The Hodgeman County Colony

by C. Robert Haywood

"FREEDOM'S JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR NOTHIN' LEFT TO
LOSE," a 1960's ballad complained, "NOTHIN' AIN'T
WORTH NOTHIN' BUT IT'S FREE."¹ For most of the
emancipated blacks of the post-Civil War period, the
ballad's message would have seemed a summation and
prediction for their lives. Emancipation had brought
few social, economic, or political rewards. Even the one
certain freedom coming with the end of slavery, that is,
the right to move from one place to another without any
man's permission, was becoming less assured. Anyone
with familial responsibilities was doomed, it seemed, to
remain bound to a system bent on restoring all the old
restrictions. When the enticing appeals to come west to
the new free lands made by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton
began to circulate in the South, hopes for a realizable
freedom were revived. Old John Brown's Kansas held
promise of a new life, happier and more prosperous,
with the full realization of the freedom emancipation
had once offered.² The prospects of receiving 160 acres
of debt-free land were almost as intoxicating as the
Reconstruction illusion of forty acres and a mule.

The black movement west which had been only a
trickle swelled to flood tide with the Exodus Movement
of 1879. Early in the surge, before the full force of the
migration swept across the prairie states, a band of
adventurers, dreamers, drones, opportunists, freedom
seekers, and skilled and unskilled workers from Ken-
tucky organized a mutual aid colony intent on moving to
Kansas. It was to be known as the Hodgeman Colony.

Hodgeman County, the colonists' destination, lay
just north of Ford County whose county seat, Dodge City,
was the last and most widely known of the notorious
Kansas cattle towns. As part of the Arkansas River
lowland, Hodgeman was a flat, largely treeless plain
covered with buffalo and Grama grass. The county had
been organized only two years before the Kentuckians
arrived. A few white settlers had preceded the 1872
arrival of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad
which had extended its line through the region, just
missing the southeast corner of the county, but this
scattering of homesteaders left ample room for new-
comers. The county seat issue was unsettled and rival
towns were still changing names, seeking political ad-
vantange in flattering titles.³ When the 107 Kentucky
settlers arrived March 24, 1878, the population of the
county was less than one thousand. The Hodgeman
Colony was to be largely on its own, with few established
settlers to provide aid, advice, or comfort.⁴

John F. Thomas, minister of the First Baptist Church
(Colorad) of Lexington, Kentucky, became the rallying
force for the settlement project. A company was organ-
ized and shares sold, primarily to prospective settlers
who were living in and around Lexington and Harrods-
burg, Kentucky. Thomas, along with another member of
the company, was delegated to go to Kansas and find a
suitable location. He chose a site in Hodgeman County
that was unsettled and, he believed, showed promise of
becoming a flourishing community. The Morton Town
Company filed articles of incorporation with the secre-
tary of state in 1877. The site was located on Section 27,
Township 22, Range 23.⁵ He and the company en-
visioned a town similar to Nicodemus which had been
established the year before and lay almost due north
some fifty or sixty miles.⁶ Nicodemus was widely ad-
vertised throughout the South as an ideal haven for
southern blacks, as Robert G. Atchearn indicated, a
veritable "Kansas Canaan."

Leadership for the actual migration and settlement
passed to Thomas P. Moore, one of the signers of the
town incorporation. Moore, thirty years of age, had
already demonstrated considerable leadership abilities.

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Attorneys, 1876-1886, published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

2. W. Sherman Savage, Blacks in the West (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976); Robert G. Atchearn, In Search of Canaan: Black
Migration to Kansas, 1879-80 (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas,
1978).
3. Margaret Raser, "Story of the County Seat," Junction Republican,
February 7, 1907; Heine Schmidt, "Slaves Find Freedom in Morton,
Now Hodgeman County Ghost Town," High Plains Journal, Dodge City,
January 17, 1952.
4. The first census in 1880 recorded 1,704 residents. No exact
record was made until the county was organized. Kansas State Board
of Agriculture, Second Biennial Report 1879-80 (Topeka: Kansas Pub-
lishing House, 1881), 534.
5. Records of the Secretary of State, Corporation Charters, v. 8,
p. 210-11, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS).
Besides the black settlers who came to Hodgeman County, there were some who homesteaded in other western counties, and there were town companies other than the Morton City Town Company that attempted to resettle blacks in Kansas. Among the settlers in Clark County, south of Hodgeman, were Mrs. Geo. Jenkins and daughters, shown above on their farm; this 1872 broadside, right, was the type of promotional advertisement that inspired blacks to come to Kansas.

His wife, Mattie, his father, Henry, and a brother, Benjamin, with a family of three small children, were also members of the colony. The Moore family dated its prominence in politics back to the days of Henry Clay when the white, slave-owning ancestor was active in Kentucky affairs. Thomas had been well-educated and had traveled widely in Europe as valet for Col. Thomas P. Moore. As a member of the post-Civil War Kentucky legislature, he and Benjamin had resisted the Democrats' attempt to keep blacks from voting. Local legend had it that in the fighting that broke out, Benjamin was shot in the leg.

7. Ibid., U.S. Census, 1880, Hodgeman County, microfilm, KSHS; Kansas State Census, 1885. Jemore, microfilm, KSHS.

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.

A. McClure
Stephen Essex
John Yates
Thomas Jackson
John Gauthier
Henry Briddle

A. McClure, President.
J. Woodfork, Secretary.
Facing desperate conditions, a number of Hodgeman colonists sought employment in established towns, including Larned, shown here in the 1880s.

Beyond collecting money for the trip west, there had been little concrete planning before the colony left Kentucky. As a result, the settlers arrived with few supplies and very little cash. Since Kinsley in Edwards County was the nearest depot to the proposed site, the colonists were set down there with no provisions for shelter or transportation. They spent the first nights huddled in the small schoolhouse, the only public building in town. They could see that just beyond the handful of buildings in the village lay the open prairie extending in an unbroken expanse. When the exact site chosen by Moore was ascertained, the colonists left their shelter to walk the thirty miles to what they believed would bring them a new and better life. As they moved along, carrying all their possessions, they sang, glorying in their new freedom.

They named their new home Morton City after Oliver P. Morton, founder of the Republican party in Indiana. Moore and his brother were both carpenters and, with the help of others, began the construction of three frame houses. The rest of the colony relied on makeshift dugouts and a few soddies. Moore constructed for himself temporary quarters by standing long boards in a trench and bending them over at the top to form a roof. Several of the less optimistic individuals left the colony to seek jobs in neighboring towns, and it soon became apparent to all that there was no support for or need of a town. Most of the families followed the advice of C. E. Roughton, a white Kinsley businessman, and took separate homesteads in the surrounding area. Morton City was abandoned.

Homesteading without capital was always a risky venture and few of the Hodgeman colonists had more than the bare necessities when they arrived. Lafayette Green, with a family of six, recalled that he had four dollars in his pocket after paying land office fees. He and two of the older children hired out as laborers at wages ranging from fifty to seventy-five cents a day. The family still managed to plow eight acres that first year and build a 14 x 14 foot half-underground, half-frame house. Others tried planting corn and vegetables in the unbroken sod or hoeing away patches of buffalo grass from around each corn plant. None of the plantings survived the first year.

Suffering was acute. The extreme helplessness of poverty came to the Moores when Mrs. Mattie Moore was no longer able to nurse her child. Without milk or


money to buy a cow, their feeble efforts to devise substitutes failed and the child died. They finally were forced to move to Dodge City where Mrs. Moore found work as a domestic servant. 13 But in the spring, Thomas moved back and built the first stone house in the settlement. The house impressed one of the old-timers not only because it was made of sandstone but because it had "real windows."

Nearly all of the families faced conditions as desperate as the Moores' and followed similar patterns of survival. Dodge City offered more work opportunities close at hand than the other towns. At least ten of the Hodgeman Colony found jobs there that first year; three other wives joined Mattie Moore and left their homesteads to work as domestic servants; and seven of the older sons and daughters found employment as laborers or servants. 14 A number of the more discouraged moved into Junction, Larned, Kinsley, and other towns along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe rail line. Benjamin Moore left his family to find work in Rosita, Colorado, where his wife, Mary, "one of the most intelligent colored women of Kinsley," eventually joined him in July 1880. They were able to accumulate enough money to sustain the homestead and came back to Hodgeman County sometime before 1885. 15

In spite of the bleak beginning, about fifty new settlers arrived in April 1879, including the Bradshaw clan consisting of seven families and thirty-three men, women, and children. Because they brought the skills of stonemason with them, their transition to the plains was somewhat easier than that of most. Although this second contingent had missed the worst of the first winter when two small children had died, they were not spared the rigors of plains life since the drought that had begun in 1878 continued. 16

Neighboring towns received the news of the Kentucky settlers with mixed feelings. Dodge City reacted quickly because the colony was near enough to have an impact upon the town and, in the minds of some, close enough to bear watching, especially after the second group followed the initial settlers. Harry Gryden, the popular lawyer of "the Gang" then in control of Ford County's government, interviewed many of the first arrivals while they were still in Kinsley. His report back was favorable. 17 What had alarmed some white citizens were the continued predictions of thousands of penniless blacks leaving the South. In September 1879, the Dodge City Times reported that Kansas was to receive approximately one-third of the migrants and that between five and ten thousand were leaving Georgia alone. 18 Papers from other cities reinforced these figures, suggesting that by 1880 somewhere between fifteen and twenty thousand southern blacks had reached the state. 19

The professed, almost official, objection to the influx of settlers was based more upon the apprehension caused by the impoverished conditions of the arriving colonists than on racist attitudes. What was feared most, editor Daniel M. Frost wrote, was an "army of colored tramps" requiring substantial community support, as they had in St. Louis and Kansas City, because of their "desolate condition." 20 The mayor of Wyandotte, Kansas, had told the Colored Relief Board that his community was "overburdened" with poverty-stricken emigrants and that drastic measures would have to be taken to discourage any additional arrivals. Kansas governor John P. St. John was under considerable pressure to prohibit blacks coming into Kansas. He, however, refused to act. 21

In response to the question of "What kind of a reception they [the blacks] will get in Kansas," J. G. Thompson of Dodge City wrote in a letter to the Beaufort (South Carolina) News. He assured readers that blacks would not be treated as a special class, neither "legislated for or against..." If a negro colony should come no one would be made enthusiastic, no one sentimental, no one antagonistic. He then offered some of the soundest advice given to any settler, black or white. What Kansas needed and would welcome were industrious people willing to become "hired laborers." But if homesteading was the objective, then, he insisted, the man must come first to spend at least a year in preparation for his family to join him. If the family came with the homesteader, they must have $500 minimum to establish the operation, even though the land was given without cost. "The fatal fault of the negro emigration, so far as I have seen it developed, is the unwillingness of the negro to leave behind him the old, the weak and helpless of his relatives. When an Irish family determines to make a break for America, it is the young, healthy, energetic male or female who starts off first. One who can work hard, save and send for..."

13. U. S. Census, 1880, Ford County, Dodge City, microfilm, KSHS.
14. Kinsley Graphic, July 31, 1880; Kansas State Census, 1885, Ford County, Dodge City, microfilm, KSHS.
16. Ford County Globe, Dodge City, April 2, 1878.
17. Dodge City Times, September 13, 1879.
another.... This system has brought millions to this
country."

The established Dodge Citians continued to watch
the development of the colony with interest and, gener-
ally, with a favorable attitude. Notices of blacks mov-
ing through town headed for the Hodgeman settlement
elicited no criticism. Even the information that over
three hundred blacks from Kentucky would settle in
another neighboring county was carried in the local
paper without comment.22 Once the dread of being
burdened by large numbers of impoverished settlers
had been dispelled, the tension eased. Later, when no
difficulties arose, the Dodge City Times noted that Hodg-
eman and Edwards counties were "pleased with their
dark allies, and will dwell together as brethren, in
unity." Undoubtedly, the paper continued, the blacks
came west because they were "imbued with the spirit
that governs the white man. The same attractions draw
the colored man to Kansas." However, editor Klaine was
quick to add, "Ford County offers no inducements and
has no attraction for the colored man, but Dodge City
could profitably engage a few dusky maidens—to do
washing and such."23

Klaine was to be more prophetic than he realized.
"Dusky maidens" and black men did find employment
in Dodge City as servants and laborers which helped
sustain their families on the homesteads in the neigh-
boring counties. The papers continued to carry notices
of the progress of the Hodgeman black community.
Klaine later admitted that he knew of "a couple of the
settlers (colored) who were doing well" and that, as a
whole, the blacks had proven to be "an industrious
class."24

Since Kinsley was the first point of landing, a num-er of the Hodgeman Colony returned there seeking
employment. William Thomas and Taylor Jackson estab-
lished barber shops; Robert Johnson ran a livery barn;
and several found jobs as laborers or servants. The
decimal census of 1880 listed forty-eight blacks in
Edwards County. Although the town owed its early

21. Ford County Globe, May 20, 1879. Similar advice was given by
the black press and some of the black organizations. Nudie E. Williams,
"Black Newspapers and the Exodusters of 1879," Kansas History: A
22. Ford County Globe, February 17, 1879.

23. Dodge City Times, April 27, 1878.
24. Ibid., May 26, 1881.

Some of the Hodgeman County settlers found work in Dodge City, and the employment of blacks extended beyond the first years of settlement.
The above photograph of the Long Branch Saloon, 1886, shows a black employee (unidentified) behind the bar. By 1913 the Frank Cox
Barbershop, shown on the facing page, occupied the old Long Branch building and a black employee, "Lump" Brown, was photographed
with others in the shop.
settlement and name to the white Chicago Workingman's Colony and the New England Homestead Colony, the initial hostile reaction to the black colonists was reflected in an article in the *Kinsley Graphic* critical of "colonies" and urging individuals or single families to avoid groups when settling in Kansas. But by September, the editor agreed that "a better class" of black people were coming to Kansas. The tempering of the editor's feelings was not shared by all whites, and relations between the two races remained fairly tense through the first year. This was reflected in the hostility of a number of overt acts. Three white men were arrested and fined for throwing rocks and breaking windows in a black home. The city marshal attempted to rope a black man "riding too fast" through town. On the other hand, the Kinsley editor reported that there was a baseball game in front of his office every day—"no distinction of color." Gradually, the suspicions dwindled until Kinsley became one of the least bigoted and most receptive towns for blacks in Kansas.

Larned, too, seemed at ease with the few blacks who drifted into Pawnee County. The only contact with a black person the community had before 1878 was with "Aunt Mollie," a cook at the Larned House who was highly praised and gently cared for when she became ill. Few of the Hodgeman settlers moved back east, even if east was no farther than Larned, but three families did establish claims in Pawnee County. By 1885 the number of blacks had increased to forty-six persons, exactly half having been part of the Hodgeman Colony.

The majority of the colony remained in Hodgeman County and adopted Jetmore as their trading center. Nearly all filed for homesteads: seven years after settlement the black population had increased only slightly, and of the thirty-nine family units, at least twenty-eight were farm families. The colonists were unfortunate in choosing this time to begin homesteading. An early settler in the area recalled: "I can not now remember of a shower during the year 1879 or up to July 1880 that was sufficient to lay the dust. During 1879 the prairies

26. Ibid., September 20, 1878.
27. Ibid., October 11, 1879.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., December 7, 1878.
never got green..." The Buckner Independent reported that both the spring and winter crops of grain and vegetables were an "entire failure" in 1879 and 1880. The effect of the drought was felt by all, black and white. William Agee wrote to the Evansville (Indiana) Journal of the plight of the Hodgeman settlers: "We have about 2,000 people in our county, and there is not enough food, all told, raised to support 100 persons, and of the rest there is about one-third who have the means to support themselves—the rest will have to have aid from some source..." The suddenness and extent of the drought were all the more devastating because 1877 had been a lush year. The town boosters, land agents, and local editors had spread their claims of nature's bounty with prose so purple that even the Gilded Age might have thought it extravagant. But they had backed hyperbole with wet statistics showing Larned's 8.16 inches of rain in May and Dodge City's 28 inches for the year. Now, in 1878, the boosters fought any admission of change. To have acknowledged hardships would have undermined their hopes of attracting more settlers. The Buckner Independent saw the drought as a temporary, localized condition affecting only Hodgeman and Ness counties. At first, the Hodgeman Colony shared this assessment and refused to ask for aid as others had been forced to do. Taylor Jackson wrote to friends in Topeka that all in the colony had paid their final entry fees and were "moving ahead rapidly." But the suffering of the people could not be ignored. Once again, C. E. Roughton advised them to take advantage of what others were receiving and personally sought and secured some relief from the Freedman's Aid Bureau in Topeka. Before the year was out, black leaders were writing home seeking support from old friends. However, they remained confident in the future and continued to urge others in the South to join them in Kansas. Locally, there was little help to be had. The white settlers were as hard pressed as their neighbors. Dodge Citians, who seemed willing to stage "benefits" for any cause and earlier had sent aid with "splendid liberality" to yellow fever victims in New Orleans, were slow to respond. Eventually, a local benevolent society was organized that granted assistance to the needy of whatever race. When distribution of seed and supplies was made, blacks shared equally with white settlers. Unfortunately, the drought was to linger. Still, the majority of the colony hung on and did not lose faith in their venture. Once the initial seasoning time was behind them, the individual colonists became absorbed in the routines of life with their pleasures, rewards, and disappointments. There was a slow, painful improvement in living conditions, as well as small increases in the value of their farms. Most were content with the original 160 acres and did not attempt to expand their holdings: value of farms by 1885 ranged from $300 to $800. All had some livestock, with Thomas P. Moore accumulating sixty head of cattle, but most families had only one or two horses and the same number of cattle. Since subsistence farming was their goal, the black farmers tended to plant fewer acres of cash crops such as wheat and put more land into gardens, sorghums, and potatoes than did their white neighbors. The trolley-billed homes were gradually replaced, to be remembered later with humor and nostalgia. Martin Gill had sheltered his family of six children in a house whose roof had been covered with tin from tomato cans. Still, there was music in this home from his fiddle and great expectations for the future. Mrs. George Perry, who lived in one of the original frame houses in Morton City, expressed to a Topeka reporter her "boundless hope" in the new settlement that "seemed as if God had prepared it [the land] for the colored people that they might come out from a land of trouble and live and enjoy it forever." For "Auntie Stamps" and her sons, the new land, even at its crudest, must have seemed rich in promise after leaving behind the sad memory of the three daughters sold before the war and never heard of again. The early tensions between the races noticeably diminished—in part because of the shared suffering and coping with the same uncompromising climate. Even their political convictions were similar. The colonists supported the Republican party, they said, as long as it was responsive. "We love the Republican Party, but think that we love justice better." William Sheridan put their position in perspective: "The colored people here

32. A. Bennett, "Meade County in 1879, Recollections," Fowler City Graphic, September 17, 1885.
33. Buckner Independent, Junction, August 19, 1880.
34. Ibid., November 28, 1879.
35. Kansas Graphic, October 5, 1879.
37. See accounts of meetings in July 1878 and January 1879 urging blacks to come west, claiming the colony had no aid "from the public whatsoever," Great Bend Register, July 4, 1878; Kansas Graphic, January 25, 1879.
40. Sterrett, "Negro Colony.
41. The Commonwealth (daily), May 7, 1879.
42. Sterrett, "Negro Colony.
43. Kansas Graphic, October 5, 1879.
behave like gentlemen and voted right and intelligently.”

Part of voting “right” was in supporting the Republican party and Jetmore as the county seat. Political rewards were few, but at least there was some political recognition: Taylor Jackson became the first elected coroner of Hodgeman County, a position also held by T. P. Moore who was elected to the Central Committee of the Hodgeman Republican party.43

More important than political orthodoxy were the skills and labor they brought to the economic development of the area. John and George Bradshaw were stonemasons much in demand and were remembered particularly for the stone building and house on the Henry S. Mudge Ranch.44 The Kinsley Republican, listing the businessmen of the town in 1879, included two men from the colony: Robert Johnson, “proprietor of one of the numerous Kinsley livery stables,” and Taylor Jackson, “proprietor of the Marsh avenue tannorial establishment.”45 The barbers in the three towns—Jetmore, Kinsley, and Larned—were all black.46 Members of the colony also served as hosters, teamsters, carpenters, cooks, and blacksmiths. Nearly all the adults hired out at some time as servants or laborers, using the wages to supplement farm income. Lena Gill did laundry for Jetmore women for years; Granville Bradshaw was a janitor at the courthouse even longer, and his son, George, was the town’s delivery man.47

One of the more fortunate employments for later historians was that of Jerome Johnson by the Larned Chronoscope. Johnson who had served as an infantryman in the Union army and homesteaded near Brown’s Grove, received flattering praise from the editors as “faithful, brave, industrious, and a perfect gentleman… [and] a black republican.”48 Because of his position, news of the black community’s life—picnics, weddings, deaths, excursions, and quarrels—were consistently reported.

The churches not only provided spiritual sustenance but were also the center of social life. James J. Freeman, a Methodist minister, and J. F. Thomas and James Broad, Baptist ministers, came with the first settlements. The Rev. George P. Hervey’s neat, cream-colored home in Larned was considered one of the “ornaments” of the town. His sermons were judged to be “eloquent” and “splendid,” and they “entertained his large congregation.”49 The Jubilee Singers of Larned, “composed of

44. Ibid., August 10, 1878.
45. Ibid.; Schmidt, “Site of Hodgeman Ghost Town.” See Jetmore Republican, August 19, 1881, for payment of bill for services of coroner.
47. Kinsley Republican, January 4, 1879; The Commonwealth (daily), May 7, 1879.
48. Larned Chronoscope, November 17, 1882.
49. Serrett, “Negro Colony.”
50. Larned Chronoscope, February 3, 1882.
51. Ibid., April 11, November 17, 28, 1884; Kansas State Census, 1885, Jetmore, microfilm, KSHS; U.S. Census, 1880, Hodgeman County, microfilm, KSHS; Norman, “History of Hodgeman County,” 2.
the best talent of the colored citizens," were much in demand, not only for church functions but for white organizations such as the GAR. The church leaders were also active in securing public aid by appealing to former congregations. A white settler reminiscing years later, observed that the first churches the blacks had established were so important that they outlasted the town by some "40 or 50" years.

There is a better record of the social life of the Hodgeman Colony settlers than for most black settlements because of the newspaper coverage. Birth and death notices were included with some regularity. In Kinsley and Larned, many of the items did not mention race, something that would never have occurred in eastern towns or even Dodge City. The Jetmore Reveille used the same oblique, bantering style of birth announcements reserved in other towns for well-known figures in the community. More typically, tragic incidents were considered news of interest to the whole community and were given special notice. When Lafayette Green, "an aged and respected citizen," became lost in a snowstorm, the local paper carried follow-up accounts of his rescue and slow recovery. The coverage of a black wedding, a rarity in most white-owned papers, indicated an acceptance of blacks seldom found in other communities.

One of the most pleasant events which has occurred in colored social circles for some time transpired Sunday evening, being the marriage of Mr. Daniel Cabins of Texas, to Miss Lena Davis of Mississippi. The ceremony was performed in Garrick Hall by Rev. G. Hervey of the First Missionary Baptist Church of Larned. The Hall was handsomely decorated for the occasion, and long before the appointed time was filled with a select number of friends and relatives of the bride and groom. The approach of the wedding party was heralded by the playing of the wedding march by Mr. A. H. McVeigh. The bride and groom were handsomely attired. Bishop Hervey made a few appropriate introductory remarks before performing the ceremony which made the twain one. A reception was tendered the bridal couple at their residence, where they received the congratulations of their many friends. A. H. McVeigh on behalf of a number of citizens of Larned, in a few well chosen words, presented the happy couple with a number of serviceable gifts. The marriage is a happy one, and we wish the couple long life and prosperity.

Obviously, not all relations between the races or among themselves were harmonious. Samuel Scarce [Searce], who wrote an insulting letter to the city clerk refusing to work off his poll taxes, was fined and jailed;

52. Larned Chonoscope, April 11, 18, 25, 1884.
53. Statement made by A. E. Miller, Schmidt, "Slaves Find Freedom in Morton, Now Hodgeman County Ghost Town."
54. See notice of the birth of the T. P. Moore child. "T. P. Moore received a choice present last Friday morning, it's a bousing boy... presented by Mrs. Moore." Jetmore Reveille, December 6, 1882.
55. See report of Thomas Ewing gored by a bull, the drowning of Alexander Ferguson, and the burning of Mrs. Payne's house. Dodge City Times, August 15, 1885; Jetmore Reveille, December 6, 1881; Ford County Globe, August 26, 1879; Buckner Independent, December 16, 1881.
57. Larned Chronoscope, January 10, 1885.
another black homesteader who stole a hoe and other farming tools, suffered the same fate; and even the Jubilee Singers quarreled with their director. The spirit that had sent the first Kentuckians singing to their new home was to be strained under the pressure of the rigorous climate, grim poverty, and demanding labor. Then, too, the normal irritations of living closely together over a period of time eventually led to quarrels and, in one instance, deadly violence. The victim was a member of the Bradshaw clan and the perpetrator was one of the most popular young men in the colony.

Among the Kentucky settlers who chose not to homestead was Jerry Sanders [Saunders], age twenty-five, who opened "a renovating and cloth cleaning establishment" in Kinsley. A powerfully built man, Sanders was a town favorite—garrulous, likeable, and hard working. As an eligible bachelor, he was fascinated by a number of the marriageable daughters of the emigrants, and his interest was returned by at least one of them. The charms of the young lady were not lost on others in the colony. A quarrel arose between Sanders and Phil Bradshaw. Words, then insults, were exchanged in public at the livery stable. Bradshaw, in a fury, struck Sanders with the butt end of a whip and serious fighting ensued. Sanders, dodging the "brick bats" thrown at him, seized a doubletree, and crushed Bradshaw's skull with it.

Sanders was immediately arrested and placed in jail to await the next session of the district court. Charged with manslaughter, he languished in jail while the wheels of justice slowly turned. As was typical in such cases, his trial was delayed. On December 13, 1879, he escaped, making his way on foot to Garfield where he found an empty boxcar on the Santa Fe tracks. By then, the authorities throughout western Kansas had been alerted and the sheriff at Larned arrested Sanders when the train rolled into town. Unfortunately for Sanders, he was caught in the middle of a jurisdictional dispute over reward money and he spent more time in the Larned jail.

After considerable legal maneuvering, and what would be referred to today as plea bargaining, Sanders pled guilty to manslaughter in the fourth degree. His case was complicated by his own incriminating escape attempt and the favorable testimony of others that he acted in self-defense. The procedures stretched out, involving, among other actions, the Larned sheriff's arrest of four white men who had attempted to "run Sanders off." Finally, a year after the crime, Sanders was sentenced to six months in the county jail. By his own judgment, he had been treated well in spite of the legal haggling.

The sentence appears quite light. Perhaps it was less severe because the victim was black, but there are numerous instances of western Kansas whites escaping...
with less punishment in similar cases. Race probably was not as important as Sanders’ reputation as a “hard working colored man [who] has the facility of attending to his own business which has made him popular in the community.”

When his older brother in Kentucky heard of Sanders’ trouble, he came with his family to help. Lilard Sanders and his wife “proved up” a homestead near the Bradshaws and he began working as a stonemason with them. After his release, Jerry Sanders worked for a time at a livery stable, then he too settled on 160 acres near his brother. He soon married and, in 1884, a child was born. The editor of the Globe Live Stock Journal reported to his readers that Sanders was one of “the most progressive settlers in Hodgeman county” with horses, cattle, and good crops. He was judged to be “tired of living comfortable and independent.” Lilard also prospered, although his wife had found it necessary to work for awhile as a domestic servant in Dodge. Eventually, both brothers moved to Ford County, with Lilard operating a large hog farm two miles north of Dodge City. Both brothers became well known in Dodge. Lilard, who had run away as a slave, had joined the Union army and fought in the Civil War. He marched in every patriotic parade held in Dodge, wearing his old uniform and proudly displaying his decorations and medals. As he grew older, Lilard frequently held forth on a street corner as a fire-and-brimstone preacher. Jerry was less flamboyant, but he too enjoyed public and private political debates, although he professed to being uncommitted to either party. Both brothers undoubtedly would have considered their move to Kansas as a blessing. Arriving penniless, Jerry, even with his lengthy imprisonment, had accumulated by 1885 land worth $800, four horses, two milk cows, and diversified crops promising substantial income.

At least three other Hodgeman colonists ended their lives as residents of Dodge: Rachel Scarce [Skeare], daughter of Samuel Scarce; Annie Payne; and Gracie “Auntie” Standsfield. Auntie Standsfield was even more widely known than the Sanders brothers. Her daughter-in-law was one of the first women to find employment in Dodge as a domestic servant. Eventually, her family joined her, and Auntie Standsfield remained there for the rest of her life. As a staunch Baptist, she was not only a faithful, professing Christian, but one who took her obligations for “good works” seriously. Bringing flowers to the ill and giving corn bread to children (“This is better for you than candy!”), she was welcome in any house in Dodge City, black or white.

Although Morton City was a failure, lasting only a few days, the individual settlers were to fare much better. For most of the colonists, the Hodgeman experiment was recognized as only the first step toward the freedom and economic improvement they had envisioned. For others, the Kansas adventure was the final answer. A significant number, like the Sanders brothers, remained in Hodgeman or surrounding counties for the rest of their lives. Their modest successes attracted other black people who replaced those who moved on. The 1895 Kansas census indicated that there were 120 blacks in Hodgeman County, only thirty-six fewer than in 1885. Many of the original settlers were among the enumerated, indicating that they not only survived the seasonal time but had remained through the land boom of the late eighties and the drought and depression of the nineties. Of the original colony, Mrs. Mattie Moore Lee and George Bradshaw were still residents of Jetmore in 1930.

The experience and fate of the Kentucky colonists was similar to that faced by white colonists in like circumstances. The organizational system most frequently used in settling the Great Plains was the mutual aid colony, and, as would be expected, there was a white counterpart to the Hodgeman Colony. A group based in Zanesville, Ohio, using the same organizational pattern, settled about the same distance south of Dodge as the Kentucky settlers had located north of that town. Although the white colony arrived a year later (February 21, 1879), it was confronted with the same unforgiving climate exacerbated by the same prolonged drought. The Zanesville colony of sixteen families shared at least one common motivation for leaving their old home: Kansas represented hope—a chance for a new and better life with land, security, and “the prospect of owning a home.” Since both colonies used the same flawed system of organization, they suffered the same lack of advance, realistic preparation. Neither colony was supported by sufficient capital and neither group was prepared emotionally or materially to cope with the environmental differences they were to encounter. Both immediately were faced with acute, even life-threaten-

ing, suffering. Just as the Kentuckians lost small children the first year, the Ohio colonists renamed their settlement Pearlette in honor of a child who died shortly after they arrived.

When the full realization of their plight became clear, the Ohio settlers split into irreconcilable factions, more rancorous than those in the Hodgeman Colony because the few members who came with enough capital to see them through the early hardships resented the solicitations made by the less fortunate. Appeals were sent to individuals and to the Zanesville community through personal letters and newspaper accounts, asking for food, clothing, and money. A few of the discouraged families accepted the ultimate humility of begging for train tickets to bring them back to Ohio. By the end of 1880, only two families remained and only the members of one family were to live out their lives in the immediate community. Others, like many in the Hodgeman Colony, found work in Dodge City or in other neighboring towns. There they found the kind of security they had hoped for, or at least, they were willing to settle for and did not return to Ohio.

Neither colony can be considered a failure even though Pearson and Morton City were abandoned. Clearly, the white settlers found better paying occupations once they left their colony, and so their rewards for risking the venture seemed greater. But, in a very real sense, the non-material dividends reaped by the Hodgeman colonists were more important. While it is true that they also were motivated by the desire to gain economic security, their material expectations were more modest and more realistic than those of the white settlers. Few members of the Kentucky colony would have been considered financially successful by white standards, but none were worse off economically than they had been in the South. In their quest for freedom and self-worth, matters of great personal value, the black settlers had advanced significantly.

Although racism was present in the West, overt expression was far less than in the land left behind. Most of the black settlers became contributing members of the community and were recognized as individuals and persons of value. For many, the opportunity to educate their children would have justified the cost of the venture. When they came to Kansas, only a few settlers could read or write. The 1880 census reported the majority of the black adult residents as illiterate. The opportunity to attend school was opened almost from the beginning and in schools close at hand. The Kansas enumeration in 1885 found only a handful of black children between the ages of seven and sixteen not in school. At one time, Hodgeman County had three schools with blacks in attendance. Cora Bradshaw, one of the original settlers, was one of the teachers, and black instructors had, at least, the advantage of training in normal institutes.71

The Hodgeman venture did not bring black people to the Promised Land, but it did improve the quality of their lives. Full freedom would be a long time coming. However, the venture west with all its hardships was a significant step toward realizing that goal. The willingness to risk indicated an inner spirit which would not accept placidly the conditions placed upon them by outside forces. The black settlers of the Hodgeman Colony would have answered the balladiers of 1960 that freedom was worth somethin', even when achieved piecemeal and at great cost.

71. Sterrett, "Negro Colony"; Great Bend Register, August 14, 1879.