Cyrus Kurtz Holliday  
(1826-1900)

Mary Jones Holliday  
(1834-1908)

The Cyrus Hollidays about the time of their marriage in Meadville, Pa., June 11, 1854. Daguerreotypes courtesy of Katherine Kellam Burpee and Louise Kellam Smithies.
Quotations from letters which newly arrived Cyrus K. Holliday, one of the founders of Topeka and of the Santa Fe railroad, wrote his young wife Mary, whom he temporarily left back East while he sought new opportunities in the West—

From Lawrence, November 18, 1854:

I am perfectly delighted with the Country. You may tell those who inquire that my idea of the country is simply this—that God might have made a better country than Kansas but so far as my knowledge extends he certainly never did. I am bound to make it my home if I can at all succeed in making suitable business arrangements.

From Topeka ("‘Up the River,’ K. T.," he wrote, for the five-day-old city had not yet been named), December 10, 1854:

A more lovely country I certainly never saw—and yet it looks worse now than at any other season. I am told by those who know that in the spring and early summer when the grass and shrubbery and flowers appear it is beautiful beyond conception. So I think it must be. And in a few years when civilization by its magic influence shall have transformed this glorious country from what it now is to the brilliant destiny awaiting it, the sun in all his course will visit no land more truly lovely and desirable than this. Here, Mary, with God's kind permission, we will make our home.
The Early Career of C. K. Holliday
A Founder of Topeka and of the Santa Fe Railroad
Frederick F. Seely

Cyrus Kurtz Holliday’s roots lay deep in Pennsylvania. The Holliday family, early pioneers of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian stock, about 1760 had settled the area of Blair county now called Hollidaysburg and had had a rugged time doing it, for several members of the family had been killed in Indian raids. It was here that Holliday’s father, David, was born. In 1809 David Holliday went east to Franklin county and married a Mary Kennedy; soon thereafter he took a post as accountant in the great Carlisle Iron Works, located at Boiling Springs five miles south of town.

Here, near Carlisle, Cyrus Kurtz Holliday was born April 3, 1826, the youngest of seven children. After the death of David Holliday about 1830, his widow followed a married daughter to Massillon, Ohio, about 1837, taking her three youngest children with her, and she remained in Ohio until she joined C. K. Holliday and his brother George in Topeka, where she died in 1859.

Young Holliday’s early years in Ohio remain obscure; it is likely that he was living in the vicinity of Wooster, where his brother David Hayes Holliday had settled, and he gave Wooster, Ohio, as his home address when he registered at Allegheny College in the fall of 1848.

Holliday’s choice of Allegheny College, 140 miles northeast of Wooster, may have been determined by several factors. The College of Wooster was not then in existence, and in the late 1840’s Allegheny was enjoying a fresh burst of vitality and expansion. In 1847 Pres. Homer J. Clark had retired in ill health, and a former professor had been called back as president, John W. Barker. Barker’s qualities as a great teacher and his inspiring energy seemed to fire the college into new life. Furthermore, the Methodist church had strengthened its support of the institution and Allegheny was being recommended by preachers, circuit riders, and teachers through the states lying to the south and west. The new “perpetual scholarships” had yielded $60,000 in cash and were already bring-

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ing scores of new students to the campus. The college was ready to advance into one of the greatest decades in its history, the 1850's.4

A total of 226 new students entered Allegheny that year of 1848, though the majority of these were enrolled in the preparatory department. The total enrollment in the four college classes was slightly over 100, and a faculty of five was responsible for their instruction.

In those years Allegheny's entrance requirements included a reading knowledge of Latin and basic groundwork in Greek. If a boy lacked these important tools to a classical education, he might obtain them by attending what was then called the preparatory department before he was formally admitted to college. Holliday entered college directly, so obviously he had already begun his classical education before coming to Meadville. Although records are not to be found, there were several small academies or preparatory schools in the Wooster area in the decade of the 1840's; one or two were in the town of Wooster itself, and two or three others were located in nearby settlements. Undoubtedly at one of these Holliday prepared for college, possibly teaching at intervals in the common schools in order to save enough money for college, for he was 22 years old when he registered as a freshman at Allegheny.

When he made the journey from Wooster to Meadville in the fall of 1848, young Holliday was evidently accompanied by a young man named William B. Allison, later a distinguished senator from Iowa, coauthor of the Bland-Allison act, and in 1896 a candidate for the Republican nomination for president, which ultimately fell to his fellow-Alleghenian, William McKinley. Allison gave his home address as Ashland county (formerly a part of Wayne county), Ohio, and during their freshman year the two young men roomed and boarded themselves together.5

The college at that time, located in a community of 2,500, was situated on a sparsely wooded hill a little distance from the town, with fields enclosing it, and a rail fence surrounding the college property itself. In 1850 a new plank walk was extended up the hill to the college. Bentley Hall, erected in 1822, was the only college building, but by the late 1840's it was proving inadequate for the rapidly growing student body, and in 1851, Holliday's junior year, President Barker undertook the erection of Ruter Hall, which was used for a chapel, library, and recitation hall.

The geographical distribution of students at this time is worthy of note. Of the 22 men in Holliday's class, 1852, 11 came from Pennsylvania, five from Ohio, four from New York state, one from Vermont, and one from Mississippi. Many of these classmates, as well as others of his college contemporaries, were later to make distinguished names for themselves, and their achievements are testimony of the kind of education which the college then furnished, as well as a measure of the intellectual climate which helped to mature and develop men like Holliday. A few were: Judge N. E. Worthington '54, of the U. S. Labor Commission; Ben F. Martin '54, congressman from West Virginia; Albert Long '52, missionary to Bulgaria and vice-president of Robert College; Judge Christopher Heydrick '52, of the superior court of Pennsylvania; Thomas Wilson '52, chief justice of Minnesota; Ephraim Miller '55, dean of the University of Kansas; James Marvin '51, chancellor of the University of Kansas; and James A. Gary '55, postmaster general under McKinley.

Holliday's undergraduate life seems to have been divided between his academic work and his activities with the Allegheny Literary Society, one of the two active organizations which flourished on the campus before they were displaced by Greek letter fraternities. The minute books of the society reveal that Holliday joined the Allegheny Literary Society in April, 1849, and remained an active member until his graduation.6 His Ohio friend and roommate, Allison, was admitted to membership at the same time, although he left college the following summer. In the fall of his senior year Holliday was elected speaker (the equivalent of president) of the group, and toward the end of that year he was active in its financial affairs, for he served as chairman of at least three committees, one of which was formed in 1852 to consider the practicability of establishing a literary paper in Meadville, a project which apparently did not materialize.

But if he handled the society's funds, he also contributed to them in the form of fines, which were promptly imposed upon members for any impropriety of conduct. On various occasions he was fined 6½ cents for leaning his head against the wall, one shilling for leaving the hall without permission, one shilling for wearing boots in the hall instead of the required slippers, and 6½ cents for improper posture during the meeting. He seems not to have been guilty of one of the most common offenses: spitting on the carpet.

At this time Allegheny was operating on a three-term plan with a six-weeks' vacation during the summer.7 The curriculum, char-

7. Smith, op. cit., p. 139.
acteristic of almost all colleges in this era, was based solidly upon the classics, and Latin and Greek were studied during all four years. Mathematics and logic accompanied the classics, and during one's senior year the fare was varied somewhat by the inclusion of some astronomy, mineralogy, political economy, and international law. This was the course of study, with little flexibility permitted, which Holliday pursued.

All five men who presided over the curriculum were Methodist clergymen, but many religious denominations were represented in the student body. Although the college took pride in being non-sectarian, it was quick to defend orthodoxy when under attack by the Unitarian forces of the Meadville Theological School, recently founded on the town's opposite hill. Probably to bait the faculty, in the spring of 1851 the Allegheny Literary Society extended an invitation to the president of the Unitarian school to give the annual commencement address at the college. It was C. K. Holliday who introduced the resolution. The Allegheny faculty and trustees swung into action at once, not only blocking the plan, but temporarily closing down the impudent society. Holliday and a fellow member offered to resign from the society, but their resignations were rejected.\(^8\)

Although there may have been split feelings on the matter of religion, the Meadville area was vigorous in its antislavery sentiment. Sparked by the New England Abolitionist connections of the Unitarian Theological School and supported by the strong Whig and Free-Soil sentiment in the northwestern corner of the state, as well as the religious attitude of the college, Meadville had long been ranked as an implacable foe of slavery. Undoubtedly the years which Holliday spent in this atmosphere confirmed him in the strong Free-State position which he was later to take in Kansas.

Holliday's graduation exercises, of a class numbering 22 men, were held on June 30, 1852, in the Methodist Episcopal church in Meadville. The ceremonies began soon after nine in the morning and, with a brief intermission for lunch, concluded shortly before five that afternoon.\(^9\) Holliday's standing in his class is not revealed, but in one of the obituaries published in a Topeka paper at his death, usually a time for superlatives, we find the statement, "he was graduated with highest honors." The minute books of the Allegheny Literary Society reveal that he was elected valedictorian of that group.\(^10\)

10. February 28, 1852.
At the age of 26 then, Holliday had won his A.B. degree, and possessed a sound foundation not only in the classics, but in parliamentary procedure and debate, gained from the exacting formal exercises of the literary society.

Sometime in the months following his graduation from college Holliday became associated with the George W. Howard Company, a firm of contractors engaged in grading railroad rights of way. George Howard was then a resident of Meadville and was allied in this business with his brothers Sebra and William. Charles Howard, a Detroit broker, was also involved in their activities. The exact nature of Holliday's association with these men is not clear, but it is evident that he was a copartner in their enterprises, for he is so described in the testimony of a hearing in which the Howard company brought action against Crawford county in the controversy concerning payment for work done for the Pittsburgh and Erie Branch railroad.\textsuperscript{11} It was this alliance with the Howard brothers which introduced Holliday into railroad building and initiated him into the difficulties with which he was later to be faced when organizing the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad in Kansas.

It appears that his acquaintance with George W. Howard began soon after his graduation from college. This is established by a photostated scrap of paper in a collection of Holliday letters and papers preserved by the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka. It is a signed agreement, framed in impressively legal language, between George W. Howard and C. K. Holliday, dated November 25, 1852. By its terms Holliday agreed to tutor the two eldest Howard children and to hear a certain number of recitations each day, in return for which he would be boarded at the Howard home for the reduced rate of 87½ cents per week. It was stipulated, however, that this amount did not include lights or fuel.

The undertaking upon which the Howard firm now embarked, though promising at first, proved ill-fated.

The Pittsburgh & Erie Railroad Company had been chartered in 1845 to run a line from the port of Erie to Pittsburgh, but the company had been unable to obtain adequate stock subscriptions and little work had been done. In the summer of 1852, while Holliday was graduating from college, the company made an overture to the people of Meadville to build a connecting line between New York state and Ohio under the branch powers of its charter, but little action was taken until the following summer. In August, 1853, the

commissioners of Crawford county and the grand jury recommended, subject to an expression of public opinion, a subscription of $200,000, to be issued in bonds, toward the construction of the road. The proposal was overwhelmingly approved, and the Howard company’s estimate for the construction work was accepted. Ground was officially broken August 20, 1853, for a line which would run southwest of Meadville toward the Ohio border.

It is certain that Holliday was working with the Howards before this date, as the testimony of one of Howard’s laborers, a Philip Mulligan, in the action against Crawford county referred to above, states that in July, 1853, Holliday was with Howard in Ohio, where the firm had contracted for another railroad construction job.

Opposition to the project arose, however; money was scarce, and work faltered, although the Howard brothers and Holliday continued the task of grading, and constructing the embankments. In the summer of 1854 a dispute arose concerning the amount of payment due for the work. The Howards had received $12,000 of county bonds, $1,500 in cash, and $2,150 in stock, but claimed that much more was due. The funds of the Pittsburgh and Erie branch company had been exhausted, so the Howards ceased work on September 24, 1854, and the contract was formally declared abandoned on November 1.

As compensation for his work with the Howards, Holliday seems to have been paid in part by stock in the railroad and perhaps in Crawford county bonds. James Marshall in his history of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad states that at the termination of the contract he possessed the sum of $20,000, which he used to finance his ventures in Kansas. Writing from Topeka in September, 1855, to his wife in Meadville, he instructed her to sell “one of those Bonds.” If he was here referring to the Crawford county bonds, he was either fortunate or shrewd in disposing of them before they were annulled by the Pennsylvania supreme court in 1858.

Later in Topeka, Holliday was admitted to the Kansas bar on

16. There ensued a long and tangled series of suits and countersuits involving the Howard company, the Pittsburgh and Erie Railroad Company, and Crawford county. The county’s bonds were eventually declared invalid. The controversy was not settled until May, 1891, when the Howards obtained a judgment of $15,000 after 36 years in the Pennsylvania courts.—*Ibid*.
January 18, 1862, and he was engaged in law practice with Thomas G. Thornton. It is possible that he read law while still in Meadville, but no positive evidence of this appears, and the Prothonotary's records do not show that he was ever a member of the Crawford county bar.

During Holliday's senior year in college, on January 7, 1852, he was initiated into Crawford Lodge No. 234 of the Masonic Order, and soon after his establishment in Kansas he was instrumental in instituting Topeka Lodge No. 17.

Holliday's marriage occurred on June 11, 1854, immediately following the Sunday evening service in the Methodist Episcopal church, with the Rev. Dr. John Barker, president of the college, officiating. The bride was Mary Jones, age 20, fourth child of James and Susan Jones, long-time residents of Meadville. If the faint handwriting in the U.S. census records of 1850 may be read correctly, her father was a dairyman.

It was soon after his marriage that affairs between the Howard company and the Pittsburgh & Erie Branch railroad reached a critical point. The unlikelihood that the road would be completed and the difficulty of obtaining payment from the railroad company undoubtedly moved Holliday to consider other opportunities, and Kansas, in that summer of 1854, promised to be an exciting and profitable adventure.

The Kansas-Nebraska bill was finally passed by congress in May, 1854, and President Pierce signed it on May 30. Throughout the nation debate ran high as to whether Kansas would be eventually listed in the column of the free or the slave states. A month after Holliday's marriage, the Crawford Democrat printed the full text of the bill and editorially urged that every reader familiarize himself with the provisions of this vital act. Excitement in Meadville was intense. Throughout the summer each issue of both local newspapers carried news about Kansas, and in August a mass convention was called in Meadville to oppose the extension of slavery and to resist the encroachments made on free territory. In the village of

20. For this information I am indebted to John H. Pendleton, secretary of Crawford Lodge No. 234.
23. The certainty of identification of her father could be questioned when examining William Reynolds' manuscript, "Reminiscences of Early Citizens," written in 1900, p. 28, where Reynolds states that a Peter Jones, who died in November, 1857, had a daughter who married C. K. Holliday. When Reynolds wrote this, however, he was at an advanced age and it is likely that he confused Peter Jones with James Jones. The census records reveal that Peter Jones' family could not have been that of which Mary was a member.
Conneautville, 20 miles northwest, a company of emigrants known as the Western Pennsylvania Kansas Company was organizing and departed by canal and riverboat for Kansas in October. Holliday determined to investigate the opportunities in the new land.

The journey from Meadville out to Kansas territory in 1854 was still a long and trying adventure. Holliday's letters to his wife and one long letter directed to and published January 30, 1855, in the Crawford Democrat furnish rather complete information concerning his journey out to Kansas and his early efforts to establish himself in the new territory.

Mary accompanied him to Erie on October 30, 1854; there the farewell took place, probably a very anxious one, for she was pregnant with their first child, Lillie, who was to be born the following March. Holliday traveled by train to Cleveland, then to Chicago, to St. Louis, and finally by riverboat to Kansas City, a crude frontier town of 500, where he arrived on November 7 after nine days of travel, though he broke the journey at Cleveland and again at Chicago. It was 1,219 miles as Holliday reckoned it; the total cost of his transportation he reported as $31.25. He was accompanied by his brother-in-law, A. P. Ingraham, husband of Matilda Jones, but Ingraham remained only two weeks in the new country and returned to Meadville to conduct a stationery and "Yankee notions" store.

In Kansas City, Holliday rested a few days and was perhaps impeded by the weather, for he wrote that rain, snow, and cold made his stay there very disagreeable. Next he moved west about 40 miles by stagecoach to the frontier village of Lawrence. From here, on Christmas day, he composed a long letter to his Meadville friend, James E. McFarland, editor of the Crawford Democrat, and which was duly published at the end of January. Two weeks later he wrote a second letter which almost glows with his enthusiasm for Kansas. The mild climate, the richness of the soil, the abundance of water, and the great variety of crops which could easily be raised in the new land were the aspects which most inspired him.

"The Creator," he declared, "might have made a better country than the Kansas; but so far as my knowledge extends, he certainly never did."

Here was to be his future home!

20. Crawford Democrat, November 7, 1854.
28. Crawford Democrat, February 20, 1855.