



# MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY PRESERVATION ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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## The Great Exodus of 1879

The Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation changed the cultural landscape of America. After the war, the Confederate states rejoined the Union, and reconstructed state governments were established. Slavery was abolished, and the former slaves were granted civil rights, including the right to vote. It was the period known as Reconstruction, and it was a tumultuous time for the nation, especially in the South.

The impact of the war had been particularly devastating in the South. A significant portion of the able-bodied men had been killed in the war. Major cities were left in ruin. The Confederate dollar was worthless, and the abolition of slavery meant the Southern economy had to be restructured. It was against this backdrop of the Reconstruction South that freed slaves struggled to find financial security and true freedom.

Many Southern whites resented the abolition of slavery, and they took their resentment out on the freed slaves in the form of violence in an attempt to undermine the former slaves' sense of independence. Other Southerners duped the poorly educated freed slaves and took advantage of them at every opportunity. Large landowners, lacking slaves to work the land, resorted to leasing plots to African Americans to farm. The tenant



Above, an example of Benjamin Singleton's handbills, promoting migration to Kansas. The image is courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS FN-6, #KS-49-14.

farmers struggled to earn enough to cover the rent, so they would sign on for another year of tenant farming to pay off their debts, and found themselves trapped in an endless cycle. Shortly after Pres. Rutherford B. Hayes was sworn into office in 1877, he removed the last remaining federal troops from the capitals of Reconstruction states, causing African Americans to fear their civil rights were no longer protected. The former slaves continued to be ill-treated and oppressed, and felt hopeless that the situation would ever change.

Beginning in 1877, there was a growing interest among freed slaves to leave the South and to emigrate to a place where they could feel

truly free. Some were intrigued with the idea of relocating to the African country of Liberia, but for others, a transatlantic trip was too daunting, and migrating to Kansas was a reasonable alternative (Painter). Kansas had entered the Union as a free state, and John Brown's exploits during the Bleeding Kansas years were well known, stimulating the imaginations of former slaves that Kansas was the ideal place to settle.

Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, who was a former slave, emerged as a vocal supporter of the notion of African Americans leaving the South and resettling in Kansas. He believed it was important for African Americans to own their own farmland, and high land prices in Southern states made that difficult to accomplish. In 1870 and 1873, small groups of men visited Kansas to test the waters, and both groups saw favorable homesteading possibilities. Benjamin began holding community meetings and distributing handbills, encouraging former slaves to emigrate to Kansas. Benjamin Singleton played an important role in the migration to Kansas as did a handful of others, but there was no defined leader of the movement to flee the South (Painter).

The exodus, sometimes referred to as the Kansas Fever Exodus, (continued on pg. 2)

(continued from pg. 1)  
 occurred in the spring of 1879, when thousands of former slaves left the South and headed for Kansas in hopes of finding a better life. The emigrants were referred to as “exodusters” or “exodites.” This was due, in part, because there was a spiritual aspect to the migration. The exodusters’ journey was often compared to the biblical story of the Hebrews fleeing bondage in Egypt, and Kansas was the exodusters’ promised land. One of the remarkable aspects of the exodus was it lacked organized leadership, and in spite of the lack of organization, a mass of people chose to suddenly migrate in the span of only a few months (Painter).

Many exodusters had been led to believe that if they could get to St. Louis, they would then be provided with free transportation to Kansas, and once in Kansas, they would be provided with free land. When they arrived in St. Louis and learned there was no free transportation or free land, the exodusters’ determination to make it the rest of the way to Kansas remained firm, as none wanted to return to the South, where some feared slavery would be re-established (Painter).

Benjamin Singleton was an advocate for establishing colonies comprised of all African Americans, and many of the early groups of emigrants who followed him to Kansas settled in a colony. These groups of emigrants made the trip to Kansas in a more organized manner and came with the financial means to start new lives (“Benjamin”). The wave of exodusters who traveled to Kansas in 1879 was largely destitute, and the communities where they relocated were not prepared to

handle an influx of impoverished people (“Benjamin”).

In April 1879, a ship carrying 240 exodusters was refused landing at Wyandotte. The ship headed to Kansas City to land, and the citizens of Kansas City quickly raised the necessary funds to send the exodusters on to Manhattan (National, *African American Resources*), where 104 of the passengers departed (“The Exodites”). An April 25, 1879, newspaper account noted, “There are two car loads of the colored Exodus now at the depot . . . They have fled from their Egypt of bondage and oppression into the land they have been taught to believe is the Canaan of freedom. They should be given a chance to earn the birthright of every American citizen” (“There”).

This first group of exodusters to arrive in Manhattan was described as destitute, and Manhattan residents quickly took action to help them. The exodusters were taken to an old paper mill to provide them with temporary shelter while residents sorted out what to do (“The Exodites”).

A meeting of Manhattan’s prominent citizens was held at George Higinbotham’s store to discuss the exodusters. The group drafted a resolution, which stated, “Resolved, That we would be untrue to our former history and the dictates of humanity if we did not extend them a cordial welcome to the free soil of Kansas . . .” (“The Exodites”). Dr. Patee offered to treat the sick and provide medicine at no cost. The city took charge of the commissary department to provide food, and citizens worked to find the exodusters employment and housing. Several of the exodusters had only first names, and a group of residents organized to



Above, a vintage photograph of the Bethel A.M.E. Church, courtesy of the Riley County Historical Society and Museum.

help them select surnames (National, *African American Resources*).

In a span of a few days, it was reported that 70 exodusters had found work and were now taking care of themselves (“The Exodites”). Many of the exodusters found work on farms and were provided with housing on the farm. Manhattan’s white residents received aid from the Kansas Freedman’s Relief Association to purchase land near the base of Bluemont Hill for the exodusters. The land was divided among 31 families who were given 19 years to pay for it. The relief funds were also used to purchase horses and farm equipment and to construct barracks for housing (National, *African American Resources*). A July 1879 newspaper notice stated that several exodusters had accumulated enough savings to purchase lots and had begun to build homes (“Several”). By November 1879, it was reported that “quite a little village has sprung up in the southwest part of town” where the exodusters had built homes (“Quite”). By December 1879, only one family was still receiving city assistance and was living in the old paper mill, and there were plans to find (continued on pg. 3)

(continued from pg. 2)

them better accommodations for the winter (“The last Exodite”).

Another concern was how to provide education for the exodusters’ children. In 1865, there were nine African Americans living in Manhattan, so it had not been necessary to consider separate schooling options for nonwhite students. By 1880, African Americans represented 14% of Manhattan’s population, and the state had granted permission in 1879 for communities to have separate schools. In 1884, Manhattan decided to provide separate classrooms for nonwhite students within the same school buildings as whites (National, *African American Resources*).

The Second Methodist Episcopal Church, which was an African American church established in 1866, served Manhattan’s nonwhite population, and some white churches also provided separate sections for nonwhite parishioners (National, Bethel). With the arrival of the exodusters and the increase of the number of African American church-goers, there was an urgent need to establish more places of worship. The Bethel A.M.E. Church was organized in October 1879, and many of its founding members were former slaves.

The Bethel congregation purchased land at the corner of Fourth and Yuma Streets for a building, and a small, wood-frame church was built on the lot in 1880. A second wood-frame church replaced the original structure and was built in 1916. The current brick building on the lot was constructed in 1927 (National, Bethel).

The Second (now Pilgrim) Baptist Church was organized a

few months later in 1880.

Originally, the congregation met in rooms in the former Avenue School located on Poyntz Avenue. Land at the corner of Ninth and Yuma Streets was purchased, and a wood-frame church was built in 1882 by the congregation. Work on the current brick building began in 1915 and was completed in 1917, and a new sanctuary was added in 1982 (National, Second). Both the Second Baptist Church and the Bethel A.M.E. Church are listed on the National Register.

Whether there are additional existing structures in Manhattan with direct ties to the original exodusters is difficult to determine. The activities of African Americans were not well documented during that time period, especially in a community where there was no African American newspaper.

After the initial wave of exodusters arrived in 1879, small groups of exodusters continued to arrive in Manhattan in 1880 and 1881. A May 1881 newspaper article noted that the number of exodusters arriving had greatly slowed and had almost stopped (“Why”). Kansans had estimated that 40,000-60,000 exodusters had moved to the state, and the 1880 U.S. Census showed the number of African Americans was 43,000 (“It”), which represented an increase of 26,000 people (Painter). Exodusters settled in other states, but Kansas received the largest number of emigrants (Davis).

In later years, Manhattan followed the segregation and discrimination practices occurring across the nation, but when the first exodusters arrived 140 years ago, they found a community with a more open mind. Manhattan’s residents tapped into our community’s abolitionist roots and helped the exodusters settle in,



Above, the Second (Pilgrim) Baptist Church.

start new lives, and become independent.

“Benjamin ‘Pap’ Singleton.” Kansas State Historical Society. Web. 19 March 2019.

Davis, Kenneth S. “Kansas: A Bicentennial History.” *The Manhattan Mercury*. 18 July 1976: D6.

“The Exodites.” *Manhattan Enterprise*. 2 May 1879: 1.

“It was supposed.” *The Nationalist*. 25 August 1881: 4.

“The last Exodite.” *Manhattan Enterprise*. 26 December 1879: 8.

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. *African American Resources in Manhattan, KS*, Manhattan, Riley County, Kansas.

National Register of Historic Places, Bethel A.M.E. Church, Manhattan, Riley County, KS.

National Register of Historic Places, Second Baptist Church, Manhattan, Riley County, KS.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976.

“Quite a little village.” *Manhattan Enterprise*. 21 November 1879: 1.

“Several of the exodites.” *The Nationalist*. 25 July 1879: 1.

“There are two car loads.” *Manhattan Enterprise*. 25 April 1879: 1.

“Why is it?” *The Nationalist*. 25 May 1881: 4.

# Added to the National Register

The Pioneer Log Cabin, located in City Park, and the Wolf House Historic District, located on the northeast corner of Fremont Street and Juliette Avenue, were recently added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The Riley County Historical Society (RCHS) organized in 1914 and began collecting artifacts associated with the settlement of Riley County. A place to store and display the artifacts was needed, and historical society members decided to construct a settler’s log cabin to serve as a museum.

Work on the cabin began in 1915, which was the 60th anniversary of Manhattan’s founding. Local older settlers with experience in log cabin construction lent their expertise to building the cabin, which was built without the aid of nails, bolts, steel, iron or other modern materials.

The cabin was completed in time for July 4th celebrations in 1916 and was formally dedicated later in October as a memorial to the pioneers who settled the

county. The Pioneer Log Cabin served as the first Riley County Historical Museum and continues to function as a museum and representation of pioneer life.

The Wolf House Historic District includes the Wolf House Museum, the Mansfield House, the Moses Cottage, and the Wolf House Photography Studio, which are all owned by the RCHS. The district was nominated for registry listing because of its contributions to the areas of settlement, commerce, conservation, and architecture.

The Wolf House and the Mansfield House are in their original locations, and they are excellent examples of early stone structures in Manhattan and are representative works of master stone masons. The Moses Cottage and the Wolf Photography Studio were both moved to their current locations by Lucile Wolf in 1957 when the structures were in the way of expanding the parking lots for the Riley County Courthouse and the Carnegie Library.

Manhattan is fortunate to have



Top, the Pioneer Log Cabin. Bottom, the Wolf House Museum.

these important cultural resources to help residents appreciate and interpret life in early Manhattan.

The Wolf House Museum is open for tours on Saturdays and Sundays, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m., or by appointment. The Pioneer Log Cabin is open on Sundays, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m., from April to October, or by appointment.

## Free, If You Move Them

The houses located at 1100 Bluemont Avenue and 809 North 11th Street are slated to be demolished to make way for an apartment complex. The owner of the houses is willing to offer the houses for free to a qualified party who is interested in moving either or both of them. All expenses associated with moving the houses would be the responsibility of the new owner. Demolition is scheduled to occur in June, so

relocation of the houses would need to occur before the scheduled demolition.

Anyone who is interested should contact the M/RCPA at [mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mrcpanewsletter@gmail.com), and we will put you in touch with the owner. Serious inquiries only, please.

Top, 1100 Bluemont Ave., and the bottom photo is 809 N. 11th St.



## 2019 Historic Preservation Building Awards

Thursday, May 9th  
Union Pacific Depot  
7:00 p.m.

All M/RCPA members are invited to attend the Historic Preservation Building Awards. The program is free and open to the public, so bring a guest! There will be opening remarks at 7:00 p.m., and the remainder of the program will be an open house, come-and-go type of event.

Parking is limited at the depot. Additional parking is available at the Flint Hills Discovery Center with easy access to the depot via the pedestrian underpass.



Above, 720 Poyntz Avenue, which was recognized with a Historic Preservation Building Award in 2015.

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## In Memoriam

The M/RCPA mourns the passing of two of our organization's honorary lifetime members: Rose Bissey and Dr. Patricia J. O'Brien.

Honorary lifetime membership is reserved for M/RCPA members who

have exhibited exceptional service to historic preservation. Honorary lifetime membership may only be achieved through approval by the Board of Directors.

### Rose Bissey

Rose (Gallemore) Bissey was born Nov. 8, 1932, and passed away on Feb. 5, 2019, at the age of 86.

She taught elementary music in Green, KS, and was a secretary at Kansas State University, the American Institute of Baking, and Schwab-Eaton PA.

On June 27, 1958, she married Charles Bissey, who preceded her in death. Charles was a professor emeritus of architectural engineering and construction science. He used his

knowledge of structural engineering to find creative ways to save many historic structures. Prof. Bissey was posthumously recognized for his years of service with the M/RCPA's Exemplary Service in Historic Preservation award in 2009.

The Bisseys were dedicated supporters of historic preservation. The M/RCPA honored their many years of dedication by bestowing honorary lifetime membership upon Rose Bissey in 2011.

### Patricia J. O'Brien

Patricia J. O'Brien was born on April 1, 1935, and passed away on March 24, 2019, at the age of 83.

Pat graduated from the University of Illinois with a bachelor's of art in anthropology in 1962 and a Ph. D. in 1969. She became an assistant professor of archaeology and sociology at Kansas State University in 1967, retiring as a professor emerita in 1998.

During retirement, Pat purchased and renovated an apartment building, which had been designed by prominent local architect Henry B. Winter. She began researching the architect, and the project grew to researching other well-known architects who were involved in the creation of Manhattan's built environment. Pat compiled her extensive research into a book, entitled The Architects and

Buildings of Manhattan, Kansas. The Kansas Preservation Alliance honored Pat with the Advocacy Award for Excellence in 2009 for the research and effort she had put into her book.

Pat also published Digging K-State: The History of Bluemont Central College, which was based on findings from the final archaeological field methods student project of her career.

Pat served on the M/RCPA's Board of Directors for several years and served as president during 2008-10. She was recognized for her years of service with the M/RCPA's Exemplary Service in Historic Preservation award in 2006. The M/RCPA's Board of Directors bestowed honorary lifetime membership upon Dr. Patricia J. O'Brien in 2011.

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## *2018-19 M/RCPA Membership Roster*

### **\$35 Historic Level**

Dede Brokesh, Charlene Brownson, Sandra Chandler, Carole Chelz, Cheryl Collins, Margaret Conrow, Melvin & Randi Dale, Mike & Jan Danenberg, Marla Day, Wanda Fateley, Beverly Fink, David & Kay Fiser, Troy & Sara Fisher, Katharine Hensler, Kent Kellams, Debra Mercer, Dawn Munger, Larry & Sandy Murphy, Felisa Osburn, Bill Pallet, Allana Parker, Jerry & Martha Powell, Gloria Juhl Raney, Lauren W. Ritterbush, Tom & Karen Roberts, Catherine Roy-Tremblay, Sharlin Sargent, Ken & Nina Warren, Ron & Dixie West, Judith Willingham

### **\$100 Preservation Level**

Phil & Dawn Anderson, Mimi Balderson, Brent Bowman, Preston & Diana Chapel, Nancy Danner, Jed Dunham, Gary & Paula Ellis, Calvin & Genie Emig, Debbie Nuss & Brad Fenwick, Joe & Janette Gelroth, Charles & Kate Gillum, Larry & Linda Glasgow, Kail & Becky Katzenmeier, Mark & Ann Knackendoffel, Ann Kosch, Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, Blade Mages, Karen McCulloh, Michael & Judine Mecseri, Dori Milldyke, Jan Miller, Linda Morse, Karin Westman & Phil Nel, Marina Pecar-Krstic, Barbara Peck, Mary Pollack, John & Mary Beth Reese, Richard & Kimberly Smith, Brenda Spencer, George & Julie Strecker, Joan C. Strickler, Barbara Withee, Nancy B. Williams

### **\$125 Corporate Preservation**

Bria Taddiken-Williams/Coldwell Banker Real Estate Advisors, Bruce McMillan AIA Architects PA, GJL Real Estate/Gwyn & Gina Riffel, Rick & Judy Glowiak, Griffith Lumber Co. Inc., Master Landscape, Riffel Property/Gwyn & Gina Riffel, Strecker Nelson West Gallery/Kevin West & Alyn Pennington West, Timber & Stone Architecture and Design

### **\$250 Landmark Level**

David & Kathy Dzewaltowski, Dr. Patricia J. O'Brien, Barbara Poresky

### **Honorary Lifetime Members**

Rose M. Bissey (in memory of Charles Bissey), Mel Borst, Enell Foerster (in memory of Bernd Foerster), Dr. Patricia J. O'Brien, Edna L. Williams