Juniata: Gateway to Mid-Kansas

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In late 1853 the best-known wagon trail near what is now Manhattan was the Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley route. This army road cut through much virgin territory. The Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley road came out from Leavenworth to what later was the village of Winchester, to Osawkee village, to Half Dog creek, on to Indianola (which is where the Topeka Goodyear Tire and Rubber plant is now located). It then rolled on to Smith's ferry above the Kansas river—where a fork cut off south to the Santa Fe trail—and the other fork ran to what is now Silver Lake, on to Cross creek—the old Pottawatomie agency, now near Rossville—to St. Mary's Mission, on to the Vermillion river, crossing the stream at a point due east of present Louisville, then up to the Big Blue river about one mile below Rocky Ford, and from there cut off southwest toward the outpost, Fort Riley.

A century ago in this lovely but lonely land there were laughter, voices, the clink of money, the smell of white man’s food, and Euro-American civilization at the spots where people collected. People usually gathered only at the points where trails crossed or where the trail traffic hesitated at the major streams and rivers.

Such a place was Juniata at the crossing on the Big Blue. Juniata was sometimes called Junietta, Juaniata, and often Dyer’s Town. It grew up about two and one half miles below a spot on the Big Blue where the Indians had constructed an earth lodge and cultivated fields as much as 400 years before white settlers arrived there.¹ This paper is centered on the Big Blue river crossing and vicinity.

This is the place where Samuel D. Dyer once operated a ferry, collected toll on the United States government bridge, and watched a small town come to life. By climbing up into the hills where the plow has not been used, one can find the main road, over which, a hundred years prior to this writing, the government wagons rumbled and rolled from fort to fort. One can still locate the old piling for the Big Blue bridge on the post road—that is, unless the river is up.²

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² Prof. Linwood L. Hodgden of Kansas State College, Manhattan, has been doing anthropological work in the Big Blue river bottom. The Smithsonian Institution, with Hodgden as field assistant, conducted three excavations in the general area. In July, 1953, Hodgden was in charge of an excavation of the earth-lodge referred to above. He was assisted by Smithsonian people, the University of Nebraska, and Kansas State College.
In the year 1853, the first white settler, Samuel D. Dyer, came to this area, which reminded some people of the Blue-Juniata of Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{3} It seems that Dyer had been in Kansas nine or ten years before 1853.\textsuperscript{4} And we know he had worked for the government at Fort Scott. Early correspondence refers to Dyer as coming from various places back East. At different times he is referred to as a Virginian, a South Carolinian, and a Tennessean. As if that is not confusing enough we find that the census of 1855 listed Samuel D. Dyer as a farmer, 50 years old, having emigrated from Missouri (wife, Pamela age 40 years). Most likely he was a Tennessean by birth, regardless of where he lived after that.\textsuperscript{5}

There is a question as to the exact date when Samuel D. Dyer moved up from Fort Scott, for some think it was early 1853 and others place it along in midyear. His daughter, Sarah, later stated that it was in the “spring of 1853.”\textsuperscript{6} In any event we find that it was not long before his good wife, Pamela, sons, Abraham, William, Enoch, and daughters, Jane, Lydia, and Sarah had come to the new home on the Big Blue. Other children mentioned are John, James, Mary, and Martha Ann. Probably all of the 11 children did not come to Juniata.

Dyer brought along with him a pony, two yoke of oxen, some cattle, sheep, hogs, and other items for his frontier home. The hogs were called “elmpeelers.” We find that by fall, 1853, Dyer, with the aid of several sons, was helping the government teams with the crossing at the Big Blue.\textsuperscript{7}

Several troublesome questions pose themselves: (1) Did Dyer, or did he not, operate a ferry in late 1853 and 1854? Some of the early correspondence refers to a pontoon bridge. When was the bridge built? (2) If he operated a ferry at this early date, what kind was

what is known as the Inkoope house, take the first two turns right and you will come to Cedar creek. Go about one quarter mile beyond the Cedar creek bridge and there on the east side of the Big Blue is the old piling.

Juniata ranch is on the west side of the river. Gen. John Stephen Casement acquired the ranch in 1878 and gave it to his son, Dan Dillon Casement, in 1889 on the latter’s 21st birthday. Upon the death of Dan Dillon Casement in March, 1953, the property passed to the heirs, Jack S. Casement of Colorado, Mrs. Harold Furlong of Ohio, and Mrs. Donald Dorn of Mexico City. In December, 1953, the property was purchased by John J. Vanier of Salina.

3. Dan D. Casement and others have expressed the belief that this was the explanation of the name, Juniata.
5. Mrs. John Flick of Manhattan has a letter in her possession written by S. H. Carnahan, Roseburg, Ore., dated October 22, 1948, which quotes information published by the American Bible Society, stating that Dyer was born in Tennessee on July 19, 1801. The letter also mentions that Dyer had been a major in the Black Hawk War.
it? Mrs. John Flick of Manhattan, whose grandfather, David Hays, was one of the first settlers up Cedar creek, thinks that a ferry never operated regularly for any length of time before the government bridge was destroyed in 1856. H. W. Soupene of Manhattan reports that his grandfather told him that he had worked as a stone mason on a bridge there in either 1852 or 1853.

By the time of the official opening of Kansas territory in May, 1854, it was quite evident that a town had emerged on the east side of the river. Under the territorial delineation this was Riley county and not Pottawatomie county as it is today. A number of families had located north of the crossing along Cedar creek on a bit higher ground.

Some of the inhabitants of the Juniata area were Proslavery in sympathy, but early election returns would indicate that there were as many or more antislavery people. Brief treatment of this point follows later in the paper. Families from New England also came into the area along with families from the Old South and border states. One New England group had stopped for a time back at Rock Creek. By November 29, 1854, it appears that they had left Rock Creek. Some returned to Lawrence, and some remained in present Pottawatomie county but moved westward to the Big Blue crossing.

George O. Willard described the new town in his letter of January 7, 1855, which he headed, "Juniata, (on the 'Big Blue River')":

... A town site has been laid off here, and settlers are coming from nearly every State in the Union; about fifty families are here now. The town is on the "Blue River," about five miles from its mouth, and the same distance from the Kansas River, and about 125 miles from the mouth of that river. We are also about twenty miles from Fort Riley. Various tribes of roving Indians are scattered about us, but they are generally peaceable. ... Provisions of all kinds are very dear here at this time. Potatoes and butter we do not get at all. Wages are pretty fair. Any kind of mechanic will make money here another spring.

Game is abundant—I have seen 8 deer in one herd. Turkeys and squirrels are also plenty; quails and prairie hens are abundant. The river is filled with fish weighing from one to one hundred pounds. I ate a portion of one caught in the Kansas, which weighed 76 pounds. There is no ice in the river at this place now. We have a bridge across the Blue river here 300 feet long, built

8. General information on the questions can be found in "Some of the Lost Towns of Kansas," in Kansas Historical Collections, v. 12 (1911-1912), p. 426. No author is listed, but the secretary of the Society and editor of the Collections at the time was George W. Martin.

William E. Smith, Wamego lawyer for many years, reported that when Fort Riley was established in May, 1855, that Dyer "built the government ferry across the Blue at a place called Junietta."—Ibid., v. 17 (1926-1928), p. 461.

by government. The military road from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley passes
here.\textsuperscript{10}

In the same year, 1855, Thomas C. Wells wrote that the cholera was
raging at Fort Riley, where it had caused many deaths.\textsuperscript{11}

For a time the town showed promise of becoming one of the real
cities of the area. Dyer opened a store and what was termed a free
hotel—where all kinds of denominational preaching was permitted.
Dyer, of the Methodist Church, South, was the leading man of the
town. The settlement was often referred to as Dyer’s Town. He
was described in a contemporary account as an old six-foot man
of the Methodist Church, South. His house was said to be “one story
high and three stories long.”\textsuperscript{12} Dyer and his wife kept a “sort of
free hotel and small store” going by hiring help from time to time.
The house was a preaching place for all the denominations, and it
was customary to invite everybody to dinner after preaching. This
pair were a kindly, generous-hearted old couple, and “their free
table and dishonest clerks soon got away with most of their prop-
erty.”\textsuperscript{13}

The first election, that of electing a territorial delegate to the
United States congress, was held in Samuel D. Dyer’s house on
November 29, 1854. This was district ten of the sixteen election
districts first established by governor of the Kansas territory, Andrew
H. Reeder. The minutes which authorized this, read as follows:
“Place of election, the house of S. D. Dyer, at the crossing of the Big
Blue river. Judges: S. D. Houston, Francis Burgereau, and S. D.
Dyer.”\textsuperscript{14}

On December 23, 1854, a commission was issued to Samuel D.
Dyer as justice of the peace for the tenth district. And his son, William
Dyer, was commissioned constable for the tenth district on
January 1, 1855.\textsuperscript{15}

With all this activity, a saloon grew up on each side of the river.
Before long some person had started a blacksmith shop. Mail came
in every week or two via an ambulance and four mules. It stopped
at the cabin of Seth J. Child, from which place it was delivered. It

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp. 148, 149; the bridge referred to in this letter was washed away in Febru-
ary of 1856; see, also, p. 91 in this magazine.

\textsuperscript{11} Thomas C. Wells, “Letters of a Kansas Pioneer 1855-1869,” loc. cit., p. 154. This
letter, written August 9, 1855, was addressed to his mother.

\textsuperscript{12} Isaac T. Goodnow, “Personal Reminiscences and Kansas Emigration, 1853,” in

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} “Executive Minutes.—Minutes Recorded in the Governor’s Office During the Ad-
ministration of Governor Andrew H. Reeder,” in Kansas Historical Collections, v. 3 (1881-
1884), p. 203.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 240, 242.
cost ten cents to send a letter and five cents for a newspaper. A post office was officially established at Juniata on July 25, 1855, and Seth J. Child was made postmaster.16

As early as November, 1854, the Rev. Charles E. Blood of New Hampshire had been laboring as a home missionary at a point about a mile west of Juniata.17 At least on one occasion he preached a sermon at Dyer’s house. It was very likely that this happened more than once, as Blood, a Congregationalist, was active in Juniata affairs. For an interval after first coming to Juniata, the Bloods resided in a lean-to addition at the side of the Dyer cabin. According to Mrs. John Flick and Walter McKeen the first wedding on Cedar creek took place August 22, 1855, when William Dyer and Melissa Jane Hanna said, “I do.” Later in the same year, Lydia Dyer married George Jamison.18

Juniata seemed to grow as long as the $10,000 government bridge held. But ice flow and flood water destroyed the bridge in February, 1856. Mrs. Asahel G. Allen’s diary tells that heavy rains had broken the ice and on February 26, 1856, she noted the results as follows: “The bridge was destroyed by the ice today; a great inconvenience to us as our claim is on the other side of the river from our house.”19

The quartermaster at Fort Riley sent a new boat over and asked Dyer to operate it at the crossing where the bridge had formerly existed. Without first obtaining a license from the Riley county officials, Dyer started to operate a ferry. By June, 1856, there was a suit against him in the probate court. A fine of $200 was fixed, but there is no evidence that it was ever paid. Friends of Dyer circulated two petitions in his favor and sent them to the governor of the territory. The first petition was signed by William Dyer, James Dyer, C. R. Mobly, A. A. Garrett, A. C. Allen, William F. Allen, C. N. Wilson, and possibly others. Another petition was also circulated which included a longer list of signatures. Some of the signers of the second one were people like S. D. Houston, David Hays, Robert Hays, John Pipher, Tunis I. Roosa, Iva Taylor, J. R. McClure, and others. No further mention of the matter of the suit

16. Letter, W. W. Hovey, First assistant postmaster general, Washington, D. C., to F. G. Kimball of Manhattan, dated February 24, 1898. Mrs. John Flick of Manhattan has a copy of this letter.
18. Information concerning weddings and many other family affairs can be found in “A History of Cedar Creek.” The data was secured from families of the Cedar creek community and compiled by Mrs. John Flick and Walter McKeen. McKeen typed several copies of this booklet. Mrs. Flick of Manhattan has one copy.
19. Mrs. Asahel G. Allen’s diary is in the Ms. division, Kansas State Historical Society.
is made in the records of the governor’s office which were turned over to the archives of the State Historical Society.\textsuperscript{20}

On August 5, 1856, the post office was moved across the Big Blue river and officially opened at a spot approximately one half mile west of the crossing on the Big Blue.\textsuperscript{21} This, the new post office, was called Tauromee (at times also spelled “Tauroma,” “Tarromee,” and “Tauroru”).

A person born at the Tauromee post office on September 7, 1856, is living in Manhattan as of this writing. Mrs. Ella Child Carroll, past 97 years of age, remembers much of her early childhood. She is the daughter of that first postmaster, Seth J. Child. As she recalls this post office, it consisted of a pigeonhole, roll-top desk in the corner of their one-room log cabin. When Child wanted to close the post office, he merely pulled the top of the desk down and snapped a lock. Mrs. Carroll says that theirs was the first house on the west side of the river to have glass windows and real lime chinking between the logs. On March 26, 1858, the United States government discontinued this post office of Tauromee.\textsuperscript{22} There had never been a town there, since most of the people lived east of the river near Juniata.

The following disputed matter continues to crop up: Was Samuel D. Dyer Proslavery in sympathy? Numerous references are made to the matter—some contradictory. Usually Juniata was referred to as a Proslavery town, but this is not necessarily proof that it was. Probably the majority of people living in this general area at the time considered both Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley to be under Proslavery administration. The first election held in the Kansas territory, November 29, 1854, found 87 votes cast in the Big Blue district. The majority of voters failed to select a clear-cut candidate on the slave issue as the returns show: (1) Proslavery John W. Whitfield, two votes; (2) Free-State John A. Wakefield, six votes; (3) Administration Democrat R. P. Fenniken (not committed on slave issue) 29 votes.\textsuperscript{23} Of course the Juniata population made up only a part of the Big Blue district electorate.

In January, 1888, Prof. Isaac T. Goodnow read a paper at the


\textsuperscript{21} Letter from the first assistant postmaster general, W. W. Howes, to F. G. Kimball, see Footnote 16.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} The original affidavits of the results of the November 29, 1854, election are in the Archives division, Kansas State Historical Society.
annual meeting of the State Historical Society. His paper told of a trip he made with Gen. Samuel C. Pomeroy through the Big Blue crossing in 1855. Goodnow’s paper stated that on “the fifth day, on the Government road, five miles above where Manhattan is now situated, on the Big Blue, we struck Juniata, a little Pro-Slavery town, close by a Government bridge, built at an expense of $10,000.”

In 1853 and 1854 there is little mention of Samuel D. Dyer in connection with slavery. Dyer may have expressed more positive views on the matter as the slave issue “warmed up” in Kansas. Or it is possible that he kept most of his opinions to himself. Thomas C. Wells had a very definite opinion as to Dyer’s stand. But there is no certainty that Wells had assessed the situation correctly. A letter written April 13, 1856, by Wells to his mother reads:

Mr. Dyer has turned strong proslavery and they have got a proslavery minister there of the Methodist Church South, who says “he would as leave sell a nigger as an ox.” They have organized a church under proslavery influence and intend to do all they can to bring slaves into Kansas and drive out the yankees “for,” they say, “they do not want eastern men to rule the territory.”

Years later, in 1906, Dyer’s daughter, Sarah, who married a Mr. Woodard and moved to the state of Washington, referred to her father and the slavery question in this way: “My father had southern principles but he did not believe in slavery. He had friends on both sides fighting during the war.” If Dyer supported the Southern cause it was almost a certainty that many people of Kansas territory would place him squarely in the Proslavery camp regardless of the merits of such a classification. The meaning of Sarah Dyer Woodard’s words “southern principles” is not clear. Does she refer to state rights, white supremacy, both of these, or something else such as lower tariffs?

There are other references in the historical record to the effect that Samuel D. Dyer was Proslavery minded. But at the same time one can find some references stating that he was a “free-State Democrat,” so the question is still unanswered. This much seems clear. Dyer was not aggressive nor was the town aggressive in any slave-minded way. The record also points out that Dyer and his family were respected and well liked in the community.

The slavery discussion would merit but little attention here if it were not for the fact that it affords one feeble measuring stick for

reassessing that “passionate” territorial period. If one influential family and a promising little town might possibly have been mistakenly labeled for one hundred years, what other similar but more significant errors are still being read into the record?

Isaac T. Goodnow has summarized the main reasons which were at play in the decline and death of Juniata town: “The destruction of the bridge, . . . and the changing of the Government road, with the rivalry of Manhattan, which followed, effectually wiped out the town.” Goodnow also expressed the belief that in Kansas no Proslavery town could live by the side of a Free-State town.27

In any event, Juniata could have had little hope left when in March, 1858, the post office of Taumee was discontinued. The two factors which were the most important in bringing on the death of Juniata, were: (1) the military road was moved down the river closer to its mouth; and (2) the growth of rival Manhattan town with its definite antislavery atmosphere.

Almost a half century after Juniata’s decease, Gen. John A. Haldeman, talking of former-day possible Kansas capital sites, quoted Governor Reeder as having said: “I remember old Squire Dyer, at the ‘Crossing of the Blue,’ had hopes for his place.” 28

Juniata soon passed out along with many lost towns. Yet, although it did not become the capital of Kansas, it is not forgotten either.