Wyoming, and these were
followed two years later by an account of Montana.
With the departure of Townsend and the arrival of
Grohman, the center of attention for the readers of The
Field was shifted beyond Kansas and the plains to the
open ranges of the far West. Kansas and its neighbors
could neither hold the interest of readers any longer
nor offer a plentiful supply of available fertile land to
English emigrants thinking of settling there.

In the twenty-two years since The Field had first
introduced its readers to the prairies of Kansas the state
had been transformed from a hunting ground to an
increasingly cultivated landscape. As a hunting ground
and then as empty farmland it had attracted the Eng-
lish—many of them readers of The Field—with what
England could not itself provide. But by the early 1880s
the taming of Kansas was well underway and it was no
longer a newsworthy area to Englishmen. It had become
too much like England. As one resident of Marion
County wrote about Kansas in The Field in 1882: "The

37. Ibid., December 31, 1881.
38. Unlike Curley and Townsend, W. Baillie Grohman was already
an established writer—on mountains and hunting—when he was
commissioned to write for The Field. His most famous book on his
American experiences, Camps in the Rockies (London: Sampson and
Low), appeared in 1882 and was followed by Fifteen Years' Sport and Life
in the Hunting Grounds of Western America and British Columbia (London:
Cox, 1900).
planting of hedges, fruit and ornamental trees is the order of the day, and in a few years Kansas will have more the appearance of an English landscape than any state in the Union."

With the center of interest shifting from the plains to the mountains, the dominant concern in *The Field* for news of travel and emigration to middle America ended. Now its readers sought and obtained more information on Australia, southern Africa and other emigration fields, as well as the mountain and Pacific West. Items on Kansas appeared only infrequently and most of these were letters from settlers there. An episode in the making of Kansas—and in the journal that championed it in England—had been concluded.