Alfred Gray, Quindaro’s first mayor and later chief clerk of the territorial legislature, then secretary of the State Board of Agriculture.
“A Spot of Ground Which Human Interest Clings To”: Changing Perceptions of Quindaro and Its History

by Ian H. Munro

In 1915, almost sixty years after the founding of Quindaro, Charles E. Cory, a Fort Scott lawyer and pioneer historian of slavery in Kansas, visited the abandoned townsite in company with George M. Gray, nephew of old Quindaro’s first mayor, Alfred Gray, and O. W. Little, a newspaper editor. As a historian might do, Cory sought out Gray’s company so that he would know what he was seeing, although his description of Alfred Gray’s abandoned home was filtered through the gothic sensibility of his time: it was, he thought, “a fit place for bats and owls.” Cory was one of many visitors to old Quindaro, both before and after its abandonment, who have written about it and shaped perceptions of Quindaro through the lenses of their period and individual perspectives. This article traces the arc of representations of Quindaro from its origins to the present, considering as it does so why Quindaro, alone among the dozens of towns that sprang up in Kansas during the 1850s and soon died, has remained, in Cory’s words, “a spot of ground which human interest clings to,” to be revisited, recollected, and reinterpreted by later generations.1

Significant influences on how subsequent generations would come to view the town were the “aspirations and the hopes and the expectations,” as Cory put it, of the first shareholders in the Quindaro Town Company and the settlers who followed them. Not content with their town being known as the only port on the Missouri River where free-state emigrants could debark without fear of harassment from proslavery Border Ruffians, the founders’ vision went further. Before a single building had gone up, they pictured a great commercial city arising, the capital of a future state of Kansas, and they reserved a large public square on the town plat for municipal, county, and state buildings.2 Many of the first commercial and ecclesiastical buildings were imposing three-story edifices constructed of quarried stone blocks, intended to last.

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1. “Old Quindaro, the Charm of It,” Fort Scott Daily Tribune-Monitor, June 14, 1915.
Charles Robinson, head of the first enterprise of the New England Emigrant Aid Company (NEEAC) in Kansas Territory and a major shareholder, proposed bridging the Missouri River between Parkville, Missouri, and Quindaro, “thus securing for [Quindaro] a concentration of railroads that will insure its growth. By this route,” Robinson’s argument ran, “goods can be carried from Boston to San Francisco without the delay and expense of ferriage.”

Quindaro, in his imagination, was to be the buckle in a future transcontinental railway system, guaranteeing a generous return on his investment.

Writers about Quindaro would also be attracted to a romantic narrative of Quindaro’s lightning development and precipitous decline. Within months of its founding, Quindaro was living up to the founders’ hopes: by April 1857, shares in the company that had sold for $150 were going for up to $1,200. “Ten months since,” reported the Missouri Democrat, “scarcely an hour’s work had been done here; now warehouses and stores are being built, and a hotel finishing which, when completed, will be the largest in the territory, with a single exception.”

The Democrat’s story was reprinted in newspapers across the country, thanks to the founders’ connections through the NEEAC with antislavery newspapers, including Horace Greeley’s influential New York Tribune. The town was “coming into very general notice throughout the country,” wrote John M. Walden, coeditor with Clarina Nichols of the Quindaro Chindowan, “and is beginning . . . to be regarded as a most important and promising point. We hardly open an Eastern newspaper that contains no allusion to it.”

Finally, writers were drawn to Quindaro’s story because of its national reputation as, in the words of the New York Times, “distinctively and radically a Free-State town” whose citizens “almost without exception are opposed to the extension of Slavery a single foot beyond its present limits,” a promise that drew antislavery emigrants and financial support from the Northeast. At the same time, Quindaro was viewed as an outpost of Yankee enterprise on the western frontier: “None but a Yankee would ever have thought of building a town on the tops of such hills and bluffs,” one reporter wrote in September.

Terms such as “enterprise,” “Yankee ingenuity,” the “Yankee spirit,” and “progressive” were often associated with Quindaro in sympathetic reports to create connections between free-state settlers and the antislavery sentiments of readers in the Northeast. The “Yankee” trope also contained, however, a racially charged narrative contrasting white values with those of Native Americans who owned agricultural land coveted by settlers. Leading men among the Wyandotte Indians were described in the New York Herald Tribune as “lacking that energy of the Yankee blood.” The acquisition of Indian trust lands was eagerly sought by Quindaro town leaders. In the Chindowan, Walden described nearby farmland owned by Delaware Indians as “a wide profitless waste, containing many thousand acres of land, owned by an indolent set of beings, who, by their presence and possession, are pre-

venting it from being converted into grain fields and gardens.7

Quindaro’s reputation was further enhanced in the eastern press by the efforts of proslavery forces to discredit it as a “Yankee town” and an “abolition hole.”8 In August, the Star of Empire, a proslavery paper published in Westport, Missouri, accused Quindaro residents of inciting slaves to escape and concealing them in defiance of the Fugitive Slave Law. Walden responded that the people of Quindaro “are unanimously opposed, upon conviction to the extension of slavery one foot beyond its present limits. But they recognize the compromises of the Constitution; and they neither entice away slaves, nor knowingly harbor fugitives. If our neighbors in Missouri are wise and know their own interests they will meet us in a reciprocal spirit of good faith and good will.” Quindaro citizens, said Walden, were inclined neither “to institute an inquisition before which negroes entering the town will have to appear and answer certain questions as to where they are from” nor “to countenance fugitives should they be known as such.”9

After a Quindaro wag with abolitionist sympathies humorously offered a reward for the “non-apprehension and non-lodgment” of an escaped slave, the Star of Empire urged an invasion of Quindaro in retaliation. “It was ultimately decided,” reported the Chicago Tribune, “that Quindaro need not be sacked for the present; but one or two of the colored audience having received public information of the road to freedom, made straight for Quindaro,” contributing to the town’s reputation as well as its growing black population.10

By mid-1858, stories about Quindaro were beginning to disappear from national newspapers. As the border war subsided in northeastern Kansas, local leaders of all political stripes became more concerned with developing the area’s economy even as the border war continued in southern Kansas, as Jeremy Neely pointed out.11 Towns along the Missouri River began to compete fiercely with each other for survival. Quindaro had outlived its found-

8. “Quindaro, that Abolition Hole!” Quindaro Chindowan, August 8, 1857.
ing mission as towns on both sides of the river suppressed the activities of Border Ruffians and welcomed emigrants regardless of their opinions on slavery.

The Civil War completed the process of Quindaro’s decline. By May 1861, Quindaro men were leaving to join a Union artillery company and the Kansas Mounted Riflemen. Union soldiers were billeted in the town, their horses stabled in abandoned warehouses. Residents began to depart out of fear of Confederate guerrilla attacks. For one soldier of the Ninth Kansas Volunteers Regiment, what remained of Quindaro was a disappointment: “the famous City among the hills,” he called it, where “there is not level land enough to align a Corporal’s Guard.”12 Wrote another soldier in the regiment, “Quindaro is not quite as large as St. Louis. . . . It does not support a single store, and the Postmaster lives three miles from town. It was almost entirely deserted before we came here.” The Quindaro Tribune, successor to Walden’s Chindowan, shut


An 1878 map of Wyandotte County, Kansas, including Quindaro, showing the route of the Missouri Pacific Railroad as well as Wyandotte City, the future Kansas City, Kansas. It includes a caption identifying the first white settle in the area.
down in the same year, while soldiers removed every piece of wood they could find to use for firewood.13

New Quindaro, spreading southward from the top of the bluffs, continued to exist in wartime, however, carrying with it some of the haughty reputation of old Quindaro. “In point of good society—” John Walden had boasted in 1857, “of upright, intelligent, and agreeable men and women,—Quindaro has now no superior, and very few equals in Kanzas.”14 It was a view that still seemed to prevail after the town’s decline: when Quindaro threatened to secede from Wyandotte County over a political squabble, the Wyandotte Gazette criticized the “restless spirit” of some of Quindaro’s citizens that “will never permit her to remain in any county, in which she is not the chief. A little less of the spirit of ‘dragged angels down,’ would be beneficial to Quindaro.”15 Quindaro’s old rivalry with the city of Wyandotte—the future Kansas City, Kansas—was not forgotten. After Quindaro citizens discussed the creation of a free common school in a meeting that was described as “one of the most harmonious deliberative meetings ever held” in the notoriously fractious town, the Wyandotte Gazette said it was “glad to see that [the people of Quindaro] can act together on one subject, and especially so important a one as that of common schools.”16

A Quindaro citizen responded to the gibe by asking “how Quindaro people can have earned such a long-POLED thrust” from Wyandotte when “Quindaro intelligence is in a fair way to comprehend almost any spur of Wyandotte.”17 When a public library was started in Quindaro a few years after the war, stocked by books that had belonged to the Quindaro Town Company, the Gazette could not resist recalling a time “when the ‘goose’ of that burg ‘hung high,’ and corner lots sold for $1,000.” The new library, the paper noted, would be located in the new Quindaro schoolhouse, “really a credit to the place.” The Olathe Mirror noted that the “colored school” in Quindaro had about 180 students enrolled, and the white school-house was said to be nearly filled.18

Whatever its reputation as a free-state sanctuary and commercial hub, Quindaro had never been noted for racial tolerance. Quindaro voters in May 1858 rejected the proposed Leavenworth Constitution for a future state of Kansas, mainly out of mistaken fear that it sanctioned black suffrage and integrated schools, or so Walden believed. An Indiana visitor to Quindaro in September wrote that Quindaro voters were “every where required to pledge themselves as Free State men, and to vote against negro suffrage and negro immigration in the Territory.”19 At a Wyandotte city convention in the same month, conservative free-state men adopted a platform opposing nominees of the “black-republican party,” and nominated their own county ticket “pledged to opposition to negro equality . . . and now and ever in favor of making Kansas a FREE STATE FOR THE WHITE RACE ALONE.” One Quindaro resident, P. T. Colby, a Democrat, was among the candidates nominated.20

W hite citizens of old Quindaro were far from unified on matters of race, however. Also in September, a Quindaro election board headed by Alfred Gray allowed an African American, Henry Drake, to cast a vote. The Western Argus of Wyandotte was outraged: “The names of the negro-loving judges who permitted their Cuffee equal to cast his vote for Black Republicanism and free Kansas,” sneered the Argus, “are Alfred Gray, mayor and milkman of Quindaro, and Mr. Sortor,” the latter probably referring to Elisha Sortor, one of the earliest settlers in the area. After Democrats and “conservative” free-state men threatened to lynch Drake and demanded that his vote be withdrawn, Gray agreed to erase Drake’s name and vote.21 Underlying both school and suffrage issues was a fundamental debate over whether the constitution of a future state of Kansas could bar the emigration and settlement of blacks.

The problem of race and schools in old Quindaro lingered in post–Civil War Quindaro. By 1869, several African American Quindaro residents were permitted to

15. Wyandotte Commercial Gazette, January 19, 1861.
17. “Quindaro School Meeting, &c.,” Wyandotte Commercial Gazette, December 5, 1863.
vote on the condition that they could demonstrate that they were "more than half white." When an African American in 1883 attempted to send his children to the white school, some whites objected and circulated a petition requesting that his land be detached from the all-white district and attached to the district containing the black school. The county school superintendent refused the request. "We think," said the Gazette, a Republican paper, that the superintendent "acted very properly . . . and we believe he will be sustained by a majority of the people of this county." The Wyandott Herald, a Democratic paper, disagreed. The white people of Quindaro had, the paper proposed, "very generously divided" school districts, creating one for whites and another for blacks. A contract provided that white children living in the "colored" district would attend the white school and black children in the "white" district would attend the "colored" school. The complainant—"a very light mulatto," stipulated the editors—was challenging this agreement by wanting his children to attend the white school.

Meanwhile the African American population of Quindaro had steadily continued to grow and flourish. In August 1863, blacks held a celebration in honor of the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies and also, the Wyandotte Commercial Gazette reported, as "a 'Lincoln dinner' in honor of the progress of our emancipation." A number of whites, including John Walden, attended and gave addresses "on the duties of the colored race incident to their new condition as freemen." Emancipation celebrations continued annually. The 1872 festivities in August celebrating West Indian Emancipation Day drew delegations from Leavenworth and Kansas City that headed for Quindaro in "vehicles of every description, and 'citizens on foot.'" In September of the same year, a "grand barbecue" was held in Quindaro to celebrate "the emancipation of the colored people of the United States." Among the speakers at the barbecue was Charles H. Langston, a prominent black leader and principal of the Colored Normal School in Quindaro, a department of Freedmen's University that had been founded during the Civil War. It would later become Western University, which contemporaries hoped would be a western equivalent of Booker T. Washington's famed Tuskegee Institute. In time, Western University—and thereby Quindaro—would indeed become famous as the home of the Jackson Jubilee Singers.

Ironically, given Quindaro's history of racism, new Quindaro was becoming known as a center of African American culture and educational advancement even as the remaining structures in what one newspaper called "Ancient Quindaro" were crumbling and being pulled down, and a dispute was developing over who owned the remnants. In 1867, a Kansas legislator proposed to donate the townsite to Freedmen's University, and two

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27. Wyandotte Gazette, September 1, 1870. This report notes that there was "some talk" of new buildings being built in the original townsite and that Congregationalist minister S. D. Storr’s home in old Quindaro had recently been expanded by an addition, while a new residence had been built for W. W. Dickinson.
years later, Nancy Quindaro Guthrie, a Wyandot who with her husband Abelard Guthrie had been instrumental in negotiations for her people’s sale of the townsite acreage to the town company and who had given her name to the town, was reported to be attempting to recover “the greater part of the town site.” She claimed, according to the Wyandotte Commercial Gazette, that “though she may sell twenty times, yet the land still belongs to her.” It would not be until 1890 that Western University would secure title to the land from members of the old Quindaro Town Company or their heirs.28

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ev before that, however, old Quindaro had become a nostalgic personal memory for people old enough to remember its heyday. A writer for the Weekly Union of Junction City in 1872 recalled when the town was considered “the great city of Kansas . . . gateway for the immense immigration coming in; the great river port of the new State,” so that prominent visitors stopped there first on the way into Kansas Territory. He enumerated some of those present when the antislavery U.S. senator Henry Wilson visited in 1857, many of whom were still alive, including Charles Robinson and Alfred Gray. In 1878, A. S. Corey, a printer, recalled his first impressions of Quindaro in 1857: a “small town surrounded by huge bluffs covered with forests.” On one of the bluffs, John Walden was casting composition rollers for the first issue of the Chindowan. Corey was promptly engaged as the paper’s compositor, remaining throughout its brief existence and taking over the editorship after Walden’s resignation in June 1858.29

By 1881, when a correspondent calling himself “Hugo” wrote about Quindaro, he thought it was doubtful “if fifty per cent of the people of Wyandotte County know what a flourishing young city strove to climb those ravines to the table land above.” As for many of those who wrote about Quindaro in the 1880s, it was the grandiose dreams of its founders and the very brevity of the town’s moment in the sun, when there was said to be “more business done in Quindaro in a day than there was in Wyandotte in a week,” that brought out the philosopher in Hugo. Comparing Quindaro to ancient Troy, he predicted that “some local Seligmann [Schliemann] will doubtless delve in the Quindaro bluffs” for vestiges of the former town.30

In 1882, a Lawrence journalist echoed Hugo by contrasting Quindaro at its height with its rapid demise until it became “the deadest of all the dead towns in Kansas. It can hardly be realized that it was once the point around which centered the dreams of several prominent Kansans that it was to be a great city.” The building that once housed the Chindowan had become, in a familiar formulation, “a fit place for the assembling of bats and owls.”31 In the same year, Clarina Nichols published a letter in the Wyandotte Gazette claiming that “Uncle Tom’s cabin,” in addition to being the home of the town’s literary society, was also a station on the Underground Railroad. Many slaves, she wrote, “took the train of freedom there.” Nichols said she herself had harbored an escaped slave in a cistern overnight until she could be transported to Leavenworth.32 By that time, stories of participation in the Underground Railroad and abolitionism had proliferated and taken on romantic associations.

A generation after its founding, a narrative of old Quindaro was being constructed that centered on the founding white elite, predominantly New Englanders, to the exclusion of the intertwined histories of Native Americans; African Americans; and even settlers from the upper Midwest and European emigrants, such as the Irish, who formed the bulk of Quindaro’s workers. Writers began casting a romantic glow over the town’s past by associating it with the Underground Railroad and with famous historical figures such as William Tecumseh Sherman, who was said to have been a frequent visitor to Quindaro. “It was here,” a reporter for the Kansas City Star quoted an old resident as saying, “the famous Beecher Rifles landed back in the troublous times which antedate the war. Jim Lane was here a great deal and Quindaro was a rallying point for the ‘Kansas Red Legs,’ as the free soil guerillas were called. . . . A great many high, brave hopes lie buried here.”33

As old Quindaro receded further, people telling its story began to idealize it beyond recognition. Adelia Alice Humphrey, writing for the Kansas City Journal in 1898,

said of the town’s founders that “theirs was not a money making but a home making scheme.” A writer for the Gazette Globe of Kansas City, Kansas, in 1911 described the founders of Quindaro as “men of principle, of tact, of religion, who, if necessary, would lay down their lives so that their principles might be sustained.” The town government, he added, “was a pure one, being of the clean nature that characterized the New England towns.” It was, this writer thought inaccurately, a temperance community that ran liquor dealers out of town. Temperance was indeed rooted in the background of the New England settlers, but when Quindaro acquired the status of an organized town under charter of the territorial legislature, its common council allowed the sale of liquor over the objections of Congregationalist minister Sylvester Storrs, who complained that “grog shops are open and are said to be doing a thriving business.” Forgotten, too, was Abelard Guthrie’s complaint in 1861 that he and “every other man” in Kansas who went into land and town share speculation had been swindled out of all they had by Charles Robinson. As much as Quindaro’s leaders tried to evoke the image of a decorous transplanted New England village, Quindaro in its heyday was very much a town of the West, with its inhabitants striving by any means for survival.

Newspaper stories about old Quindaro, often embroidered with gothic motifs and constructed around a sic transit gloria mundi theme of contrast between Quindaro’s imagined great days and its present state, continued to appear through the early years of the twentieth century. Typical of the genre is a 1905 article by Perl W. Morgan that first appeared in the Kansas City Star and was reprinted in newspapers across Kansas. It began with conventional images of the town’s remaining buildings “almost hid beneath a mass of creeping, thick-leaved vines, inhabited by owls and bats and infested with snakes and insects, their gray stone walls crumbling and falling down from age and decay” and continued with recollection of the “future great metropolis that, for the brief period of its life, was the most promising town on the Missouri river above St. Louis.”

Another story, printed in the Globe of Kansas City, Kansas, in 1907, took fancy a step further by speculating that the ruins bore evidence of the last fight of the “Quindaro tribe of Indians” against white settlement. A “row of loopholes” was described as running around the walls of the two buildings still standing, some bearing what the inventive writer called “marks left by the burning of powder, which shows that the buildings were used at one time in resisting an attack.” Although the Gazette Globe writer referred to one of the buildings as “the old fort,” no such building ever existed and no Indian attack against Quindaro ever occurred. However, the story added to the town’s romantic image.

35. “Literary Notice,” White Cloud Kansas Chief, July 4, 1861; for Sylvester Storrs’s comments, see “A Good Sermon At The Right Time,” Quindaro Chindowan, April 24, 1858.
A writer for the *Kansas City Globe* made the absurd claim that of all the “lost cities of the western world, and they are legion, there is none so replete with romance and history” as old Quindaro. The town is personified in this account as having “died for her principles, one of the first martyrs to the cause” of ending slavery. Another writer, also for the *Globe*, put into crude verse her view of “The Quindaro Ruins,” where “you can dream about such circumstances / As negroes in hiding, taking all kinds of chances.” In 1921, Quindaro even acquired a “wild cave man” appropriate to its mysterious reputation: residents spoke of “wild cries” in the night, “mysterious lights,” and a figure said to be “roaming the hills.” The story appeared just before Halloween, suggesting that it may have been a hoax, although another report of midnight cries and lights appeared in the *Kansas City Kansan* several months later.

At the same time that such fantastic or romantic accounts of old Quindaro were appearing, a certain historical consciousness was emerging as the last free-state pioneers passed from the scene. Writers for local newspapers began to ask questions about the past, such as “Why should one town live and another die?” O. W. Little, editor of the *Alma Enterprise*, who accompanied Charles Cory on his 1915 visit to Quindaro, reflected on “how little we of the second generation really know about the early history and geography of this state of ours, this state whose history is in fact so short that we should be familiar with its every detail.” As a measure of cultural change since the 1850s, Little noted a warehouse filled with decaying oxen yokes, an item that the Wabaunsee County Historical Society, with which he was associated, had experienced great difficulty securing for exhibit.

The sense that Quindaro was in danger of being forgotten is apparent in a proposal in the *Kansas City Kansan* in 1919 to name a U.S. Merchant Marine ship the *Quindaro*. The writer argued that “every school child” should be taught the history of Quindaro for its “Indian romance” and the “bunch of live ones” who built the town. In 1921, the *Kansan* published a speech by George W. Veale before the Kansas Historical Society that demonstrated how Kansas City, Missouri, businessmen had thwarted Charles Robinson’s dream of a Parkville-to-Quindaro bridge. The paper also published stories on “new dreamers” who were building homes near the old site and on a proposal to revive the Missouri River ferry service that had once run from Quindaro to Parkville.

Such stories connected old Quindaro to contemporary developments and inevitably raised the question of what should be done with the old site. A writer for the *Kansas City Kansan* proposed in 1922 that it should become a public park “with the ruins preserved as they are in the

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42. “Name It Quindaro,” *Kansas City Kansan*, January 1, 1919.
midst of all the wild luxuriousness of vegetation that is found today” while having “walks that would make this a resort with but little expense and a monument that would forever distinguish Kansas City.” In 1937, a black Kansas legislator, William H. Towers, proposed that old Quindaro should become a state park, a proposal seconded by Bishop William T. Vernon, president of Western University, who said the ruins were “a sort of playground for our students as well as the subject of class tours.”

Nonetheless, for half a century after Towers’s proposal, old Quindaro disappeared from general attention. New Quindaro became more associated in press reports with urban decay than with Kansas history, and the old town-site nearly became the site for a landfill. At that point, public attention was reawakened and battle joined over whether Quindaro was worthy of protection as a historical site. In 1987, for the first time in over a hundred years, mention of Quindaro appeared in the New York Times, which identified it incorrectly but not without precedent as an “abolitionist port.” The Times story reported that preparatory to the conversion of the site to a landfill, archaeologists and historians were examining it for information about how frontier settlers had lived. The investigators found the “outlines, in the form of basement walls, of old commercial buildings, including one that apparently housed a store, offices and a meeting hall, and another that housed the town’s newspaper.” The Times story concluded that there was “little likelihood that the ruins will be preserved.”

Over a decade passed before an Associated Press story speculated that the townsite might be preserved after the ruins were recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Kansas and national newspaper reports tended to play up romantic associations with abolitionism and the Underground Railroad, eclipsing the complex history of the town and Kansas that had begun to emerge in revisionist studies. In a 2001 essay, Rita Napier argued that civil rights struggles in the late 1950s and 1960s had called the attention of historians to the omission of many people, “in particular women, African Americans, and ethnic groups of color,” from traditional accounts, leading to the introduction of new perspectives that challenged “some of our most cherished myths, values, and stories of the West.” Among the most cherished values for Kansans was their state’s reputation as the home of John Brown and resistance to slavery. “In contrast to traditional interpretations that view Kansas as a place free of racial problems,” James N. Leiker wrote, “revisionist scholarship of the past generation has challenged the extent to which toleration and liberalism have influenced its past. In many ways these historiographical changes merely reflect the larger transformation of both the historical profession and the nation as a whole during the civil rights era.”

Revisionist scholarship has likewise taken a critical view of traditional representations of Quindaro. Jeff Bremer, for example, contrasted the “mythology of Quindaro” as a town founded by abolitionists and a station on the Underground Railroad with the reality of its population by “free-soil, antislavery Northerners who were more interested in making money than abolishing slavery. . . . While many may prefer the fiction of viewing Quindaro as an idealistic abolitionist base, full of reformers such as Clarina Nichols and James Walden, the reality behind its story reveals much of the hard truth about American capitalism and racism. The settling of Quindaro and Kansas Territory was as much motivated by the desire for land and wealth as by antislavery politics.”

Kristen Oertel, in her study Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, and Violence in pre–Civil War Kansas (2009), wrote of free-state ideology’s “exclusion of blacks and Indians from its vision of a Free-Soil republic.” Gunja SenGupta examined the connections between the racial views of Quindaro’s founders and those of the leaders of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, arguing that the latter supported “the exclusion not merely of slavery but of former slaves as well. If replicating Northern society on the frontier demanded that the territory be kept white in order to keep it free, the free labor entrepreneurs were willing to acquiesce in the adoption of a territorial Black Law.” James Leiker called attention to the views of free-state settlers such as Walden who came to Kansas from “old northwest states such as Indiana and Ohio,” where

“antiblack racism matched and at times even surpassed that of the South.”

For some of those who fought to prevent the old Quindaro site from becoming a landfill, Quindaro was an emblem of the state’s indifference to African American history and by implication to African Americans: “The chronic problem has been the neglect of African-American history and culture, and racism,” said an activist in the Quindaro Town Preservation Society. “Kansas was a free state founded in the struggle against slavery, and yet it has seriously neglected its heritage.”

Much room remains, therefore, for further study of Quindaro along the inclusive lines suggested by Napier. For example, to date no studies have examined the internal politics of the community, including how the influx of immigrant laborers was received by the town’s residents. There have been no significant studies of the role of women in Quindaro’s development or of the commercial relationships between Native Americans and free-state communities bordering Indian trust lands.

As recently as 2018, Quindaro took on renewed significance. After a statue of John Brown on the old site of Western University was defaced by vandals, a Kansas City Star editorial represented old Quindaro as “an example of people from different walks of life working together for the greater good, at a time fraught with violence and division,” implicitly contrasting the imagined values of the town with the bitter racial and cultural divisions of the present day. Despite the brevity of its existence as an independent, living community, Quindaro will surely continue to stimulate ideas, images, curiosity, and dispute.

