
“The Colored People Hold the Key”

Abram Thompson Hall, Jr.’s Campaign to Organize Graham County

by Charlotte Hinger

From the summer of 1877 through 1879, approximately six hundred African Americans in organized colonies, clusters of family groups, and small trickles of courageous individuals migrated to the High Plains and established and settled Nicodemus, Kansas. For the first time in the history of the United States, enough blacks gathered in a specific region to affect critically important issues indigenous to the settlement of the West.¹ In just three years time, these African Americans created the first township in Graham County, secured its first official school district, persuaded Kansas Governor John Pierce St. John to appoint a black census taker, and controlled the structure of bi-racial political alliances in their county.²

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The author thanks Virgil Dean, Melissa Tubbs Loya, Deborah Dandridge, Angela Bates, and the tireless manuscript retrieval staff at the Kansas Historical Society for their assistance with this article. She is especially appreciative of the time and talents donated by volunteers in local Kansas historical societies. This article is dedicated to the memory of her late husband, Donald R. Hinger, who supported all her writing endeavors.

1. For an overview of African American post-Reconstruction political activity in Kansas see Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865–1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); Norman Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979); Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879–80* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978); Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998); see also Claire O’Brien, “‘With One Mighty Pull’ Interracial Town Boosting in Nicodemus, Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 16 (Spring 1996): 117–29; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The Free Press, 1974).

2. For detailed information on the settlement of Nicodemus see William J. Belleau, “The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas” (master’s thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1950); Orval L. McDaniel, “A History of Nicodemus, Graham County, Kansas” (master’s thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1950); Nell Waldron, “Colonization in Kansas” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1932), 125–27; Van Burton Shaw, “Nicodemus, Kansas: A study in Isolation” (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 1951); Glen Schwendemann, “Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 34 (Spring 1968): 10–31; Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, “The Origins and Early Promotion of Nicodemus: A Pre-Exodus All-Black Town,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 4 (Winter 1982): 220–42; Clayton Fraser, “Nicodemus: The Architectural Development and Decline of an American Town,” in *Promised Land on the Solomon: Black Settlement at Nicodemus, Kansas*, ed. Gregory D. Kendrick (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1984), 35–61; Daniel Chu and Bill Shaw, *Going Home to Nicodemus: The Story of an African American Frontier Town and the Pioneers Who Settled It* (Morristown, N.J.: Silver Burdett Press, 1994).

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 31 (Spring 2008): 32–47



Portrait of A. T. Hall, identified by the author and courtesy of the Nicodemus Historical Society Collection, Kansas Collection, RH MS 545, University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

These achievements were largely due to the pragmatic leadership abilities of Abram Thompson Hall, Jr., a well-educated, freeborn African American journalist. Hall's editorials and letters printed in Kansas newspapers, and his correspondence to and from Governor St. John provide ample evidence of his critical role in organizing Graham County. Hall's astute political maneuvers forced early county organization, despite vigorous opposition from

the white majority that felt the move was premature and would result in unnecessary financial burdens for struggling settlers.

Hall was born April 15, 1851, in Chicago, Illinois, to Abram and Joanna (Huss) Hall. His father, Abram Thompson Hall, Sr., was a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). The elder A. T. Hall was the first black man given formal license to preach in Chicago. He

organized Quinn Chapel, which became one of the largest AME congregations in the country.³ A. T. Hall, Jr., was educated in the public schools and attended medical school for one year at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Indianapolis, Indiana. After Hall left college, he worked three seasons as a sailor on the Great Lakes. He then began his career as a journalist. Throughout his long life he was at various times an editor, reporter, and columnist.⁴

While employed as the city editor for the black newspaper, the *Chicago Conservator*, Hall read articles about the “movement to locate Negro Americans on United States Government lands in the west during the winter of 1877–1878.” According to Hall, blacks were enticed by reports of “boundless acreage, fertility of soil[,] equable climate and golden opportunity to acquire and own a home on lands west of the Missouri river, in the State of Kansas.” Excited by these new opportunities, in the early spring of 1878, Hall and his “political chum” Edward Preston McCabe headed west to Kansas.⁵

Upon reaching Leavenworth, in April 1878, Hall’s focus shifted from business opportunities to politics and journalism because of a conversation he overheard in a café regarding the plight of the Nicodemus settlers who were in need of supplies to tide them over until their crops matured. He later explained that his “newspaper instinct instantly apprised that here was a human interest story fairly crying out loud for investigation and publication.” He tracked down John W. Niles, an agent from Nicodemus in Leavenworth soliciting aid for the colony. Hall learned



Hall was a well-established journalist in his hometown Chicago, but in the early spring of 1878 he and his “political chum” Edward Preston McCabe, pictured above, headed west to Kansas.

3. Richard R. Wright, *Centennial Encyclopaedia of The African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1916), 103; online at: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/wright>. References to the senior Hall’s first name vary between Abraham, Abram, or A. T. Hall, Sr.; A. T. Hall, Jr.’s younger brother, Charles, who was ten years old when Abram came to Nicodemus, later became a statistician and wrote an intricately researched 845-page book on the progress and status of the Negro race in the United States for the Department of Commerce. See Charles E. Hall, *The American Negro, His History and Literature: Negroes in the United States, 1920–1932* (New York: Arno Press, 1969).

4. Lulu Sadler Craig, “Early Settlement,” *Craig Manuscript Collection*, Graham County Historical Archives, Hill City, Kansas, 10; Belleau, “Nicodemus Colony,” 51. The Craig Manuscript is comprised of topically arranged material about Nicodemus and contains a detailed narrative from Hall. In her foreword, Craig thanked A. T. Hall, W. L. Sayers, Annie Hickman Comer, and Betty Kirtley Lewis for “suggestions and data.” Unfortunately, Hall did not provide precise dates for his employment in either the Craig manuscript or the frequently quoted biography contained in the Belleau thesis. As was the custom, Hall was identified by “Sr.” rather than “Jr.” after his father’s death.

5. Hall’s account, in Craig, “Early Settlement,” 10. Although only four issues of the historic crusading newspaper, the *Chicago Conservator*, have been preserved on microfilm, Hall is present in the first three editions, and his father in the final one.

that despite the presence of “articles in the daily newspapers, emanating from a disgruntled group back in the colony [Nicodemus], impeaching his right as a solicitor,” Niles’s appeal had been highly successful. Now, however, “a group of local race [Negro] politicians” led by W. B. Townsend and William Matthews tied up the aid. In Hall’s opinion, Townsend and Matthews, “seeing the success of the donation,” were “eager to be given credit or glory for what they had had no part in bringing about.”⁶

6. *Ibid.*, 11. For more on William D. Matthews and William B. Townsend, both long-time residents of Leavenworth and influential leaders of the African American community, see Roger D. Cunningham, “Douglas’s Battery at Fort Leavenworth: The Issue of Black Officers During the Civil War,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Winter 2000–2001): 204–16; “Capt. Matthews, Pioneer Colored Kansan, Is Dead,” *Leavenworth Times*, March 3, 1906; “Brief Biographical Sketches, of State Officers, Members of Congress, and Officers and Members of the Legislature of Kansas, for the Year 1879,” *Topeka Commercial*, March 5, 1879; “W. B. Townsend Is Prosperous,” *Topeka Plaindealer*, March 14, 1902.



Soon after his arrival, Hall took charge of officially recording the settlers' preemption, homestead, and soldier's claims at the district land office in Kirwin, Kansas. Warned by land officers of an impending rush of white settlers, Hall urged the colonists, like those pictured here, to move out of their temporary residences in Nicodemus and onto their own property because the law required "whole or partial residence and a certain amount of cultivation" to legitimize a claim. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

According to Hall's account, prior to a meeting to be held at the AME church later that very evening to determine custody of the supplies, he and Niles hatched a plan that worked to perfection. At the outset of the meeting the opportunity for further debate was thwarted when Hall immediately moved to release the goods to Niles. "Our program," wrote Hall, "went through almost unanimously," and Niles was "elated over the outcome." Impressed with Hall's abilities, Niles persuaded Hall and McCabe to accompany him to Nicodemus. Hall later wrote that when the party arrived with the wagons of supplies the "entire population met us


. . . with a greeting much like that accorded homecoming victors loaded with the spoils of war."⁷

Hall used his political skills to settle the controversy in Nicodemus about Niles's self-appointed role as the colony's agent. Those who had supported Niles from the beginning wanted to keep the supplies for themselves, but Hall persuaded that faction to share with all who would

7. Hall's account, in Craig, "Early Settlement," 11-12; see also Schwendemann, "Nicodemus: Negro Haven on The Solomon," 21-22. Hall's account of the trip to Kansas in the Craig manuscript contains more details than the biography in Belleau, "The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas."

State of Kansas
 County of Rooks, } ss.
 Sworn to and subscribed
 before me me E. P. McCabe, a Notary Public
 in and for said county and state this
 22nd day of Oct A.D. 1879.

E. P. McCabe
 Notary Public



Hall was appointed deputy district clerk of Rooks County for the as yet unorganized Graham County, and McCabe was commissioned as a notary public. Pictured is McCabe's signature on a petition requesting that Governor St. John take steps to organize Graham County. When the county was organized in 1880, the governor appointed McCabe county clerk, a position to which he was subsequently elected. Two years later, McCabe received the Republican nomination for state auditor and won that office in the November election. He was reelected in 1884 and thus served the state in that capacity from January 1883 to January 1887. To date, E. P. McCabe is the only Kansan of African descent to have held a statewide elective office.

sign a document he drew up authorizing Niles to solicit aid on behalf of the colonists. All but seven signed at once, and by "ration day," they too had signed.⁸

Soon after his arrival, Hall took charge of officially recording the settlers' preemption, homestead, and soldier's claims at the district land office in Kirwin, Kansas. Warned by land officers of an impending rush of white settlers, Hall urged the colonists to move out of their temporary residences in Nicodemus and onto their own property because the law required "whole or partial residence and a certain amount of cultivation" to legitimize a claim. The Kirwin land agent, W. C. Don Carlos, helped secure Hall's appointment as deputy district clerk of Rooks County for the as yet unorganized Graham County, and McCabe's commission as a notary public.⁹

8. Craig, "Early Settlement," 12.

9. Ibid., 13, 14; "Secretary of State-Second Biennial Report," in *Public Documents: Kansas, 1879-1880*, (Topeka: Geo. W. Martin, Kansas Publishing House, 1881), 125. McCabe was the second person commissioned as notary in Rooks County. He was preceded two days earlier by N. C. Terrell, a Millbrook man, who would later play a crucial part in Graham County politics.

Hall and McCabe began a land location business and advertised themselves as attorneys qualified to conduct business in the fifteenth judicial district.¹⁰ At a time when the requirements for admission to the bar were quite casual and based on "good moral character," Hall's educational credentials were considerably above most lawyers practicing on the prairie. His letters and speeches contained Latin and French phrases, and he often quoted from the classics and Shakespeare.¹¹

10. As local papers began publication, Hall and McCabe advertised in all but the *Graham County Lever*, which was located at Gettysburg. The newspapers in Graham County in order of appearance were: *Western Star* (Hill City, May 22, 1879); *Millbrook Times* (Millbrook, July 11, 1879); *Graham County Lever* (Gettysburg, August 2, 1879); *Roscoe Tribune* (Roscoe, June 23, 1880); *Graham Republican* (Millbrook, August 6, 1881); *Millbrook Herald* (Millbrook, May 16, 1882). They also advertised in Topeka's *Colored Citizen* beginning on September 6, 1878.

11. *Kansas Compiled Laws* (1879), 113; Robert W. Richmond, *Requisite Learning and Good Moral Character: A History of the Kansas Bench and Bar* (Topeka: Kansas Bar Association, 1982), 37-70; Michael H. Hoefflich, "Why the History of Kansas Law Has Not Been Written," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Winter 2003-2004): 264-71; Robert C. Haywood, *Cowtown Lawyers: Dodge City and Its Attorneys, 1878-1888* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 49-50; D. M. Valentine, "Roll of



HALL & McCABE,



LOCATERS & LAND AGENTS.

Nicodemus, Graham Co., Kan., 4/11 1879.

To the Honorable the Governor of Kansas
Honorable Sir.

We desire
to refresh your memory relative to your promise to us, at an interview held with you at your office, during the month of January. The promise was that, when Graham County applied for organization, if in any manner con-

Hall and McCabe began a land location business and advertised themselves in newspapers as attorneys qualified to conduct business in the fifteenth judicial district. The two men also advertised their offices on this letterhead, which notes Hall as Deputy District Clerk and McCabe as Notary Public.

Ascent two weeks after arriving in Nicodemus, Hall resumed his vocation as a journalist, sending letters and columns in support of the colony to various Kansas newspapers before Graham County itself acquired papers. He also staked his claim as the official correspondent from Graham County at the influential *Atchison Daily Champion*, edited and published by John A. Martin, a promi-

nent Kansas Republican and soon-to-be governor. Hall first wrote in May 1878 to the *Colored Citizen*, a black publication founded in Fort Scott and moved to Topeka in July 1878. He urged blacks to “lay down the hoe in the South, leave the old worn out fields and move to Kansas, the freest, grandest, noblest State in the Union.” Written in his typically lyrical style, Hall referred to “the merry laugh of children at

Attorneys,” in *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the State Of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1883), 29:xiv-xv. Valentine recorded seven hundred persons admitted to practice before the Kansas Supreme Court by 1883. Out of the plethora of attorneys in Graham and Rooks counties—identified as such through business cards and letterheads—only the names of Thomas Beaumont and T. T. Tillotson appear on Valentine’s roll. Communication from the State Library of Kansas, Topeka, received while researching this article, verified that there are no historical

lists of attorneys practicing in the various counties in Kansas. The Kansas Bar Association was not established until 1883. However, Hall and McCabe are named as attorneys in numerous documents and the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) has record of Hall and McCabe as attorneys in Abram T. Hall, Jr., and E. P. McCabe, “Brief of the attorneys for the Roscoe Petition,” filed March 30, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 23, Correspondence of Governor John P. St. John’s Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas (hereafter cited as “St. John Papers, KSHS”).

play upon the green sward," proclaiming that "what was once a prairie wild will soon take on city airs."¹²

Hall published his first regional letter in Rooks County's *Stockton News* on June 10, 1878. He submitted breezy little "unconsidered trifles" regarding Nicodemus. The letter was a blend of social commentary and skillful propaganda, which displayed the new community of Nicodemus in the most favorable light. He reported on a church wedding, a Sabbath school, plans for a glorious Fourth of July celebration, businesses under construction, and the receipt of provisions from blacks in eastern Kansas. He also noted that the colonists had undertaken the arduous task of digging a town well. Overall, the "unconsidered trifles" were hardly small matters. In a very short letter, Hall presented the black colonists as law-abiding, religious, industrious, patriotic, shrewd, and innovative.¹³

During the first year after their arrival, Hall and McCabe became involved in state politics. The *Colored Citizen* praised the two men for paying their way to the Republican congressional convention and working like "true heroes for their race." On his trips to Topeka, Hall secured his relationship with that city's African American community. He gave an inspiring address on January 21, 1879, to the literary society at St. John's AME Church, Topeka's second oldest African American church and one of its most influential black



Hall and McCabe met with Governor John Pierce St. John, pictured, shortly after his January 13, 1879, inauguration. They asked him to designate Nicodemus as the temporary county seat. This was the first of many such requests received by St. John from towns in what would become Graham County.

institutions. The *Colored Citizen* reprinted the speech in its entirety.¹⁴

During 1878, Hall was neutral toward county organization. In a letter to the *Stockton News* he wrote that "there are a class of men in this county who are bent on organizing the county in some one or the other manner." He predicted that "nothing will grow out of it, save bad blood and heartache," and mused that "the colored people hold the key to the situation and will no doubt use their advantage." The "key" lay in the strength of the black community's unified voting block, because the white vote was split among a number of towns. Hall informed readers of the *Atchison Champion* that there were "myriads of aspirants for county honors" and that until slates were known, "public opinion and comment should be held in abeyance."¹⁵

By the end of 1878, however, Hall had become increasingly concerned about the county seat issue:

The county seat question still demands attention. . . . As before hinted, Nicodemus has hopes of proving to be the dark, yet winning, town in the race. She will certainly command the entire Negro vote of the county, and the white vote in her immediate vicinity, which is about double the vote which any of the other five points can bring to bear. A few bold spirits on Bow Creek want municipal organization, but the mass of Grahamites prefer county organization, as the lesser evil.¹⁶

12. *Colored Citizen*, May 10, 1878. Hall was a highly-observant, trained journalist and this letter contains detailed information regarding the founding of the colony. For more on John A. Martin, who took over the *Atchison* newspaper at age nineteen in 1858 and served as governor from 1885 to 1889, see Homer E. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 113–15.

13. *Stockton News*, June 10, 1878.

14. *Colored Citizen*, September 6, 1878 and February 1, 1879; *Hays City Sentinel*, September 14, 1878; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865–1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 31.

15. *Stockton News*, December 5, 1878; *Atchison Daily Champion*, December 19, 1878.

16. *Stockton News*, January 2, 1879.

Hall's letters and columns to papers outside Graham County and his correspondence with Governor St. John reveal the brewing controversy. The organization of the county was a matter of fierce debate, and in the span of seven years two county seats were duly established: Millbrook in 1881, and Hill City in 1888.¹⁷

Hall and McCabe met with the governor shortly after his January 13, 1879, inauguration. They asked him to designate Nicodemus as the temporary county seat, and referred to this meeting in a letter sent April 11, 1879:

We desire to refresh your memory relative to your promise to us, at an interview held with you at your office, during the month of January. The promise was that, when Graham County applied for organization, if in any manner consistent with your position you could further the interests of Nicodemus you would do so. Memorials to your Excellency praying for organization are now circulating throughout the county and are receiving many signatures of bona fide residents and householders. . . . What we ask of you is, to use your option, thus given you by the signers, and declare Nicodemus as temporary County Seat. We trust that you will find it within the scope of your jurisdiction to favor us, for our sole purpose in desiring it is the upbuilding of Nicodemus, and our people are the first settlers and desire it only temporary. Please favor us with an early reply.¹⁸

St. John replied April 17, 1879: "I must be governed, as I stated to you when you were here, by a petition of citizens." He assured them that "it will afford me pleasure to do anything I can consistent with my duty to favor your people and locality," and advised them to get up a petition.¹⁹ However, Hall was undoubtedly shrewd enough to realize that a petition for Nicodemus would fail. In his next letter to the *Stockton News*, published February 13, 1879, Hall again commented on the county seat question. He observed that although "Stevensville is the latest aspirant for

17. "Graham County Commissioners' Journal, Docket 1, (incomplete) March 7, 1881–February 3, 1887," in *Historical Records Survey* (Topeka: Federal Works agency, n.d.), 69. This document is apart from the *Survey of County Archives* conducted by the Works Projects Administration; Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 40.

18. Unfortunately although KSHS has appointment books for Governor George T. Anthony who preceded St. John, and Governor George W. Glick who followed, there is no extant similar record for St. John. Both Hall and St. John alluded to this meeting in correspondence. Abram T. Hall and E. P. McCabe to Governor John P. St. John, April 11, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 1, St. John Papers, KSHS; St. John to Abram T. Hall and E. P. McCabe, April 17, 1879, 27-03-01-04, no. 15, St. John Papers, KSHS.

19. St. John to Abram T. Hall and E. P. McCabe, April 17, 1879, 27-03-01-04, no. 15, St. John Papers, KSHS.

the county seat, Nicodemus is still in the field, and it has been well said that 'the colored troops fight nobly.'"²⁰

In a May 7, 1879, letter to the *Stockton News*, Hall demonstrated that community issues challenging Kansas African Americans often transcended racial agendas. White and blacks alike could be victimized by careless legislation. Hall was uniquely qualified to assess consequences and affect public opinion. In this letter, Hall referred to the state legislature as "the grave and reverend solons who misrepresented their constituency so ably last winter at Topeka." On March 12, 1879, these officials had approved an act to alter the boundaries of Sheridan County, a change that encroached on Graham County's territory and eliminated four townships along with proposed county seat locations.²¹ Hall and McCabe wrote the attorney general, Willard Davis, asking for an official opinion as to the validity of the legislation. Davis assured them the previously established boundary of Graham County would not be affected, although "what the Legislature intended cannot be determined . . . and must remain in uncertainty till that body again meets and settles it." In the meantime, confusion over this legislative act fueled debate over the formal organization of Graham County. For instance, in "A Voice for Organization" farmer Fred Harris wrote: "We are surrounded on three sides by organized counties, which are ready to possess themselves of a portion of our territory, and unless we organize we are powerless to prevent it. Our county is none too large now; shall we allow our more enterprising neighbors to gobble a tier of townships from each side?"²²

It may have been concern over the vulnerability of Graham County that prompted Hall to organize Nicodemus Township, though he clearly preferred county organization. Graham County was attached to Rooks for judicial purposes, and, as long as it was unorganized, Graham County citizens were required to conduct all municipal business and file all legal papers—even affidavits—at Stockton, Rooks's county seat. Trips to Stockton were

20. *Stockton News*, February 13, 1879.

21. *Stockton News*, May 7, 1879; *Kansas Laws* (1879), ch. 73, sect. 3; *Stockton News*, May 21, 1879. Attorney General Willard Davis wrote Benjamin B. F. Graves on July, 30, 1879, that in his opinion "some clerk made a mistake." See *Public Documents—Kansas, 1879–1880*, "Report of the Attorney General," (Topeka: George W. Martin, Kansas Publishing House, 1879), 111. In fact, changing county boundaries required a majority of votes by the legal voters of both counties. See *Kansas Compiled Laws* (1879), ch. 24, sects. 1369–73, 124–28.

22. "Report of the Attorney General," in *Public Documents—Kansas, 1879–1880*, 112. Davis's letter was sent to W. R. Hill, but was "in answer to the letter of yourself, Hall, McCabe and others." The pages of this publication are renumbered within sections. *Millbrook Times*, August 22, 1879.

During this critical, turbulent month, July 1879, editor Benjamin B. F. Graves formally launched the *Millbrook Times*. Millbrook was a Democratic stronghold, but Graves was an avid Greenbacker. Nevertheless, Hall, a staunch Republican, maintained a mutually respectful relationship with Graves throughout his residency in Graham County. In the first issue of the *Times*, published July 11, 1879, Graves established a neutral stance toward race, saying he had “no sentimentality in the matter.” He claimed to “regard the white and black man as equals” and insisted that “if their conduct is equally good, we shall not profess any inordinate love for the colored man, nor extol him above the clouds, with a view to securing his support when elections are held; . . . for our colored people are too intelligent to be deceived with such chaff.”²⁵

Hall was pleased with Grave’s racial stance and sent the editor a letter that was printed in the second edition of the *Times* on July 18, 1879:

We respect your sentiments regarding colored people. We do not wish to be put above our white neighbors, and when we see one of them professing to elevate us to that position we very naturally question his motives. All we wish is those equal rights which the law guarantees to us, and this we are satisfied you are willing to grant us. If the *Millbrook Times* speaks the sentiments of the Millbrook people we are all Millbrook men.²⁶

By this time, however, Graves had learned of the petition organizing Nicodemus Township and in the same edition containing Hall’s response, he printed the following:

We must protest against a law which makes two thousand citizens of this county subject to the will or caprice of any twenty-five men, without giving the great mass of people a chance to speak a word in their own behalf. It matters not if every man in the county is opposed to the thing, saye [*sic*] twenty-five, for these twenty-five are the sole dictators in the matter. . . .

We don’t object to what has been done because of the race of those who have done it, nor because of the location of township headquarters at Nicodemus, but we do most emphatically denounce the law which en-

ables any twenty-five men to defy the wishes of every other man in the county.²⁷

Hall defended his actions in the next edition: “We were not prepared for quite so general a disapproval of the township organization as we find existing. . . . Wishing to organize the county . . . and meeting with ill success we took the step we have as a last resort. We should have been satisfied had the same thing been done by any other place in the county, but having no hopes of their doing it we did it ourselves.”²⁸ The only recourse for the white population to avoid conducting their official business in a black town indefinitely was to organize the county and force Governor St. John to appoint a temporary county seat until the official election of the permanent site.

Editor Graves wrote St. John asking “what rule, if any, is adhered to in designating the temporary county seat of an unorganized county where there are two or more aspirants for the position?” St. John replied that he was required to locate the temporary county seat wherever the majority of “legal voters” indicated by their signatures on a petition. “The law is plain and leaves no discretionary power in the matter.”²⁹

Furious over the petition emanating from Nicodemus, Gettysburg residents entered the fray in earnest. F. E. Bowers, a carpenter and the deputy superintendent of public instruction, wrote the governor complaining about the township organization by the “colored portion of the county aided by a few white men whose record for honesty is not the best, without knowledge or consent of the better portion and majority of the people of the county.” Bowers insisted the motive of the Nicodemus petition was the ten thousand dollars in bonds that would be given to the new seat. He concluded that despite the financial hardships, county organization would be preferable and asked St. John to consider the matter.³⁰

On October 11, 1879, St. John received a petition initiated and circulated by N. C. Terrell, a wealthy businessman residing in Millbrook. The petitioners requested the “speedy organization” of Graham County and that Abram T. Hall be appointed census taker for a one-time census validating

Rooks County Courthouse, Stockton, Kansas, 208; *Kansas Compiled Laws*, ch. 24.

25. James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 82–92. The Greenback Labor Party favored monetary inflation, and so supported increasing the number of paper dollars in circulation. *Millbrook Times*, July 11, 1879.

26. *Millbrook Times*, July 18, 1879.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Millbrook Times*, July 25, 1879.

29. Benjamin B. F. Graves to St. John, July 29, 1879, 27-04-07-7, folder 1, St. John Papers, KSHS; Governor John P. St. John to Benjamin B. F. Graves, July 31, 1879, 27-03-01-04, no. 17, St. John Papers, KSHS.

30. F. E. Bowers to St. John, July 10, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 1, St. John Papers, KSHS.

fifteen hundred bona fide inhabitants of an unorganized county as required by law for formal organization. This census was separate from the scheduled census mandated by the U.S. Constitution that would also take place in 1880. The position of census taker was viewed as a prize political plum, and quite lucrative. The job paid three dollars a day and six cents a mile “for each mile necessarily and actually employed in making the return to the governor.” A Millbrook family of attorneys who were friends of St. John—Charles, T. T., and Ida Tillotson—supported Terrell.³¹

When by early November no action had yet been taken on Terrell’s petition, Hall wrote to St. John to urge him to act:

More than three weeks have passed away since I conferred with you relative to granting a petition from the citizens of Graham County, asking you to appoint me as census-taker. The objection which you raised to the affidavit of the three free-holders, was met immediately after I returned to this county, and a new affidavit such an one as you had approved, was made out and subscribed and sworn to by the free-holders, and forwarded without delay to you. Since when we have patiently waited to receive the appointment asked, or to learn the why it was withheld. . . . Meanwhile the other points that are desirous of catching the plumb of temporary county-seat, encouraged by your silence, are using every endeavor, both *fair and foul* to change the current of public sentiment in their favor.³²

As proof of these “foul” means, Hall enclosed four affidavits by Nicodemus residents claiming they had been tricked into signing petitions for Gettysburg when they were actually in favor of Millbrook for county seat. Two of the men declared that the bearers of the petition had said the “colored leaders” of Nicodemus, “Hall and McCabe,” had sold their people out. St. John replied November 6, 1879, that “under the law (with which you I suppose are familiar) when my attention is called to alleged fraud connected with the memorial asking the appointment of a census taker, it becomes my duty to investigate.”³³ He later found the accusations against Hall to be unfounded.

31. “Petition for the Organization of Graham County,” received in the office of John P. St. John, October, 11, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 4, St. John Papers, KSHS. Kansas *Compiled Laws*, ch. 24, sect. 114. Ida Tillotson would become the fourth female “admitted to practice law” in Kansas in 1881. See *Graham County Lever*, April 22, 1881. In the June 16, 1881, edition of the *Hill City Lively Times*, editor Thomas McGill mentioned borrowing a law book from Ida inscribed “To Ida Tillotson, att’y at law, Millbrook, Kans., from her friend and Sabbath School teacher, John P. St. John.”

32. Abram T. Hall to St. John, November 3, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 1, St. John Papers, KSHS. Affidavits were enclosed with this letter.

33. St. John to Hall, November 6, 1879, 27-03-01-05, no. 20, St. John Papers, KSHS.

The same day he wrote Hall, St. John received a petition from Gettysburg. It was commercially printed, with an elaborate inscribed heading: “To Hon. John P. St. John, Governor of Kansas.” The Gettysburg petitioners asked for a specific slate of county officers, with Robert Richmond as census taker. Richmond was not the only contender vying with Hall for the position. Another notable rival was Thomas Beaumont, an attorney and editor of the Hill City paper, the *Western Star*. His co-publisher, T. H. McGill also desired the position, but was willing to be named “assistant when the time is ripe.” McGill thought Beaumont’s appointment “would be satisfactory to the people here.”³⁴

The Reverend John Henry, a Baptist minister whose territory included Nicodemus, warned St. John that Hall’s appointment was risky and that “the feeling against the first office of the Co. being given to a Col[ored] man is intense.” He believed “Hall could more easily fill any other office than the one to which he aspires: the one that would bring him in contact with every excited man in the Co.” Henry’s concern was well founded, as John Landis, the man who originally surveyed land for the colonists, had repeatedly been threatened and was eventually murdered. The Reverend Daniel Hickman, one of the original Nicodemus settlers, and other blacks, believed Landis was killed because there was opposition by whites to a settlement of African Americans. The *Western Star* referred to the killing as “a ku-klux measure.”³⁵

Hall’s political courage during this volatile post-Reconstruction era was matched by St. John’s commitment to equal treatment of human beings irrespective of race. Hall’s request for the appointment to census taker came during a particularly difficult time for the governor, as the state was overwhelmed by a migration of blacks from the South during the Exoduster movement. At one point St. John was even asked to issue a proclamation and “arrest this disastrous flood of Negro paupers in its flow to Kansas.”³⁶

34. “Petition from Gettysburg for County Officers,” received in the office of John P. St. John, November 5, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 5, St. John Papers, KSHS; Thomas Beaumont to St. John, May 23, 1879, and T. H. McGill to St. John, May 29, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 1, St. John Papers, KSHS.

35. Rev. John S. Henry to St. John, November 7, 1879, 27-04-01-7, folder 1, St. John Papers, KSHS; *Western Star*, quoted in the *Millbrook Times*, August 1, 1879; George A. Root, “Biographical Sketch of Rev. Daniel Hickman,” in History, Graham Co., Nicodemus, collection 691, box 1, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka. “Landis” is incorrectly referred to as “Landers” in this manuscript. The *Norton Advance* stated this was the third attempt on Landis’s life. A correspondent from Nicodemus also implied there were racial factors in the murder of John Landis, when commenting on the “Roscoe riot.” See *Roscoe Tribune*, January 28, 1881.

36. I. O. Pickering, “The Administrations of John P. St. John,” *Kansas Historical Collections* 9 (1906): 670.

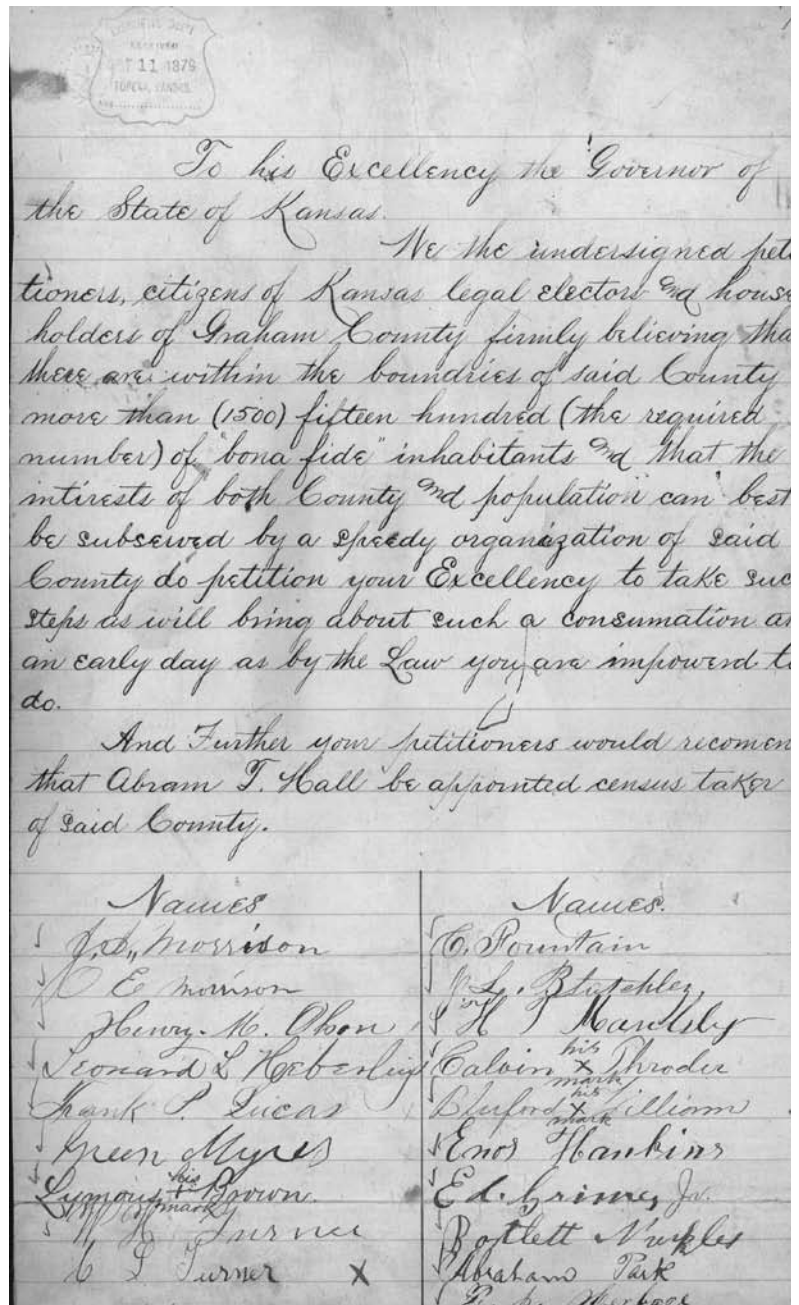
Furthermore, in January 1880, the U.S. Senate began investigating the reasons for the migration, and St. John was accused of luring blacks to Kansas. However, G. W. Carey, vice-president of the Emigrants Relief Board, introduced correspondence from St. John during the hearing and presented the governor as an able crusader for equal—rather than preferential—treatment of African Americans. Carey entered the following letter from St. John to Evan H. Harris into his testimony:

The only inducements now offered, or that ever have been offered by the State of Kansas to immigrants are rich soil, healthy climate, free schools, and a free ballot, with full protection to the life and property of every law-abiding citizen, irrespective of race, condition, or color. . . . Kansas has done nothing to encourage the emigration of colored people from the South: she has simply said, and still says, that she will not place a sentinel at her portals to ascertain, before permitting those who desire to enter, what political party they belong to, where they were born, whether they have been sprinkled or plunged, or what particular shade their skins happen to be. All that Kansas requires of parties coming into the State is to obey the laws, be honest, sober and industrious, and join with us in helping to make a great and prosperous State, populated by a happy and free people.³⁷

In accordance with his racial neutrality, St. John acknowledged Hall's superior qualifications and appointed him census taker on November 10, 1879. Even given its benefits, it was not an easy job. Census takers were considered intrusive under the best of circumstances. With Hall serving in the position, whites living in Graham County—some of whom were allegedly former bushwhackers from Missouri—were confronted with a highly educated, Shakespeare-quoting, Latin-spouting, French-speaking African American asking them if they could read and write.³⁸

37. Testimony of G. W. Carey, *Report of the Select Committee of the Causes of the Removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States*, 46th Cong., 2nd sess. 693, Part 3, 398. Painter speculated in *Exodusters*, 268, that letters may have been removed from the St. John papers at the KSHS to prepare for this investigation. Indeed, they were. St. John's correspondence is preserved through the testimony of Judge G. W. Carey, vice-president of the Emigrants' Relief Board, contained in part 3 of this seventeen-hundred-page report.

38. Shortridge stated that Missourians settled as clustered groups in Phillips, Rooks, and Graham counties (Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains*, 82–92). The *Hays City Sentinel* quoted from the *Troy Chief* and referred to these Missourians as “rebel bushwhackers” when discussing the murder of John Landis (*Hays City Sentinel*, September 21, 1878).



This petition, received by Governor St. John on October 11, 1879, requested the “speedy organization” of Graham County and that Abram T. Hall be appointed census taker for a one-time census validating fifteen hundred bona fide inhabitants of an unorganized county as required by law for formal organization. The petition set off a wave of similar requests from neighboring towns, so that by March 1880 St. John was bombarded with petitions, affidavits, letters, accusations of fraud, personal visits, conflicting reports, threats, appeals to his zeal for temperance, pleas for racial advocacy, and blatant attempts to exploit his friendship by those living in the Graham County towns vying for the position of temporary county seat.

St. John wrote to Hall on November 21, 1879, that “during the time you are engaged in your official duties as census taker, you shall in no manner electioneer, or use your influence in favor or against any place aspiring to become the temporary county seat.”³⁹ However, Hall could still participate in the “township convention” held at Nicodemus on November 22, 1879, to elect candidates for township officers. Hall was elected convention chairman, and editor Graves as secretary. An “Equal Rights Ticket” was formed from a multi-racial, politically diverse alliance of blacks, whites, Democrats, Greenbackers, and Republicans from Millbrook and Nicodemus. Citizens of Roscoe partially adopted this ticket, though they added three candidates from their own town. Gettysburg, however, nominated the “People’s Township Organization Ticket,” which was composed entirely of white men. At the December 3, 1879, township election, the “Equal Rights Ticket” handily won all of the positions except that of one constable.⁴⁰

Township officers were elected for a one-year term on a schedule determined by state law. The township officers elected at Nicodemus in December would serve only two months before the mandatory state election. If the county was not organized and the temporary county seat designated before that time, the citizens of Graham County would be forced to bear the expense of a second township election and to conduct their business in a black town. This made Hall’s work as census taker all the more important. He began taking the census on November 24, 1879. Three weeks later, however, he “postponed operations” and with the permission of St. John went to Chicago to visit his family. He resumed work on January 8, 1880. This interruption prompted several outraged letters and editorials. Moreover, the novelty of a black man serving as census taker provoked a great deal of comment, pro and con. The *Ness County Pioneer* noted that Graham County had a “colored census taker,” which “doesn’t seem to suit some of the white trash pretty well.” The *Western Star* accused Hall of taking money, and the *Graham County Lever*, located in Gettysburg, denied that the town would meet Hall “with violent opposition in the discharge of his duties on account of his color.”⁴¹

39. Governor John P. St. John to Abram T. Hall, Jr., November 21, 1879, 27-03-01-05, no. 20, St. John Papers, KSHS.

40. *Millbrook Times*, December 5, 1879.

41. “Townships and Township Officers,” in *Kansas Compiled Laws* (1879), ch. 110; see also “Attorneys at Law,” in *Kansas Compiled Laws* (1879), ch. 11, n. 11. Graham County held the mandatory second Nicodemus Township election, February 3, 1880; *Millbrook Times*, January 2, 1880; *Stockton Record*, January 10, 1880, quoting from the *Ness County Pioneer*; *Western Star*, January 8, 1880.

42. *Millbrook Times*, January 23, 1880.

43. Thomas Allison to St. John, March 22, 1880; and J. J. Bell to St.

In January 1880, the *Millbrook Times* praised Hall:

... some of our people have been heard to exclaim “what manner of man is this of whom we have heard so much?” What must be their surprise when our worthy census taker drops in on them with a quiet good morning, and with book and pencil in hand immediately proceed[s] to ask the necessary questions and book them accordingly. When he arises, to go about his “master’s work” he leaves friends where perhaps he had enemies; he has the rare faculty of combining pleasure with business; and can gently talk the old folks to sleep on topics of general conversation and then he can entertain the young folks with choice music and good jokes; and after all have a few kind words left for the dog.⁴²

Not all citizens shared editor Graves’s kindly assessment of Hall. While compiling the census, Hall strictly adhered to St. John’s prohibition against campaigning while so engaged. Consequently, the governor received affidavits from persons saying they had questioned the census taker about the shape of various petitions and that Hall would not respond.⁴³

Hall completed his census on March 6, 1880, and went to Topeka where he presented the information to St. John. His report included a newsy summary with his cheerful overview that the state of Graham County showed “a degree of settlement and improvement wholly without a parallel in the annuals [*sic*] of the state.”⁴⁴ Jubilant over the successful census, each of the towns contending for St. John’s appointment as temporary county seat—Hill City, Millbrook, Gettysburg, and Roscoe—rushed to gather the greatest number of signatures on a “memorial” (petition). In March 1880 the governor was bombarded with petitions, affidavits, letters, accusations of fraud, personal visits, conflicting reports, threats, appeals to his zeal for temperance, pleas for racial advocacy, and, in the case of the Tillotson family, blatant attempts to exploit friendship.

One of the first petitions came from Hill City. It contained 596 signatures. Hall wrote the heading, acknowledging that many of the names would appear on other petitions “under the stress of various misrepresentations.” The first

John, March 22, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 2, St. John Papers, KSHS.

44. Abram T. Hall, Jr., “Census Report of Graham County,” March 6, 1880, State Archives, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Hall reported that Graham County had a population of 3,570, with a total of 1,084 householders, 1,026 voters, 1,101 school children, and 17,709 acres under cultivation.

45. See the following in the St. John Papers, KSHS: “Petition for the Designation of Hill City as the Temporary County Seat of Graham Co.,”

signatures, in a bold hand, were that of E. P. McCabe and Abram T. Hall, Jr. The next day, St. John received a petition with 704 signatures requesting that Millbrook be named the temporary county seat. It too contained the signatures of McCabe and Hall. McCabe declared in a personal letter to St. John, received March 3, 1880, that his signature on the Millbrook petition had been placed there “without his consent and for no other purpose than as an inducement or bid for the support of the Colored Element” and he refused “to touch or handle the unclean thing.” However, McCabe’s personal signature was quite distinctive and almost certainly was on this petition.⁴⁵

Hall and McCabe’s signatures were also on a petition for the town of Roscoe where they consistently advertised their legal services once the town acquired a paper in June 1880.⁴⁶ Neither of the men’s signatures ever appeared on Gettysburg petitions. Hall did not contribute correspondence or columns to the *Graham County Lever*, nor did he and McCabe advertise in the publication, perhaps due to the disdain editor H. S. Hogue had for African Americans.

A number of the petitions from the various towns were undated, and contained scratched out names. Persons also wrote St. John asking him to remove their name from one petition and place it on another. L. P. Boyd, a Gettysburg man, summed up fraudulent methods used by all the towns in a letter castigating Millbrook: signatures in excess of the number of petitioners on the census return; signatures of non-residents and non-voters; signatures of persons who had been in the county less than four months; fraudulent, illegal, or minor signatures; and unverified signatures. Some petitions lacked the oath by which signatories verified they were who they claimed to be.⁴⁷

There was no question that fraud was rampant. Three cowboys from Sheridan County even swore out an affidavit that “while sojourning in town of Gettysburg,” they had been asked to sign a paper asking Congress to pass a bill loaning settlers money at a reasonable rate of interest. They

received in the office of John P. St. John, March 4, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 9; “Petition from Millbrook,” received in the office of John P. St. John March 5, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 10; E. P. McCabe to St. John, March 3, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 2. McCabe’s signature on the Millbrook petition is number 424.

46. “Petition for the Designation of Roscoe as the Temporary County Seat of Graham Co.,” March 20, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 13, St. John Papers, KSHS. Roscoe was the last town of the four county-seat contenders to acquire a paper: the *Roscoe Tribune*, edited by F. P. Kellogg, first published on June 13, 1880.

47. L. P. Boyd to St. John, March 12, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 2, St. John Papers, KSHS.

48. R. H. Lyman, H. Williams, and J. B. Gregory to St. John, March 5, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 2, St. John Papers, KSHS; *Stockton News*, April 6, 1881.

signed, but later learned their names had been torn off the paper and attached to a petition for Gettysburg as county seat. Rooks County was inundated by a cascade of affidavits and endured the constant hullabaloo of its neighbor. The editor of the *Stockton News* wrote: “Rooks County is glad to get rid of the many malicious and trifling law suits which are constantly arising in Graham County. Yes, go! We bid you God speed. What will you give on the dollar for the fees Graham County owes the officers of Rooks County?”⁴⁸

Bewildered by the whole fiasco, St. John replied to an irate Thomas Beaumont, editor of the *Western Star*, regarding rumors that Hill City had been eliminated from the race, that the town’s “petition is in very bad shape, so much as to render it out of the question for consideration.” The governor noted that although he was in personal contact with his census taker, Hall “seemed to be unable to straighten out the matter.” St. John had, he admitted, disqualified the tattered and mutilated Hill City petition, though he was not “throwing Hill City out of the race.”⁴⁹

On March 30, 1880, St. John received a brief, in Hall’s handwriting, filed on behalf of Roscoe by the firm of Hall and McCabe. At last, Hall and McCabe revealed their final choice for the temporary county seat. They were “Roscoe men.” Early on they had abandoned their hopes that Nicodemus would be the temporary county seat after learning St. John’s authority to designate the location depended on petition from legal voters. Hall argued that, out of all the towns in the county, Roscoe could claim the greatest number of electors and residents. To support his case Hall called into question the results of the census he himself had taken, noting that up to 150 people living in “a portion of the state not embraced within the legal boundaries of Graham County” had been counted as living there. The mistake was made, according to Hall, because although the state legislature had never repealed the act that changed the border between Sheridan and Graham counties, the census had been conducted as if the law had been rescinded.⁵⁰

Hall went on to accuse both Gettysburg and Millbrook of fraud, and reasoned that the land north of the Solomon River, which divided the county, was more attractive for

49. Thomas Beaumont to St. John, March, 17, 1880, 27-04-01-7, folder 2, St. John Papers, KSHS; St. John to Thomas Beaumont, March 18, 1880, 27-03-01-06, no. 25, St. John Papers, KSHS.

50. Namely the act cited in Kansas’s *Compiled Laws* (1879), ch. 24, sect. 1338. Hall, Jr., and McCabe, “Brief of the attorneys for the Roscoe Petition,” 27-04-01-7, folder 23, St. John Papers, KSHS.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Willard Davis to Governor John P. St. John, “Report of the Attorney

settlement and contained the “most numerous populated townships in Graham County,” while the land south of the river “is all or nearly all of it within the limits of the U.S. land grant to the Kansas Pacific railroad company.” The lengthy petition concluded:

The petitions emanating from and for Roscoe, have been presented just as they were circulated, each one certified to before a proper officer as containing none other than genuine signatures of bona fide householders, and legal electors of Graham County.

If the exigencies of this contest demand any better or stronger evidence of clear memorials than are they, then we pronounce it rigor and not law.

This is our case, and here we rest it.

Hall and McCabe
Atty’s for Roscoe⁵¹

Earlier that month, St. John had written Attorney General Davis regarding the very legal issue eloquently delineated by Hall. Davis replied March 18, that the territories of Kansas counties were defined in 1868 and that the “inconsistencies and absurdities of said act” of the recent sessions of the legislature “seem so glaring and irreconcilable, that it seems to be void for uncertainty” and would “forbid its recognition as a valid statute.”⁵² At the time that he composed the Roscoe brief, Hall would not have been privy to Davis’s opinion.

On April 1, 1880, the governor issued a proclamation announcing the official organization of Graham County, naming Millbrook as the temporary county seat. In this document, he also appointed John Inlow, A. E. Moses, and O. J. Nevens as county commissioners, and E. P. McCabe as county clerk. The newly appointed county officials met April 13, 1880, at the Maulsby Building at Millbrook and the official election for the county seat was set for June 1, 1880. The votes received by the contesting towns were: Gettysburg, 345; Millbrook, 332; Roscoe, 332; Hill City, 90; Nicodemus, 52. As Gettysburg did not receive a majority of the votes cast, Millbrook remained the county seat.⁵³

General,” March 18, 1880, in *Public Documents Kansas 1879–80*, 131.

53. “Proclamation of Governor John Pierce St. John organizing the county of Graham, April 1, 1880,” in *Proclamations and Messages*, vol. A, Governor’s Office, John P. St. John, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; “Historical Sketch,” in *Inventory of the County Archives of Kansas* (Topeka, Kansas: Historical Records Survey, Works Progress Administration, 1938), 5. Hill city was never a serious contender during the first Graham County seat fight. The town even failed to poll a majority in its own township on June 1.

The lack of a majority and the absence of a courthouse left Millbrook vulnerable to a challenge a year later. On June 7, 1881, the commissioners were presented with a petition bearing the names of 741 persons. Citing chapter twenty-six of Kansas’s *Compiled Laws*, they demanded a “Special Election” because a vote of the legal electors had not determined the permanent location of the county seat. Furthermore, Millbrook had not erected the required “county buildings at a cost of one thousand dollars.” The election was held July 12, 1881. Of the 878 votes cast Gettysburg received 281, Millbrook 247, Roscoe 221, and Hill City 129. Since neither Millbrook nor Gettysburg had received a majority, a run-off election between the two towns was held on July 26, 1881. Millbrook received 473 votes, Gettysburg 348, and Millbrook was declared the permanent county seat of Graham County. Editor T. H. McGill suggested that “Gettysburg should go out behind a haystack and hate itself to death.”⁵⁴

Hall left Graham County in October 1880, before the grand finale to the permanent county seat vote. A number of local papers and the *Atchison Champion* speculated that he intended to get married and that his “heart was in Topeka.” However, when he did marry in 1883 he was living outside the state of Kansas. In a letter to Kathryn Henri, organizer of the sixtieth anniversary celebration of Nicodemus, he indicated that he left to assume the local editorship of the *National Tribune* in St. Louis. Upon his departure the *Roscoe Tribune* printed this tribute: “Mr. Hall honorably distinguished himself in the early days of the Nicodemus colony, and was connected with it while the colonial organization lasted. Should the result of the Nicodemus experiment be to prove that the colored people from the South can settle and permanently succeed on the public lands in the West, Mr. Hall’s name will be preserved as one of the benefactors of his race.”⁵⁵

By 1882 Hall was again the city editor of the *Chicago Conservator*, though his ties to the residents of Graham

54. *Graham County Commissioners’ Journal—Docket I, 1881* (Topeka, Kansas: Historical Records Survey, Works Progress Administration), 59, 69. This publication should not be confused with the *Inventory of County Archives*, which was produced separately. *WPA Inventory of County Archives*, 6; *Hill City Lively Times*, July 28, 1881. It is not the intention of this article to explore the factors leading to the second county seat fight in 1888, though it is worth note that a 1887 tornado destroyed all but the courthouse (donated by Graves and Tillotson) and a few other buildings in Millbrook, setting the stage for Hill City’s rise.

55. Quotation from the *Atchison Daily Champion* in the *Roscoe Tribune*, November 12, 1880. For Hall’s letter to Henri see Belleau, “The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas.”

56. *Chicago Conservator*, November 18, 1882; December 16, 1882; September 8, 1883; December 18, 1886. The famous anti-lynching crusader

County remained solid. In the December 16, 1882, edition, he demonstrated the durability of the relationships he had formed in Kansas. He reported that “Mr. N. C. Terrell, the founder and principal business man of Millbrook, Graham Co., Kan.” had “honored our sanctum with a call and told us quite a batch of news concerning our frontier friends.”⁵⁶ Hall’s time in Chicago was short lived, however, and by September of 1883 he had moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The *Conservator* carried a write-up of his marriage, at an AME church, to Minnie Robinson. The bride was said to be an “excellent scholar and has the benefit of very extensive travel.” The column then praised Hall’s abilities: “The groom is as well known as any other young man of his age. Having a natural ability for literary work, and a laudable ambition to excel, he has made a bright record by the use of his facile and trenchant pen. He is one of the pioneers in the colored journalism, and deserves the recognition he has received.”⁵⁷

Hall was undoubtedly atypical in his educational level and abilities, and his role as a “pioneer of colored journalism” in Kansas and elsewhere is preserved in his many publications and letters. Early historians of Nicodemus, however, were unaware of his role in the organization of Graham County, and, as a result, his contribution to Kansas and black history has never been properly acknowledged. Although Hall was deeply committed to “uplifting the race,” he was not isolated within a racial enclave. He forged political alliances with surrounding whites to cope with problems challenging all communities in the settlement of the American West. Other African Americans moving west would also at times meld a racial agenda with pragmatic cooperation. Like Hall, they would run for offices on multi-racial slates, seek political appointments, lobby for causes, and write letters and articles.

Hall’s publications and correspondence, and the subsequent response of the white communities to which they were (at least partly) directed, demonstrate that he forced the organization of Graham County at a time when the

and pioneer black feminist, Ida B. Wells, purchased the paper in 1895.

57. *Chicago Conservator*, September 8, 1883.

58. For analysis of the causes of county seat fights see, Everett Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854–1890* (Lincoln, Nebr.: Johnsen Publishing



Hall—pictured here around 1905—left Graham County in October 1880, before the grand finale to the permanent county seat vote. Even so his role in the organization of the county was integral. Given the violence that often characterized county seat wars in the extreme western portion of the state in his day, Hall’s non-violent political maneuvers in the organization of Graham County were all the more remarkable. After leaving Kansas Hall returned to newspaper work and eventually settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Photograph courtesy of the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

white population preferred to delay the move. As editor Graves pointed out, when Hall organized Nicodemus Township, he subjected the entire white population of Graham County to the “will of twenty-five men.” Given this, and the violence that often characterized county seat wars in the extreme western portion of the state in his day, Hall’s non-violent political maneuvers in the organization of Graham County were all the more remarkable.⁵⁸ [KH]

Company, 1954), 459; Steven L. Scott, “Great Plains Hamlet County Seat,” *Heritage of the Great Plains* 19 (Spring 1986): 1–14; Homer Socolofsky, “County Seat Wars in Kansas,” *The Trail Guide* 9 (1964): 1–25; James A. Schellenberg, *Conflict Between Communities: American County Seat Wars* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987), 27; Robert K. DeArment, *Ballots and Bullets: The Bloody County Seat Wars of Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 5.