

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

NICODEMUS HISTORIC DISTRICT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Nicodemus Historic District

Other Name/Site Number: Nicodemus, Nicodemus Township; Kebar, Wild Horse Township; Stockton vicinity Dugout

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Nicodemus Township; Hill City Township; Not for publication: X
Kebar vicinity, Wild Horse Township; Stockton vicinity

City/Town: Nicodemus Vicinity; Stockton Vicinity

State: KS County: Graham; Rooks Code: 065; 163 Zip Code: 67625; 67669

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: X

Public-State:

Public-Federal: X

Object:

Category of Property

Building(s):

District: X

Site:

Structure:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

72

3

11

3

90

Noncontributing

62 buildings

0 sites

17 structures

0 objects

79 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 5

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official_____
Date_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official_____
Date_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau**5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ____ Entered in the National Register
____ Determined eligible for the National Register
____ Determined not eligible for the National Register
____ Removed from the National Register
____ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper_____
Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Domestic	Sub: Single Dwelling
	Agriculture/Subsistence	Sub: Agricultural
	Education	Sub: School
	Religion	Sub: Religious Facility
	Recreation and Culture	Sub: Outdoor Recreation
	Funerary	Sub: Cemetery
Current:	Domestic	Sub: Single Dwelling
	Agriculture/Subsistence	Sub: Agricultural
	Education	Sub: School
	Religion	Sub: Religious Facility
	Recreation and Culture	Sub: Outdoor Recreation
	Funerary	Sub: Cemetery

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Other/

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Weatherboard, wood shingle, stucco, limestone, synthetics

Roof: Wood Shingle, metal, asphalt

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**Summary Statement of Significance**

This document expands and amends the existing Nicodemus Historic District National Historic Landmark narrative, prepared in 1974 and listed as an NHL in 1976. Nicodemus, Kansas, was established in 1877 as a settlement for African Americans just as Reconstruction was coming to an end. It is the oldest surviving African American municipality west of the Mississippi River. This amendment incorporates additional important research compiled about the community since 1976 that reveals the intertwined history, material resources, and cultural traditions that are the essence of Nicodemus. It expands upon the historical significance of the community (NHL Criterion 1), identifies its status as a Traditional Cultural Property (NHL Criterion 5), and acknowledges the known or potential archeological components of the district (NHL Criterion 6) that have potential to yield information of major scientific importance regarding African American westward migration and cultural identity. It proposes an enlarged boundary that incorporates resources associated with this information and the nationally significant story of Nicodemus. The expanded boundary includes all of Nicodemus Township and a portion of Hill City Township, the dugout near Stockton, and one additional discontinuous area, Kebar (Keybar) in Wild Horse Township. The expanded district contains approximately 32.3 square miles.

The 1976 NHL documentation listed the Nicodemus town only, containing about 160 acres, which is the northwest quarter of Section 1, Township 8S, Range 21W of Nicodemus Township in Graham County. The nomination described ten historic buildings and sites. Two have since been demolished: the Sayers General Store and Post Office, and the Dr. D.L. Stewart Residence. The identity and location of a third resource is unknown, identified as “an Original Town Residence.” It is presumed that this third building, a limestone-veneered sod ruin in 1976, is no longer standing.¹ The original documentation also included as a discontinuous component of the NHL: a dugout house located approximately two miles east of Nicodemus. The dugout is actually located 18 miles east of Nicodemus, near the community of Stockton, in Rooks County. It continues to be identified as a discontinuous, contributing resource to this Nicodemus Historic District, and remains an important resource associated with the history of the community.

In 1996 Congress established the Nicodemus National Historic Site, comprised of four properties identified in the NHL (the Township Hall, the St. Francis Hotel/Switzer Residence, the First Baptist Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church), and a fifth building, the Nicodemus District No. 1 School House. The enabling legislation explicitly protects private property rights, and the National Park Service today owns only the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The NPS interprets these properties, provides preservation assistance to property owners, and maintains a headquarters in the town.

Nicodemus retains national significance for its role in the history of westward migration in the U.S., specifically African American westward migration, as members of a community of formerly enslaved Africans in Kentucky sought freedom and autonomy through establishing their own landholdings and independent self-governance. Although land ownership and independence were and are long-held American values, they were not readily available to formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants in 1877. Nicodemus stands out among both earlier and later established African American settlements because it persevered when many settlements on the High Plains, African American or otherwise, withered and faded back into the landscape from which they arose.

¹Although unconfirmed, the residence may have been located south of Madison Street between Fifth and Seventh Streets. In 1983, it was documented as the ruins of a one-room sod and stone house. Bettina C. Van Dyke, “Tim Lacey House,” data pages, Historic American Buildings Survey [hereafter cited “HABS”] No. KS-49-Q, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

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The importance of land ownership as a marker of freedom, along with long-term family and community ties that extend from the time of slavery in Kentucky to the present, are significant factors in the life of Nicodemus. Many of the current landowners in Nicodemus, Nicodemus Township, and surrounding areas are descendants of those first settlers. Thus, a close knit community built on kinship and long-held associations with the land creates a special connection of past and present centered in Nicodemus. The depth of this association or connection of shared experience, kinship and place – specifically the land – which is not only generally known, but *felt* by the people of Nicodemus and the descendant community, embodies uniquely African American values, hope and tradition. Nicodemus is a multi-layered cultural landscape with both a physical and a cultural presence that includes buildings, sites, landscapes, archeological, and ethnographic components. In addition to its historic significance, it is a Traditional Cultural Property that may be considered of a unique significance to African Americans and that would likely resonate on a national scale with African Americans today, prompting one African American scholar to observe: “Nicodemus, Kansas became/is a collectively owned property that represents exceptional historical, cultural, racial, and political significance for a group of Americans who attempted to make America’s promise of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ real, moving their hopes from theory to practice.”²

It is likely that historic archeological sites are abundant throughout Nicodemus Township, but only limited archeological research has been undertaken. The archeological potential of Nicodemus has been identified by various means in recent years.



Between 2006 and 2009 a series of cooperative projects carried out by Washburn University, Howard University, the Kansas Anthropological Association, Kansas State Historical Society, the National Park Service, and the Nicodemus Historical Society focused on identifying and testing archeological sites related to the settlement period of Nicodemus.⁴ Such sites were associated with the community’s settlement, history of occupation, composition of households, daily lifeways of town residents, rationale for choices of construction sites, and rationale for eventual abandonment.⁵ An initial pedestrian survey of nine sites located in the town of

² Valerie Grim, Ph.D., Chair and Professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana State University, personal communication with Paula Reed, February 2012.



⁴ Margaret C. Wood, “Explorations of the Struggles and Promise of African American Settlement on the Great Plains: Archeological Survey and Testing of Sites Related to the Settlement Period and Early History of Nicodemus, Kansas,” Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, 2007, report on file at the Kansas State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office; Margaret C. Wood, “Wake Nicodemus: African American Settlement on the Plains of Kansas,” *Archaeology e-Gram*, 2007, accessed June 18, 2013, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/archeology/sites/npsites/nicodemus.htm>; Flordeliz T. Bugarin, “If the Cottonwood Could Speak, It Would Tell a Tale of the Nicodemus Past,” Howard University, 2011, draft report on file at the Kansas State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office; Flordeliz T. Bugarin, “In the Midst of the Wildflowers: KATP Searches for the Nicodemus Past,” *Kansas Preservation* 28, no. 4 (July-August 2007): 7-13; Steven De Vore, “Geophysical Investigations of Two Dugout Locations Associated with Nicodemus National Historic Site, Graham County, Kansas,” January 2007, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska; Sherda Williams, “Excavation of an Early Dugout Homestead at Nicodemus, Kansas,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 84-87.

⁵ Charlotte King and Erika Seibert, “New Philadelphia Townsite National Historic Landmark,” January 16, 2009, Section 8 p. 33, citing Wood, 2007, “Explorations of the Struggles,” and Wood, 2007, “Wake Nicodemus.”

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Nicodemus and two sites in Nicodemus Township provided a preliminary evaluation of the archeological potential of these resources based on surface inspection. Six of the eleven sites were deemed to have some potential to have some intact archeological deposits.⁶ Two sites (14GH102, the Thomas Johnson/Henry Williams Homestead; and 14GH103, the District 1 School House) were chosen for further geophysical and archeological testing.⁷

Field work has contributed to a preliminary analysis of survival strategies, processes of adaptation, and health quality⁸ and a Master's Thesis on the impact of state policies and actions, and the political economy on the development of Nicodemus.

To date (2016), nine sites have been recorded with state archeological site numbers. The five sites located within the National Park Service's National Historic Site have received baseline geophysical testing.¹⁰

Archeological research at Nicodemus is complicated by some practical considerations. One site surveyed in 2006

At the time that archeological fieldwork was conducted the land was owned by no fewer than thirty individuals, many of whom resided outside of Kansas, making it logistically impossible to gain land owner permission to work on this property.¹¹ Other surveyed locations exhibited no surface indications that would suggest the presence of a site. Subsurface testing or remote sensing at some point in the future, however may verify the documentary evidence and oral history accounts.

The expanded NHL boundary figures prominently in both the historical and the continuing measure of Nicodemus' sense of place. The experience of Nicodemus, then and now, is "all about the land."¹² Nicodemus Township's landscape is at once scenic and productive, and is "all ours" to today's owners who are descendants of the African American ex-slaves who settled here, as it was to their ancestors. The concept of rootedness in the land and land ownership is a key concept in the identification of Nicodemus both as a distinctive historic place and as a Traditional Cultural Property. It is a concept that is reaffirmed in family histories and folklore, and celebrated in the annual Emancipation Day/Homecoming Celebration—a time when descendants from across the country "go home" to renew their connection to each other and to the land. The individual properties

⁶ Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles," 59-72. The 2006 survey also visited another three possible dugout sites in the town of Nicodemus, and the Stockton area dugout. Steven De Vore to Manager, Midwest Archeological Center, "Trip Report, Planning Meeting for Geophysical Investigations of the Washburn University Archeology Field School Investigations of the Dugout Sites Associated with the Nicodemus Historic Site, Nicodemus, Kansas (April 5-7, 2006)," 10 April 2006 memorandum, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, Lincoln, Nebraska.

⁷ De Vore, "Geophysical Investigations of Two Dugout Locations;" Wood, "Exploration of the Struggles," 72-99.

⁸ Mia Carey, "The Untold Story of Nicodemus: Reconstructing Environment and Health," *The Howard University McNair Journal of Research* 16 (2012): 11-20, on *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed November 7, 2016, <http://heritagelab.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CarieyM-Paper-formatted.pdf>.

⁹ Valerie A. Suarez, "A Historical Materialist Analysis of Nicodemus," Master's thesis, Howard University, 2014.

¹¹ Margaret Wood, personal communication with Sherda Williams, Superintendent of Nicodemus National Historic Site, April 2006.

¹² This and other quotes in this section are from Angela Bates in discussions with her during field investigations, October 25, 2011.

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within the enlarged Nicodemus National Historic Landmark hold as much significance as the overall landscape in capturing the importance of land ownership as a special overarching quality of Nicodemus as a Traditional Cultural Property.

The concept of having a “little piece of ‘Demus” translates to the importance of each individual property, homestead and homestead site, regardless of what is on those properties today – whether a ruin, a trailer, a house, or a potential archeological site. It’s all of very great importance to formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants who were legally excluded from the basic American right of land ownership. Thus, Nicodemus’ history, material resources and cultural traditions are inextricably intertwined. The national significance of Nicodemus is embodied in the totality of its essence—history, kinship associations and landownership. African American scholar and ethnographer Antoinette T. Jackson has observed that this connection to the past, grounded in the present by the role the living community plays in continuing intangible traditions, plays a critical role in defining Nicodemus as a town site, a township, and as an extended community.¹³

As both a Traditional Cultural Property and a nationally significant historic resource, Nicodemus’ period of significance must cover both the historical period of settlement and development through the ongoing nature of Traditional Cultural Properties. The Period of Significance therefore extends from the establishment of Nicodemus in 1877 to the present. However, it does not follow that all property within the expanded NHL boundary is counted as contributing because it falls within the period of significance. For buildings and structures within the district’s boundaries, the National Register/NHL 50 year rule shall apply. Therefore, no buildings or structures dating from after 1966 are counted as contributing. In addition, properties within the expanded Nicodemus NHL boundary that have no historical associations with African Americans are considered non-contributing, regardless of their age.

In the following resource count and property inventory, the land forming the entirety of the district is considered one contributing site. Contributing sites within this overarching site that have African American associations include known or potential archeological sites, homestead ruins, or culturally important natural features. These component sites are described, but not counted individually. As a whole, they link the contemporary community and ancestors in a web of kinship and shared culture that is mediated through space and place and extending from past to present. This convergence of feeling and association with land figures prominently in the following portrait of the physical scene.

Location (of both tangible and intangible cultural resources), setting, feeling and association are also important to defining the historic and physical integrity of Nicodemus. As the Nicodemus settlement encompassed much more than the town itself, the expanded boundary more accurately identifies historic elements of the built environment that have the ability to represent this history. Resources of substantial size and scale that are associated with the nationally significant period are identified as contributing or non-contributing. Minor resources that do not strongly contribute to Nicodemus’ historic significance are not counted, such as oil wells, pumps and storage tanks, but are mentioned in specific property descriptions.

According to the 2010 Census data for Nicodemus, the township’s population is fifty-nine, of whom twenty-eight are White and twenty-four are African American. An additional six residents are noted as racially mixed.

¹³ Antoinette T. Jackson, “Intangible Cultural Heritage and Living Communities,” *Anthropology News* 55, no. 3 (March 2014) on *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://heritagelab.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/AnthropologyNewsMarch2014JacksonArticle.pdf>. See also “Nicodemus National Historic Site Project,” *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 2015, http://heritagelab.org/?page_id=243; and Justin Hosbey, “Inalienable Possessions and Flyin’ West: African American Women in the Pioneer West,” Master’s thesis, University of South Florida, 28 March 2011: 48, *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 2015, http://heritagelab.org/?page_id=243.

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However, Nicodemus is perceived as “home” to a large web of African American descendants scattered across the United States. Some of these descendants share in ownership of Nicodemus property, although they are not residents and thus not counted in the population number. Also, portions of the settlement that were part of the Nicodemus experience actually occurred in nearby locations, like Wild Horse Township to the south, Rooks County to the east and Hill City and its environs to the west.

Nicodemus Township lies within the 6th Principal Meridian of Kansas, and includes the following sections: Sections 24, 25, and 36, Township 7S, Range 22W; Section 1 and part of Section 12, Township 8S, Range 22W; Sections 19 through 36, Township 7S, Range 21W; and Sections 1 through 6, portions of Sections 7 through 12 and Section 14, Township 8S, Range 21W.¹⁴

The following description presents the overall landscape first, as it embodies the comprehensive historical and cultural significance of Nicodemus. This is followed by a description of the town of Nicodemus, which is appropriate as this document is an update of the existing NHL nomination, and the earliest settlement in Nicodemus occurred in the town site. Individual properties follow the description of the township. These individual properties hold as much significance as the overall landscape in capturing the importance of land ownership as a special overriding quality of Nicodemus’ history and as a Traditional Cultural Property.

Physical Description

Setting:

Rolling open landscape creased with gullies and intermittent or dry streambeds characterizes Nicodemus Township and its surrounding lands, straddling the “Smoky Hills” and “High Plains” regions of Kansas. The area receives limited rainfall, an average of twenty-two inches a year, slightly more than that which characterizes a semi-arid climate. The amount of moisture is considered marginal for growth of many crops. Winters are cold and summers hot. The weather can be violent at times with hail storms or tornadoes. It is almost always windy. The Smoky Hills region supports mixed grasses, and the semi-arid High Plains, short grasses and scrub in areas not under cultivation.¹⁵ Located on high ground north of the South Fork of the Solomon River and its confluence with Spring Creek is the Nicodemus town site, with the township lands extending on continuously rising, but rolling landscape to the north and west. The municipal (as opposed to mapped) township covers 28 sections and portions of seven other sections along its southern border, in Graham County Kansas, against its boundary with Rooks County in the northwestern part of the state. Sections and quarter sections divide the land with dirt and gravel roads typically following the section lines. In land measurement, a section is a one-mile square, and 36 sections (640 acres) form a township, in six mile by six mile squares. This system of land division resulted from the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), which is a legal reference system designed to ease the description, inventory and transfer of real property. The PLSS surveys in Kansas were conducted between 1854 and 1876.¹⁶ Nicodemus Township’s layout departs from the standard six-by-six mile plan to compensate for the irregular southern boundary, resulting from the twisting path of the Solomon River. The Town of Nicodemus lies in the southeastern part of the township by the same name, in Section 1. The town site occupies approximately 160 acres or the northwest quarter of Section 1.

¹⁴ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 126.

¹⁵ Ibid., 122, 123.

¹⁶ Kansas Society of Land Surveyors, *Original Land Surveys of Kansas: The Public Land Survey System*, accessed 2012, http://www.ksls.com/about_surveys.htm; n.d.

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Land ownership and usage patterns conform to the PLSS survey layout, with roads, fields, fencelines and property boundaries following the section/quarter section survey system, except where geographical features like the Solomon River interfere.¹⁷ Open pasture/rangeland and grain crops, mostly wheat and sorghum (milo), grow on the land. Working oil wells with pumps and storage tanks mark the landscape. Metal windmills at house sites and in fields power pumps that draw water to households and livestock. Intermittent, seasonal and permanent stream beds and drainages meander through this landscape, providing support for the only trees, predominantly cottonwoods. Spring Creek winds southeastward to meet the South Fork of the Solomon River just south of the town of Nicodemus. Limestone, known locally as “magnesia rock” protrudes from the ground, forming bluffs with horizontal bands of rock, which was used for construction of buildings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

U.S. Route 24 bisects Nicodemus Township, running east-west, skimming the north edge of the town of Nicodemus. Kansas State Route 18 enters the township from the southeast, passing through the town of Bogue, located about five miles southwest of Nicodemus in Wild Horse Township. Route 18 intersects with U.S. Route 24 about four miles west of Nicodemus, at the base of Route 24’s sweeping curve to the south, a place known as “The Junction.” In 1964 Route 24 was realigned to pass closer to Nicodemus, running along its north side. Originally Route 24’s path was three miles north of Nicodemus, bypassing the town and then turning south to meet the present alignment at the Route 18 junction. A railroad, part of the Union Pacific system, runs to the south of Nicodemus, passing through Bogue and on to Hill City, Graham County’s seat. The railroad helped to spur the development of Bogue, while diminishing the prospects of Nicodemus as a trade and transportation center for the local farms and ranches. While the town of Nicodemus and Nicodemus Township had more than 300 residents during its early history in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, after the railroad bypassed the settlement, the population gradually decreased. Current census records do not calculate the town of Nicodemus’ population separately from the whole township.

Properties in the town and surrounding township are privately owned, for the most part by descendants of the original settlers. Often a property’s ownership is split among multiple descendant families, their numbers becoming larger as each generation passes. The increasingly intertwined land ownership patterns are part of the physical character of Nicodemus, because of the importance of association with the land and the feeling that comes with having “a little piece of ‘Demus.” With multiple owners, a large number of the houses in Nicodemus are unoccupied or inhabited intermittently. Many are not maintained and are deteriorated. To many of the people of Nicodemus, the improvements on the land are not important. It is the land itself that holds significance.

Scattered through the township are homestead sites connected with the development and history of the Nicodemus settlement. In addition to homesteads, there are places important for their association with Nicodemus and its people, such as fishing spots, ballfields, picnic groves, cemeteries and church sites.¹⁸

Nicodemus Town, General Description:

Laid out in 1877 as a planned settlement for Blacks, Nicodemus was promoted to African Americans in Scott, Fayette and Bourbon Counties (Georgetown and Lexington areas) of Kentucky, who made up a majority of the first settlers. Other early emigrants came from Topeka, the Kansas capital. Like most towns in the plains states, Nicodemus’ lay-out follows a grid pattern. Seven numbered streets, First through Seventh run north-south, while the six east-west avenues are named for the first Presidents, Washington through Jackson (John

¹⁷ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 122.

¹⁸ Jackson, “Intangible Cultural Heritage and Living Communities.”

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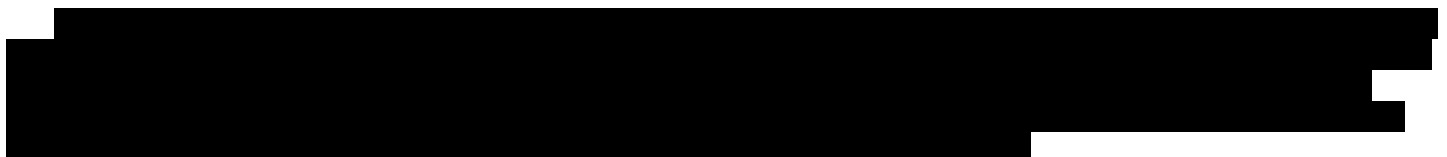
Quincy Adams was omitted, presumably to avoid having two Adams Streets). North of Washington Avenue, adjacent to Route 24 is South Avenue. No explanation has surfaced for the rationale of naming the northernmost avenue "South." Perhaps its location just south of a section line is a factor.

When the first emigrants arrived, there were no buildings in Nicodemus, and no trees with which to produce wood-frame buildings. Settlers made do with dugouts carved into embankments and sod houses constructed of blocks cut from the surface of the land, typical of settlement housing on the high plains. Eventually settlers replaced these first houses with rock (the term used regionally for stone construction) or frame buildings. None of the early dugouts or sod houses survives, but several dugout sites have been identified through archeological investigation.¹⁹

A few rock buildings remain from the late nineteenth century, but the majority of the built environment of Nicodemus town and township dates from the 1920s to 1940s. A period of construction activity in the 1970s produced six U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-sponsored duplexes and a new Baptist church, along with several ranch-style houses, and renovations to older buildings. There are also numerous house trailers dating from the 1950s through the 1980s. In 1978, a 100-foot cylindrical metal water tower was added to the Nicodemus skyline. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds provided for creation of a playground and basketball and tennis courts in 1981-1982, along the north side of Washington Avenue, on the site of the Masonic Hall and the General Store in the town's nineteenth century central business district. A brick wall monument embedded with corner stones and the Masonic symbol carved in stone commemorates the buildings that once occupied the playground site. In addition to the residential property in Nicodemus, the town also contains farmed land, round metal grain storage bins and metal equipment storage buildings.

Today the approach to Nicodemus is by way of U.S. Route 24. Characteristic of western Kansas, the big and distant horizon gives broad vistas. Nicodemus' water tower stands as a landmark pinpointing the town from miles away. Signs mark the Nicodemus National Historic Site and a wayside features a state historical marker. One of the signs placed in the late 1990s or early 2000s is a large rock slab, inscribed "Nicodemus" and "Established in 1877." These are located in a roadside park along South Avenue which parallels Route 24, adjacent to it. The roadside park, an extension of the playground area, also contains shade trees, a border of evergreens planted in the 1940s as a 4-H project, and a few picnic tables.

Prominent in Nicodemus is the NPS presence with five properties making up the National Historic Site, along with a Headquarters office in one of the HUD duplex units. The National Historic Site includes the Township Hall (1939), which also serves as an NPS Visitor Center; the St. Francis Hotel/Switzer Residence (1881), the stuccoed stone portion of which is one of the oldest surviving buildings in Nicodemus; Old First Baptist Church (1907), a stuccoed rock building, which replaced an earlier rock building; the AME Church (1885 on the building, but various other dates are also offered), a rock building; and the District 1 School House (1918), a foursquare frame building. These are the most prominent or oldest buildings in the town. The Township Hall still belongs to the municipal government and is used for meetings and other government functions along with its role as an NPS Visitor Center.



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In general, the townscape shows the grid pattern of the streets, some of which remain unpaved. Many of the lots appear vacant, but may be the sites of earlier habitation when the town had a greater population. Tumbleweeds roll down the streets and tall grass grows around houses, sheds, and mobile homes that are unoccupied. Occupied house lots are more manicured, and some portions of the town are farmed. Housing is generally one-story, of frame or rock construction. Older houses are either side-gabled or front-gabled, two or three bays wide. Another prominent type is one-story foursquare dwellings with hipped roofs, two or three bays wide. Representing the 1950s-1970s period are ranch-type houses, generally of frame construction. A few houses were built quite recently.

Nicodemus Township, General Description:

Nicodemus reached well beyond the quarter section where the town was laid out. Throughout Nicodemus Township and beyond, homestead sites associated with the founding of Nicodemus dot the landscape. Some retain remnants of older buildings – generally houses, but original sod houses and dugouts appear to be gone from the landscape. The buildings are set upon the gridded landscape, on farms that were originally usually a quarter section (160 acres). Most dwellings face south or east to capture the warm rays of the morning sun.

The built environment includes, among the oldest buildings, one-story foursquare houses of either frame or rock construction. These generally are three bays wide with a central entrance and hipped roof with central single-flue chimney. Most of these buildings date from circa 1920 and are part of the general vernacular housing of this part of the state, and not specific in style or type to Nicodemus. Also from the 1920s are one-story, frame or rock side-gabled or front-gabled houses, two bays wide, often with a second cell or wing set at right angle to the first, forming an L-shaped building. Lapped wood siding covers frame houses, sometimes with an added layer of stucco. Other materials are poured concrete foundations, wood shingle roofing and siding, rolled asphalt roofing and siding and brick chimneys.

Most of these earlier houses are abandoned and in deteriorated or in ruinous condition. They are part of farmstead clusters which also include windmills, open sheds and garages, metal grain storage bins (often still in use), and occasionally small cattle, horse or hog barns. Barbed or American wire fencing defines spaces for cattle grazing or house lots. In addition to the standing buildings there are numerous ruins of house sites and farmsteads contain foundations, stone corners and partial walls, or collapsed frames.

Representing the 1930s and 1940s are one-story, two- or three-bay houses, influenced by the bungalow style. These houses are generally still in use and are accompanied by round metal grain bins, metal equipment sheds and small barns, sheds and garages. From the 1960s and later are ranch-type houses, often established on the same farmstead with abandoned older dwellings. Some of these more recent houses are modular, others are traditionally built of frame or brick construction.

In addition to farmstead and homestead sites there are three cemeteries, holding the remains of Nicodemus settlers and residents up to the present. These are Mt. Olive and Nicodemus Cemeteries in Nicodemus Township and Samuels Cemetery at Kebar in Wild Horse Township. Mt. Olive had a Baptist church (no longer standing) associated with the cemetery, but the other two cemeteries did not. There were also rural settlement clusters, like Kebar, located about six miles southwest of Nicodemus, as well as Mt Olive, associated with a rural church, Fairview, Mulberry Grove and Tempe.²⁰

²⁰ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 40.

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Resource Inventory:

Several sources were used to identify specific sites within the expanded NHL boundary. Primary among these is information prepared in 1983 by a HABS team, and include survey forms and maps dating to the periods 1877-1900, and circa 1920. Interviews with Angela Bates, Executive Director of the Nicodemus Historical Society, identified the locations and names of numerous sites, as did oral interviews on file at Nicodemus Historic Site (National Park Service).

Note: The numbers associated with individual properties serves as a locational tool that corresponds to numbers on the accompanying maps. They are not to be used as a resource count.

Landscape

1 contributing site

The previously described landscape embodies the historical and cultural significance of Nicodemus. Within this overarching site are resources and features that contribute to the cultural significance of the community. This includes known and potential archeological sites and their associated artifacts. Future archeological investigations may confirm these sites, or identify additional sites. Most of these types of resources and features are identified below as “landscape features,” but are not counted individually. The exception are two sites that have received additional archeological investigations beyond preliminary surveys and geophysical testing.

1. Township Hall/Site 14GH108, built 1939

1 contributing building

NW corner Washington Ave. and Second St.

A Works Progress Administration project that employed community members for its construction, Township Hall was included as one of ten resources identified in the original NHL nomination. In addition to serving local government needs, it was a community gathering spot, and the venue for numerous celebrations.²¹ It is part of the Nicodemus NHS and serves as the NHS Visitor Center, although the Township Hall is still owned by the township and functions as the municipal headquarters. It is a one-story, gable-front municipal building, three bays wide by six bays in length. It has rock walls laid in regular courses. A projecting enclosed gabled entrance pavilion extends from the south gable wall. The asphalt shingle roof terminates over exposed rafter tails. Stone buttresses along the side walls separate steel multi-pane windows. A brick chimney extends from the northeast area of the roof. The Hall was photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS-49-B. The site received a baseline geophysical survey in 2012.

2. 100 Washington Ave., ca. 1920

1 contributing building

This one-story, two-bay frame, side-gabled dwelling retains wood siding covered with later asbestos shingle siding. A one-story, full-width gabled extension attaches to the rear. The house has an asphalt shingle roof with metal flue.

3. SE corner, Washington Ave. and First St., ca. 1970

1 non-contributing building

A metal frame house trailer stands on this lot.

²¹ Roberta Riley Robinson oral interview by Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson, “Nicodemus National Historic Site Project,” *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 2015, http://heritagelaby.org/?page_id=243.

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4. E side, First St. south of South Ave., ca. 1940

1 contributing building

Appears to date from 1960s, but is said to have a 1940s construction date. According to Nicodemus resident Joetta Nivens, the building had been located in the township, and moved to town.²² This one-story, seven-bay ranch style dwelling was part of a commercial component, a popular restaurant called Ernestine's Bar-B-Q. Ernestine Williams operated the business from 1975-2004, and it was the only operating business in Nicodemus when it closed in 2004.²³ The house faces north, oriented to U.S. 24. It has a low-pitched roof with overhanging eaves that extends to form a porch along the entire front, supported by decorative metal columns. Masonite/tempered hardboard siding covers the building. A shed extension attaches to rear (south).

5. N side, Washington St. east of First St., ca. 1900

1 contributing building

A steeply-pitched, hipped roof and brick veneered walls cover this one-story foursquare dwelling. Recent modifications have been made to the building. There is a shed extension on the south elevation and a shed-roofed porch along the west elevation along with a gabled entrance bay. It has a metal and asphalt shingled roof. The house is reported to have been moved to this location.²⁴

6. SW corner, First St. and South Ave., ca. 1970

1 non-contributing building

A metal house trailer stands on this corner lot.

7. SE corner, Second St. and Washington Ave., ca. 1970

1 non-contributing building

A metal house trailer and an elevated oil tank occupy this lot. The tank is not counted.

8. SE corner, First St. and Adams Ave., ca. 1920

2 contributing buildings

Narrow gauge wood siding covers this one-story, three-bay frame foursquare with a door, window, window façade fenestration pattern, and an asphalt shingled hip roof. Single pane sash windows have molded flat topped architraves and there is a shed roofed entrance porch. There is a gabled dormer on the south side. The house is reported to have been moved to this location.²⁵ A hog shed with metal siding stands behind house.

9. SE corner, Second St. and Adams Ave., ca. 1970

2 non-contributing buildings

A junkyard and two metal pole sheds occupy this corner.

10. 148 Second St., (E side, south of Adams Ave.), ca. 1930

2 contributing buildings

This is a one-story, gable-front frame house covered with Masonite/tempered hardboard siding. There is a circa 1960 concrete block side-gabled addition with picture window attached to the north side, and a shed extension to south. A 1950s metal house trailer stands adjacent to the south.

²² Joetta Nivens oral interview with Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson, "Nicodemus Oral Histories," *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 20105, http://heritagelab.org/?page_id=2213.

²³ Hosbey, 48.

²⁴ Don Burden, Heather Lee, Paul Sadin and Dawn Vogel, *Historic Resources Study, Nicodemus National Historic Site* (National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office: 2011), 206.

²⁵ Burden, et. al., 206.

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11. 401 Second St., (W side, south of Adams Ave.), ca. 1920**2 contributing buildings**

While out of numerical sequence for its location, the street address number is on this house. An asphalt shingle, hip-on-hip roof shelters this frame one-story, three-bay foursquare with a gabled addition to the north. It has vinyl siding, and a window, door, window front façade arrangement. A small shed stands behind the house. The house is reported to have been moved to this location.²⁶

12. 316 Second St. (E side of Second St.), ca. 1920**2 contributing buildings**

This is a one-story, two-bay dwelling with stucco siding designed in a T plan. The north section is side-gabled, with the cross "T" on the south. There is a shed extension to the south, and a central brick chimney. A frame shed stands to the northeast of the house.

13. NE corner, Second St. and Adams Ave., ca. 1920**1 contributing building**

The one-story house consists of a frame, three-bay side-gabled dwelling with stucco over wood siding. The roof is asphalt shingle, and a centrally-located metal flue. A rock one-story, two-bay, gabled section extends to the rear, creating a "T" plan with front section—this may be an earlier section that pre-dates the front, ca. 1920 section. There is a central entrance with a new door, and flanked by replaced windows. The house was photo documented in 1983, assigned HABS No. KS-49-D, and identified as the "Jerry Scruggs, Jr. House." It was a frame granary moved onto this site in the 1950s by community resident Jerry Scruggs, Jr., to serve as a house. Scruggs added the stone section circa 1956 to serve as a bedroom. A door was later infilled on the north gable end of the frame structure. The windows were modified after 1983.²⁷

14. 302 Second Street (NW corner, Second St. and Adams Ave.), ca. 1940**3 contributing buildings**

A one and one-half story, stuccoed frame dwelling stands on a concrete block foundation. A gable front section facing onto Second Street intersects with a taller side-gabled section to north. An enclosed porch runs along the east elevation. There is a shed extension to rear and an asphalt shingle roof over the entire house. Two metal containers, a metal pole shed, and a metal shed to north of house are also on the property. The containers are not counted.

The house was photo documented in 1983, assigned HABS No. KS-49-E, and identified as the Lloyd Wellington House. According to HABS documentation, the house has been moved and was originally located at "the old Craig homeplace," east of town. In the late 1800s, dugouts were in the vicinity of the Craig property house. A later frame house on the 302 Second Street location was vacated in the 1920s, then burned down in the 1950s. Community resident Ora Switzer moved this frame house from a location east of the townsite circa 1960, and sold it to Wellington in 1965. Wellington added the porches, and had the building stuccoed in 1966. Trees were planted and a garage built in 1967. The garage was removed after 1983.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 206, 209.

²⁷ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Jerry Scruggs, Jr. House," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-D, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

²⁸ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Lloyd Wellington House," data pages, Historic American Building Survey No. KS-49-E, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

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15. E side Second St., between Adams and Washington Aves., ca. 1955**2 contributing buildings**

Masonite or tempered hardboard siding covers this one story, three-bay, frame ranch style house. It has a central entrance and three-part picture window to the north and a double window to the south of the entrance. Decorative iron columns support a shed-roofed entrance porch. There is an asphalt shingle roof and metal flue. A frame shed stands behind the house.

16. SW corner of Washington Ave. and Second St., ca. 1930**2 contributing buildings
1 non-contributing building**

This lot contains a one-story three-bay, side-gabled frame dwelling that faces north onto Washington Street. It follows a window, door, window front façade configuration, with an added, off-center gabled portico supported with four fluted columns. A one story section extends to rear. Another, offset section on the west side extends to the south and to a circa 1980 metal house trailer. Masonite or tempered hardboard siding covers the house. A large metal equipment shed also occupies the property.

**17. “Cracker Box School,” N side of Washington Ave., ca. 1920
between Second and Third Sts.****1 contributing building**

The “Cracker Box School” is reported to have been relocated to this site from Pioneer Township in the 1920s and became the Priscilla Art Club (although HABS documentation identifies the foundation for the Pricilla Art Club immediately to the front/south of this building).²⁹ The former school building is a one-story, gable-front, two-bay by two-bay frame structure. Resting on concrete foundations, the building is covered with Masonite or tempered hardboard siding. A gabled portico has been added across the front, along with a handicapped entrance ramp.

**18. Masonic Hall Site/Township Park/Roadside Park, ca. 1930s
N side of Washington Ave., between Second and Third Sts.****landscape feature**

The park occupies the site of Nicodemus’ central business district of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Masonic Hall, built in 1880 and razed in 1972, held functions for the Masons and its affiliated women’s group, Eastern Star. It was used for ice cream socials and dances in the 1920s and 1930s, until the Township Hall was built.³⁰

Funding from a Community Development Block Grant in 1981-1982 led to the development of this park, although a park has existed in various forms since about the 1930s. Many of the trees and shrubs associated with the Township Park are said to have been established as a “4H project by the town’s children during the 1930s.”³¹ The park is considered a designed landscape site with several features that have been added over time.

²⁹ Marion Prucha, “Nicodemus, Kansas, Townsite Plan-1983,” Historic American Building Survey No. KS-49, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>. An historic image of the Pricilla Art Club is shown in *Promised Land on the Solomon*, page 75.

³⁰ Fraser, “Nicodemus: The Architectural Development and Decline of an American Town,” Chapter 2 in *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 50. Historic images are shown on pages 50 and 75.

³¹ Bahr Vermeer Hacker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 175, citing Angela Bates-Tompkins, “New Promise for Nicodemus, One of the First Black Pioneer Communities Established After the Civil War May Soon Become Part of the National Park System,” *National Parks*, July/August, 1992, 46.

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Some features within the site were identified in the original NHL nomination, including the Masonic Hall site, an associated 1972 brick masonry commemorative marker, and a 1970s state highway marker in the Roadside Park portion of the park along South Avenue. The Masonic Hall marker incorporates three stones with carved surfaces into its wall surface. The south stone is dated 1880; the north stone is inscribed with the letter "G;" and the center stone is semi-circular with the lower portion inscribed "A.F. and A.M. 1893" below a half moon with a face in profile. More recent development includes a pavilion, and features include a basketball court, tennis court, play area, and picnic benches. There is also a stone Masonic commemorative marker dated 1998. Some of the play equipment appears to date from circa 2010. A National Park service sign identifying the Nicodemus National Historical Site is within the park, and north of South Avenue is a stone sign carved with the name Nicodemus and Established 1877.

19. S side of Washington Ave., between Second and Third Sts, ca. 1970 1 non-contributing building

A house trailer, metal with low-pitched gable roof stands on this property.

20. St. Francis Hotel/Site 14GH107, 1880, ca. 1924 3 contributing buildings
SE corner Washington Ave. and Second St 1 non-contributing building

The stucco-clad St. Francis Hotel is one of the oldest buildings remaining in Nicodemus. It is also known as the Fletcher-Switzer House. It was identified in the original NHL nomination as the "Fletcher Residence," and described as Nicodemus' first post office, the oldest known such facility operated by African-Americans in the U.S. It was built by brothers Zachary T. and Thomas Fletcher; Zachary Fletcher was secretary of the group which arrived in Nicodemus in July 1877. The original owners, Zachary and Jenny Smith Fletcher, operated a post office out of the building, and served as postmaster and assistant postmaster, respectively. The property also served as a school house, with Jenny Fletcher as teacher, and as a stagecoach station.³²

The Saint Francis Hotel began as a one and one-half story rock building with a gable-front orientation, dating from 1880. Guest rooms were on the second floor. A frame side-gabled addition to the east dates from circa 1924, built by Fletcher's great nephew Fred Switzer. A shed roof bedroom was added to the southwest corner ca. 1930. Stucco was added in 1949, and the east wing was modified in 1953 to include a half-story addition and the full-length, shed roof front porch. Asphalt shingles cover the roofs. Switzer and his wife, Ora, used the house as dwelling and restaurant until the early 1970s.³³ Two frame sheds stand to the rear of the property serve as a chicken house and hog shed, and there is a concrete well cover. In addition there is a circa 1965 house trailer on the property. The well cover is not counted. The house was photo documented in 1983, measured drawings produced, and assigned HABS No. KS-49-G.

Zachary and Jenny Fletcher first lived in a dugout in this block. It served as a community school; with Jenny Fletcher as teacher. The dugout was apparently filled in, in 1935.³⁴ To the east of the hotel is the location of the Switzer bunkhouse, photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS-49-F. The site received a baseline geophysical survey in 2012.

³² Hosbey, 44; "The Five Historic Buildings," *Nicodemus National Historic Site*, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/nico/planyourvisit/the-five-historic-buildings.htm>.

³³ Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects, and Wiss, Janey Elstner and Associates, *Nicodemus National Historical Site, Nicodemus, Kansas, Historic Structures Report*, (Lincoln, NE, and Northbrook, IL: Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects and Wiss, Janey Elstner, and Associates, 2002), 2-21.

³⁴ Clayton B. Fraser, Switzer Bunkhouse," photos, HABS No. KS-49-F, [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/HABS No. KS-49-F](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/HABS%20No.%20KS-49-F); Kendrick, in "Introduction," *Promised Land on the Solomon*, vii; Hosbey, 44; Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles," 67.

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21. 517 Adams Avenue (S side between Second and Third Sts.), ca. 1930**3 contributing buildings**

This property contains a one and one-half story, two-bay, side-gabled, stuccoed frame dwelling. It faces north onto Adams Avenue, with gable-roofed additions to the east and south. Gabled roofs cover an entrance porch and a shed dormer. The roofing material is asphalt shingles. Angle brackets embellish the gables. Additional buildings include a frame outbuilding with gabled roof and German (drop lap) siding and five bay open car shed. An above ground propane tank stands behind the house. A wall of upright tires painted white encloses the front yard. The tank and tire fence are not counted.

22. AME Church/Site 14GH109, NW corner, Adams Ave. and Third St., 1880**1 contributing building**

The A.M.E. Church was included as one of ten identified resources in the original NHL nomination. Sources differ on the construction date and origin of this building. This rock gable-front church building was constructed in 1880, possibly as a house for S. G. Wilson, a White man. Converted to the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in 1881, the AME Church acquired the building between 1897 and 1910.³⁵ It is a one-bay gable front building, four-bays deep. A sign board above the entrance identifies it as the AME Church with the date 1885. Windows have single pane double hung sash beneath radial stone arches. An arched doorway on the east side was the only entrance until 1923, when a window at the east end of the north wall was converted to a second doorway. Concurrently or soon afterwards, a small, shed-roof vestibule was built around the north entry. Also during the 1920s a cross-gable was added to the center of the north side. A large arched window was inserted into the center of the north wall below the cross-gable. Circa 1931 the current gable-front entrance vestibule was added to the east wall. The building was stuccoed between 1943-1949.³⁶ The east elevation wall collapsed and now is shored with temporary framing, covered with plywood panels. Initials and graffiti are carved into stones of south elevation. A stone-lined rake suggests raising of the west gable end wall. The interior retains an intact alter area with turned balustrade and west end alcove. Three metal storage containers stand directly behind the church, but are not counted. The building was photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS-49-I. The site underwent a baseline geophysical survey, shovel testing and limited test excavation in 2012.³⁷

23. NE corner, Adams Ave. and Third St., ca. 1970**1 non-contributing building**

A metal house trailer occupies this property.

24. W side of Third St., between Adams and Washington Aves., ca. 1970**1 non-contributing building
4 non-contributing structures**

Four round metal grain bins (structures) and a large metal equipment shed (building) stand on this property.

25. 413 Washington Ave. (SW corner Washington Ave. and Third St.), ca. 1940**1 contributing building**

A one-story, three-bay side-gabled frame house faces onto Third Street at the corner with Washington Street. The front façade follows a window, window, door arrangement, with a shed roofed entrance porch. A shed-roofed extension is attached on south end, and gable-roofed section extends to the west. A central

³⁵ The park website attributes the date of AME acquisition to 1897; the *Historic Structures Report* gives a date of 1910. See <http://www.nps.gov/nico/the-five-historic-buildings.htm>, and Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Historic Structures Report*, 2-3.

³⁶ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Historic Structures Report*, 2-3, 3-11.

³⁷ De Vore and LeBeau.

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brick single-flue chimney and a large exterior north end chimney wrapped with Masonite/tempered hard board siding serve the house. The roofing material is asphalt shingles. A propane tank stands to the west of the house, but is not counted separately.

26. S side South Ave., between Second and Third Sts., ca. 1970

1 non-contributing buildings

Site of a modular ranch-style house which was recently removed, although a gable-end detached frame garage remains.

27. Town Well, W side of Third St., between South and Washington Aves., date unknown

1 contributing object

One of several town wells located throughout Nicodemus, this one retains a cast iron hand pump.

Samuel G. Wilson General Store/G.M. Sayers Grocery Store and House Site, 1880 *landscape feature*
NW corner Washington Ave. and Third St.

South of the town well site, the two-story rock building formerly occupying this site was identified as the "Sayers General Store and Post Office" in the original NHL nomination. It was included as the one of the ten resources described in the original NHL nomination. The building was built by White businessman Samuel G. Wilson, and operated as a general store.³⁸ It was razed in 1981.

28. SE corner of Adams Ave. and Fourth St., ca. 1920

1 contributing building

The original construction date of the house is circa 1920. The house is an east-facing frame one-story, two-bay, side-gabled dwelling in very deteriorated condition. There is one door opening and one window on the east side; a one-story side gabled section extends to the south, also with single door opening. Various coverings include wood shingle, horizontal weatherboard siding and rolled asphalt. A wood shingle roof and brick flue remain inside the south end of the northern section. The house was moved to this location in the 1950s or 1960s, according to a local informant. The building was photo documented in 1983, identified as the Ace Williams House, and assigned HABS No. KS 49-J. Ace Williams was the Director of School District 1 in 1949.³⁹

29. Ball Field, NE corner of Madison Ave. and Fourth St., ca. 1950

landscape feature

A ball field with metal pipe back stop occupies this corner.

30. Tuss Lacey Site, 14GH104, 1870s

landscape feature

S. side Adams St., between Fourth and Second Sts.

The Tuscumbia "Tuss" Lacey Site contains remnants of a sod/rock house, and associated artifacts, located in a deeply plowed field. It has been described as an excellent example of vernacular architecture on the Great Plains. The Lacey House was originally a sod home, the walls of which were slowly replaced by stone that was laid on the exterior of the sod. Once the stone walls were complete, the sod was removed from the interior. Tuscumbia Agnes Smith came to Nicodemus from Georgetown, Kentucky, with her

³⁸ Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45. Historic images are shown on pages 45 and 52.

³⁹ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Ace Williams House," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-J, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

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father and siblings. Her granddaughter, Roberta Riley Robinson, recalls that Lacey's husband, Tim Lacey, owned a homestead southwest of the current schoolhouse. The Tuss Lacey House site also offers the opportunity to explore the material culture, architecture and use of space in a female-headed household.⁴⁰ The site was recorded in 2009 [REDACTED]

31. S side of Madison Ave. between Third and Fourth Sts., ca. 1970, 2016 2 non-contributing buildings

Two metal house trailers stand on this lot.

32. S side of Madison Ave. between Third and Fourth Sts., ca. 1970 1 non-contributing building

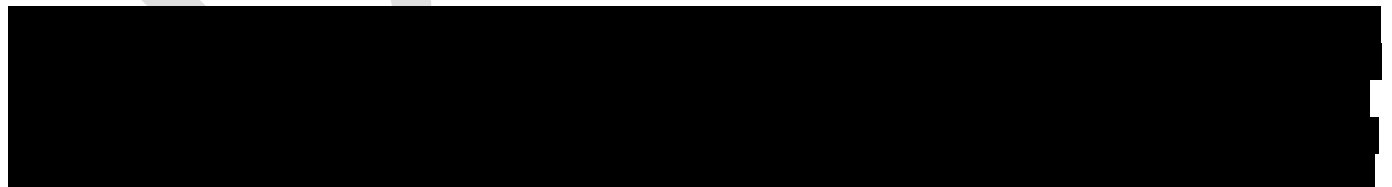
A metal house trailer stands on this lot.

33. S side of Madison Ave., east of Fifth St., ca. 2005 1 non-contributing building

A one-story frame ranch-style house with two frontal projecting gabled sections; one of the sections houses a two-car garage that was built recently.

34. District 1 Nicodemus School/Site 14GH103, 1917 or 1918 2 contributing buildings
NW corner, Madison Ave. and Fourth St. 1 archeological site
landscape features

This location includes both standing structures (school building, wood shed) and potential archeological resources. The first formal school in Nicodemus was built on this property in 1887. Destroyed by fire in 1916-1917, the building was quickly replaced with the current school, which remained operational as a school until 1960. It was eventually purchased by the American Legion and was used for meeting and social events.⁴¹ The school is a one-story frame foursquare school building with poured concrete foundation, wood lapped siding and pyramidal hipped roof, stands prominently on this parcel. It has three bays across the front (east) façade, with a central entrance. Other features include a gabled dormer on the front side, with a flagpole that rises from the dormer roof, and a hip-roofed entrance porch supported by steel columns. A brick chimney is southwest of the dormer. A rank of six windows is on the north elevation. There is one window (boarded up) on south elevation and none on the west. The playground is to the south of the building, and includes a slide, swing set and jungle gym. A frame gabled storage building (coal shed) stands to northwest of the school building. The school was documented with measured drawings and photographs in 1983, and assigned HABS No. KS-49-O.



⁴⁰ Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles," 64; Roberta Riley Robinson oral interview; *Promised Land on the Solomon*, page 8, contains an image of the house. As with all private property in the district, future archeological investigations would require owner approval, and collaboration between researchers and the local and descendent communities.

⁴¹ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "District No. 1 School," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-O, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

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35. First Baptist Church/Site 14GH106, 1907
NE corner, Washington Ave. and Fourth St.

1 contributing building
1 non-contributing building
landscape feature

The church was included in the original NHL nomination. It is a one-story stuccoed rock building dating from 1907. A wood shingled roof covers the church building. The front elevation, facing on to Fourth Street, is side gabled with flared eaves and pronounced returns. Small circular window openings are in the west and south gable ends. There is a projecting gable on the west side (added ca. 1920), and a square corner tower at the southwest corner. There is an arched main entrance in corner tower section. The top portion of the corner tower once included an open belfry and a four-sided spire with flared eaves; this was destroyed by strong winds in the 1930s. The bell remained in place until the late 1940s or early 1950s. In the 1920s buckling of the east walls prompted construction of exterior buttresses, and the windows of the north wall were infilled to stop structural settling. Stucco was applied ca. 1949. About 1967 a cinderblock addition containing two small bathrooms and a pastor's study were added to the northwest portion of the building. Windows have been reduced in size and boarded up, but their Gothic influence of peak head windows remains visible at the interior. Also in the interior, a dropped ceiling in the sanctuary is covered with pressed metal, which blocks off the circular windows in the gable ends. A one-story brick L-shaped building with a gabled roof, constructed just to the north of the old church, currently serves as the sanctuary, built in 1975.⁴³

The First Baptist Church was documented with measured drawings and photographs in 1983, and assigned HABS No. KS-49-K. The document notes that the First Baptist Church congregation occupied this site initially in a dugout, then a sod building, and then in 1880 a rock building. In 1907 building is said to have been constructed around the 1880 sanctuary. Following completion of this building, the 1880 sanctuary was removed, with the materials carried out the front door. The infilled dugout is said to be located between this building and the new First Baptist Church to the north. This may have accounted for the settlement of the north wall. The site underwent a pedestrian survey in 2006 and a baseline geophysical survey in 2012.⁴⁴

36. SE corner of Washington Ave. and Fourth St., ca. 2010

1 non-contributing building
landscape feature

This location hosts a recently made house trailer with gabled roof and vinyl German-type siding, although the area is known to be the location of two previous buildings. The first was the Farmers' Joint Stock Company's one-room stone building (circa 1880). In 1913 the land transferred to the Baptist Church, and about 1918-1920, a frame house formerly belonging to Lewis Wilson was moved on site to serve as the First Baptist Parsonage.⁴⁵ The building, which received a south addition in 1955, was photo documented in 1983, and assigned HABS No. KS-49-L.

⁴³ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Historic Structures Report*, 2-12.

⁴⁴ La Barbara Wigfall Fly "Old First Baptist Church," data pages, Historic American Building Survey No. KS-49-K, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>; Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles," 65.

⁴⁵ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "First Baptist Parsonage," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-L, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

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37. Nicodemus Villa, NW corner of Washington Ave. and Fourth St., 1976**8 non-contributing buildings**
landscape feature

Six brick duplex buildings, a brick maintenance building, a five-bay garage, with macadam parking lot form this HUD funded complex. The group consists of five duplexes and one community building that are single-story, side-gabled ranch style of yellow and brown brick with recessed entrance bays.

North of the villa was once located a frame house that had been moved onto the northeast corner of the block in 1921, and served as the Charles and Elizabeth Williams family. It was vacant but present in 1983, photo documented, and assigned HABS No. KS-49-M. The northeast room in the house served as the post office in the 1930s.⁴⁶

38. 201 Washington Ave., ca. 1975

S side of Washington Ave., between Fifth and Seventh Sts.

1 non-contributing building
landscape feature

This house is a one-story, partially subterranean ranch-style concrete block house known as a "Basement House" or "Hope House" with low pitched gable roof covered with channel drain sheet metal. The entrance is on the east gable end.

Southwest of the house once stood the Dr. D. L. Stewart House, which had been included in the original NHL nomination. It had been built in 1909 with the help of Jerry Scruggs, and was a one story rock building with a hipped roof and a porch on the north side. The house was described as "considered one of the finest homes in Nicodemus, in the 1920s," but was in ruins by 1979 (with demolition plans by the owners by 1983); photo documented and assigned HABS No. KS-49-N.⁴⁷

39. N side of Washington Ave., between Fifth and Seventh Sts., 1978**1 non-contributing building**

A metal, gable-roofed garage building for the municipal fire department occupies this space. It has two bays and faces onto south Washington Avenue.

40. 154 Seventh Street (SE corner of Washington Ave. and Seventh St.), ca. 1920s**3 contributing buildings**

This is a one-story, two-bay foursquare frame house with tall, hipped roof. It is the only one of the town's five hipped roof houses that was not relocated from another area.⁴⁸ The house was expanded on the north and south during the 1960s or 1970s. A shed-roofed porch across the front has bracketed square columns. There is also a three-bay pole car shed with shed roof, a gable-roofed shed, and an above-ground propane tank. The tank is not counted.

41. 508 Seventh St. (E side of Seventh St., south of Washington Ave.), ca. 1950s**2 contributing buildings**

The dwelling on this property is a one-story side-gabled frame, four-bay ranch-type house, with metal awnings over its openings. It has a window, door, window, window façade arrangement. In addition, there

⁴⁶ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Charles Williams House," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-M, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

⁴⁷ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Dr. Stewart House," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-N, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

⁴⁸ Burden, et. al., 190.

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is a gable-front two bay garage to the north of the house. Agricultural machinery, trucks, an RV trailer and other equipment sit on the property. The equipment is not counted.

42. N side of Jackson Ave., east of Seventh St., ca. 1940

1 contributing building

Currently serving as the headquarters of the Nicodemus Historical Society, this one-story, three-bay frame, gable-front bungalow retains a gabled front porch with tapered columns and asbestos shingle siding over older wood siding. The building was once the home of Ola Wilson, Nicodemus teacher and historian. Her daughter, Kim Wilson Thomas, donated the house to the historical society.⁴⁹

43. N side of Jackson Ave., east side of Seventh St. ca. 1920

2 contributing buildings

This dwelling is a one-and-a-half-story frame side-gabled bungalow with a jerkinhead roof and frontal jerkinhead gabled dormer. Its front porch is enclosed. Masonite/tempered hardboard siding covers the building. There is also a shed garage with wood siding.

44. N side of Madison Ave., east of Seventh St., ca. 1970

1 non-contributing building
landscape features

A three-bay open front metal pole shed with metal siding occupies this space. In this general area is a depression and plantings that mark the location of the former Benjamin Davenport/Calvin Sayers House. A slight ridge at the edge of the yard may indicate an historic fence line.⁵⁰ The house was photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS 49-P. It had been built in 1917 by Benjamin Davenport (Sayers' wife was Davenport's granddaughter) and was a one and one-half gabled frame building.

The house was abandoned in the 1960s and torn down in 2009.⁵²

The Matthews family dugout was in use sometime between 1877 and 1920.

Tim Lacey House Site 14GH105, 1890-1919

landscape feature

S. side Madison Ave., between Seventh and Fifth Sts.

Across the road from the Davenport/Sayers House site is the Timbrook "Tim" Lacey House site. Nicodemus resident Roberta Riley Robinson recalled stories about her grandfather's homestead, in which all the children shared one little room.⁵⁵ The sod walls of the house were reinforced at the corners with stone.

⁴⁹ Hosbey, 44-45.

⁵⁰ Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles," 62.

⁵² Burden, et. al, 189.

⁵⁵ Roberta Riley Robinson oral interview.

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The greater area around the site has been disturbed by agricultural activities, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The stone wall remnants of this house were photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS 49-Q. This site was recorded and assigned an archeological number in 2009.

45. S of Madison Ave., W of Second St., ca. 1915

1 non-contributing building
landscape features

A metal house trailer occupies this lot. In this general area was located the Clementine ("Clem") Vaughn house, which was abandoned, in poor condition, and demolished in the summer of 2010.⁵⁷ It had stucco on the north portion of this one-story, three-bay (window, door, window) frame side-gabled dwelling. A one-bay L-extension to rear (south), had shingles and asphalt siding and was probably added at a later date. There was a small north porch addition. Poured concrete foundation supported part of the building, other sections built on rubble stone. The house was vacated circa 1959 when Vaughn temporarily moved to Topeka. [REDACTED] The building was photo documented and assigned HABS No. KS-49-R, and a construction date estimated sometime after the land was purchased in 1914.⁵⁸

46. E of Seventh St., between Washington and South Aves., ca. 1925-1935

2 contributing buildings

Standing on this property is a one-story, three-bay frame bungalow dwelling with a gable-on-hip roof. It has a one-bay gabled entrance porch, wood and vinyl siding and a concrete block foundation. In addition there is a plywood covered frame car shed. The house is reported to have been moved to this location.⁶⁰

47. S of South Ave. and east of Seventh St., ca. 1955

1 contributing building

An abandoned one-story concrete block ranch-style dwelling with a one-bay projecting gabled section on north façade, stands along the south side of South Avenue.

48. Nicodemus Water Tower, S of Adams Ave. and west of Fifth St., 1978

1 non-contributing structure

A 100-foot tall cylindrical metal tower identified with "Nicodemus" is a local landmark noting the presence of the town of Nicodemus.

⁵⁷ Burden, et. al., 189.

⁵⁸ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Clementine Vaughn House," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-R, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>

⁶⁰ Burden, et. al., 206-208.

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49. Plum Thicket*landscape feature*W side of Seventh St. extended (390th St.), E side of Spring Creek, SE ¼ Sect. 2

A thicket of shrub-like wild plum bushes at this location provided fruit for Nicodemus residents. Throughout Nicodemus Township there are similar places where residents picked raspberries, plums or fished for catfish. This location is close to the town and also to both a traditional fishing hole and Scruggs Grove, a gathering place for picnics and festivals.

50. Ola Wilson Farmstead, ca. 1900

1 contributing building

E side of Seventh St. extended (390th St.), SW ¼ Sect. 1

1 contributing object

This abandoned farmstead is located at the end of a dirt lane, and contains a one-story, two-bay side-gabled frame house with a rock L addition and shed extension to the rear. The frame portion is covered with stucco over wood siding. It has four exterior walls indicating that it was built first, and the three sided stone wing added. A wood shingle roof covers the entire building. A well pump (object) remains near the house.

51. Fishing Hole*landscape feature*E side of Seventh St. extended (390th St.) at Spring Creek crossing

Spring Creek meanders to its destination at the South Fork of the Solomon River South of Nicodemus. In some places the creek is just a trickle. In other spots it is deep enough to support a population of catfish. Catfish were a source of food for Nicodemus' residents. One of the best known fishing holes is just south of Nicodemus along the east side of 390th Street, below two large steel pipes that carry the creek beneath the roadway.

52. Scruggs Grove, 1878-1952*landscape feature*S side of "R" Road, west of 390th St., NW ¼ Sect. 11

Also known as Welton's Grove, Scruggs Grove is noted consistently as an important gathering place and a place of great meaning to the people of Nicodemus. The site is now a farmed field, but earlier had a grove of Cottonwood trees, between the Solomon River and Spring Creek where there was enough moisture to support tree growth. This was a community picnic grove. The adjacent flat open area provided space for the Emancipation Day/Homecoming celebration, carnivals, games and events.

53. Ball Field Site, 1878*landscape feature*N side of "R" Road, west of 390th St., NW ¼ Sect. 11

This flat area west of Spring Creek is now a farmed field. Opposite Scruggs Grove, this area was once a baseball diamond.

54. Taylor Homestead, ca. 1920

2 contributing buildings

N side of "R" Road, east of 370th St., SW ¼ Sect. 3

3 contributing structures

An abandoned farmstead stands at the end of a short dirt lane leading north from "R" Road. A one-story, three-bay, hip-roofed rock house, with a window, door, window façade arrangement faces the road. It has a central single-flue chimney and wood shingle roof. In addition there is a frame gable-front garage with German siding. Structures include a hog yard and shed, a shed-roofed frame chicken house, and an

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“Airmotor” metal windmill. There is also a ruin of a frame house which was crushed by a tree; the ruin is not counted individually, but is an important feature at the property. The property was photo documented in 1983, identified as the John Edwards House, and assigned HABS No. KS-49-Y. Portions of the property may have been occupied in 1879 by J. Lored.⁶¹

55. Ranch House, ca. 2000 1 non-contributing building
N side of “R” Road, east of 370th St., just south of U.S. Route 24, SW ¼ Sect. 3

This property is a modern ranch-style house, not associated with African Americans.

56. Nevins Homestead Site, ca. 1920-1950 *landscape feature*
S side of “R” Road, west of 370th St., NE ¼ Sect. 9

The house is no longer standing, but the property remains in the Nevins family. Small-scale features consisting of a metal-covered frame side gabled shed (circa 1950) and a second wood sided frame shed (circa 1920) remain. Oil storage tanks and wells are on the property, but are not counted.

57. Modern property, ca. 2000 2 non-contributing buildings
S side of U.S. 24 west of junction with “R” Road

This modern complex has a house with a steeply pitched gable and hipped roof, and a gambrel-roofed barn. It is not associated with African Americans.

58. The Junction, ca. 1920 *landscape feature*
State Route 18 and U.S. 24

“The Junction” is the name used for the intersection of State Route 18 and US Route 24. It was the site of a crossroads assemblage that included a horse race track at the SW quadrant, a gas station operated by Reg Henrie and cabins in the SE quadrant and Dorothy and John Garland’s store in the NW quadrant, adjacent to the west side of 360th Street, which was also U.S. Route 24 until 1964. The gas station was demolished during the relocation of Route 24 in 1964. Only partial walls remain of the Garland store, consisting of spalled rock on poured concrete foundations.

59. Chris and Sadie Hall Homestead Site, ca. 1920 *landscape feature*
S of U.S. 24, east of 380th St., NW ¼ Sect. 2

Partial rock walls remain of a two-bay house ruin. A frame section with a porch was once attached on the south side, and stone foundations remain.⁶² There is also an oil well tank, but it is not counted. Nicodemus resident Bertha Moore Carter recalls how Sadie Hall, a neighbor to her mother, “liked to party” in the house in the 1940s, and loved to laugh, fish, play cards, and dance. This area may have been occupied as early as 1879 by C. Reynolds, and in 1920 by Earl Nevins.⁶³

⁶¹ *Promised Land on the Solomon* settlement maps, 87-91.

⁶² Bertha Moore Carter, oral interview, “Nicodemus Oral Histories,” *U.S.F. Heritage Research Lab*, accessed July 26, 2013, http://heritagelab.org/?page_id=2213.

⁶³ *Promised Land on the Solomon*, settlement maps.

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60. Unknown African American Homestead, construction date unknown
S of U.S. 24, east of Spring Creek, NW ¼ Sect 2

2 contributing buildings
2 contributing structures
landscape feature

The house is now gone, but two frame gable-roofed sheds with wood shingle roofs (buildings) and two grain bins (structures) remain.

61. Ranch House, ca. 1970
S side of 360th Street, south of "U" Road, NW ¼ Sect. 29

1 non-contributing building
1 non-contributing structure

This property contains a ranch-style house and frame chicken house. It is not associated with African Americans. In the general area was once a home owned by Ace Williams, an African American, in 1920.⁶⁴

62. Unknown African American Homestead, ca. 1900
S side of "V" Road, west of 360th St., NW ¼ Sect.20

1 contributing building
1 contributing structure
landscape feature

This property includes a one-story, two-bay gable-front frame house with hip-roofed porch across the front. It is covered with wood siding and has a sheet metal roof. A metal windmill (structure) is adjacent. There is a collapsed stable or shed to east of house which is a feature of the property, but not individually counted.

63. George and Effie Moore Homestead/ Site 14GH326, 1880-1900
N side of U.S. 24, west of 390th St., SE ¼ Sect. 35

landscape feature

Built by George and Effie Moore, the homestead site contains a ruin of a two room rock house with a corner, partial wall, and concrete door sill. About 300' from the house, the Moores grew peanuts, watermelon, cantaloupe, black-eyed peas, beans, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. Their son and daughter-in-law Nathan and Sara Griffey Moore, would live in a two room house (later destroyed by fire) to the west, and raised hogs, cattle and horses.⁶⁵

64. Unknown African American Homestead Site, ca. 1920
E side of 370th St., South of "S" Road, NW ¼ Sect. 3

landscape feature

The site contains a remnant of a frame house consisting of the wood shingled gable roof and gables on the ground. There is German siding on the gable end.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Berta Moore Carter and Berta Moore Carter and Florence Howard oral interviews with Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson, "Nicodemus Oral Histories," *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 2015, http://heritagelab.org/?page_id_2213.

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65. Stehno Agricultural School Farm Site, ca. 1911
N side of "S" Road, east of 360th St., Sect. 33

landscape feature

This property is referenced as the W.O. Sturgeon School site in the *Cultural Landscape Report* for Nicodemus.⁶⁷ However, Angela Bates reports that it was the Stehno School, and the Sturgeon property was in Wild Horse Township near Bogue. This was one of two agricultural schools created in Nicodemus Township. No standing resources remain on the property.

66. Jim Bates Homestead Site, ca. 1920
S side of "S" Road, east of 360th St., NW ¼ Sect. 4

landscape feature

No standing resources remain, but formerly there was a limestone (rock) house on the property. The property may have been occupied between 1880-1900 by W. Kirtley.⁶⁸

67. Mount Olive Cemetery, ca. 1889 to present
S side of "S" Road, west of 360th St., NW ¼ Sect. 5

landscape feature

This is an active cemetery associated with the Mount Olive Baptist Church. The rock church at this location burned in the 1930s when a routine burning off of grass in the cemetery got out of control. The stones are buried on the site where the building stood in the northeast corner of the cemetery lot.⁶⁹ Substantial portions of the stone walls remained in 1983, at the time they were documented by photograph and assigned HABS No. KS 49-V. A vertical stone installed along the road is inscribed "Mt Olive." The cemetery is enclosed with a barbed wire fence and contains graves with stone or concrete markers dating from the late nineteenth century through the present. The stones are arranged in rows facing west. There are numerous stones for veterans of the U.S. Colored Troops (USCI, USCHA, USC Cav) of the Civil War, Buffalo Soldier Nathaniel Moore, as well as World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam veterans. There are a few evergreens planted in the cemetery, along with grassy turf. There are no internal roadways or paths.

68. Mount Olive School Site, ca. 1880
N side of "S" Road, east of 350th St., SE ¼ Sect. 31

landscape feature

No extant remains above-ground. Portions of the stone walls remained in 1983, at the time they were documented by photograph and assigned HABS No. KS 49-W. Also nearby in 1983 were ruins of a stone house.

69. Ranch House, modern
N side of S Road, east of 350th St., SW ¼ Sect. 31

3 non-contributing buildings

This complex with a modern ranch-style house, and two metal sheds/garages is not associated with African Americans.

⁶⁷ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Promised Land on the Solomon*, settlement maps.

⁶⁹ Fraser, *Promised Land On the Solomon*, 41.

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70. Edwards Homestead, ca. 1920

W side of 340th St., north of U.S. 24, SE ¼ Sect. 2
Hill City Township (Mapped Twnshp)

3 contributing buildings
1 contributing structure
landscape features

The homestead consists of a rock, one-story foursquare house with steeply pitched hipped roof. It has a window, door, window façade configuration and a wood shingled roof. The homestead is abandoned. There is a metal windmill (structure) northeast of house, two sheds, and a collapsed barn ruin. These smaller resources and the ruin are not counted individually, but are important features at the property. Oil well storage tanks are clustered behind the house, but are not counted.

71. Unknown African American Homestead, ca. 1920

N side of U.S. 24, W of the junction with KS 18, SE ¼ Sect. 6

2 contributing buildings
2 non-contributing buildings

This complex includes a one-and-a-half story gable-front house, of frame construction, stuccoed. There is a lower rising gabled front enclosure with projecting bay window. Brackets embellish the eaves. In addition there is a frame gabled shed and two modern metal equipment sheds.

72. Warren and Marie White Homestead, ca. 1920

E side of 360th St., south of "T" Road, SW ¼ Sect. 28

2 contributing buildings
2 contributing structures
1 non-contributing building

This complex contains an abandoned, one-story, three-bay side gabled dwelling with enclosed front porch extension and added garage attached. The roof is steeply pitched with a brick single-flue chimney. There is a frame gable-front garage with German siding and a concrete block extension to the side, and two metal grain bins (structures). The circa 1920 house has been replaced with a modern modular house (non-contributing), which is not associated with African Americans.

73. John Luck Farmstead, ca. 1920

W side of 360th St., along N side of Spring Creek, SE ¼ Sect. 29

4 non-contributing buildings
5 non-contributing structures

This farmstead is not historically associated with African Americans.⁷⁰ The property includes an uninhabited one-story, three-bay stuccoed frame and rock house with wood shingle roof and enclosed shed-roofed porch. There is a frame service building with gable end entrance and German siding, two metal equipment sheds, and five metal grain bins (structures). There is an above ground propane tank that is not counted.

74. Ranch House, post 1970

W side of 360th St., along south side of Spring Creek, SE ¼ Sect 29

2 non-contributing buildings

This metal roofed ranch-style house built into an earthen embankment is not associated with African American ownership. There is also a metal garage.

75. Nicodemus Cemetery, ca. 1880 to present

1 mile north of Nicodemus
W side 400th Street and S side of "T" Road, NE ¼ Sect. 36

landscape feature

⁷⁰ *Promised Land on the Solomon*, settlement maps.

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This municipal cemetery is located on a manicured grass lot enclosed with barbed wire fence. A stone post with "Nicodemus" carved into surface vertically, identifies this cemetery. A small copse of cedar trees distinguishes this cemetery. Graves date from the late 19th century through the present. Many veterans of various USCT "colored" units, Civil War veterans, as well as World War I, II, Korea and Vietnam are identified. The stones are of granite, marble or concrete and stand in rows facing west. There are no internal roadways or paths in the cemetery.

76. Cass and Mattie Bibbs Homestead, ca. 1920

3 contributing buildings

E side of 390th St. and N side of "T" Road, SW ¼ Sect. 25

1 contributing structure

Currently this is the James Bates property. The house on this property is a one-story, three-bay frame foursquare with steeply pitched hipped roof and cross gable dormers. It has a porch across the front with metal columns and a one-story addition on the south side. The house was moved to this location in 1979 from a site in Norton County about 50 miles to the northwest. There is also a frame barn with metal siding, frame shed and metal windmill (structure), and above ground propane tanks. The tanks are not counted. Although the house was moved to this site, it is considered contributing because reuse of buildings in new locations is common in this region and because of the significance of the Bates family as being part of the original Nicodemus settlement. The barn, shed and windmill are part of the Bibbs homestead assemblage. Prior to the Bibbs, in 1900 the property was owned by E. Battles, [REDACTED]

77. Alexander Van Duvall Homestead, ca. 1900

1 contributing building

W side of 390th St., and N side of "T" Road, SE ¼ Sect. 26

The remaining homestead building here is the house, a one-story, three-bay frame, side gabled dwelling with a perpendicular frame section to the rear. The rear section has a south-facing enclosed shed extension or infilled porch. The rear wing is covered with stucco, while a combination of lap, horizontal plank and clapboard siding covers the front section. Wood shingles remain on a partially collapsed roof. The house replaced an earlier sold house on the same site.⁷² According to Joetta Niven, whose grandmother owned the land, the five-room house included a kitchen, living room, a room with a piano, and two rooms upstairs. Her parents, Alexander and Elizabeth Van Duvall, raised cattle and grew wheat. Roy Van Duvall, her uncle, built the shed extension.⁷³ The house was photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS-49-S.

78. Gil Alexander Property, ca. 1990

4 non-contributing building

W side of 390th St. between "U" and "V" Roads, NE ¼ Sect. 23

5 non-contributing structures

The Gil Alexander property is located on part of the historic Henry Williams Homestead land. A tan brick modern ranch-style house, metal equipment shed, metal sided frame stock shed, frame shed, and five metal grain bins compose this farmstead.

⁷² Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 58.

⁷³ Joetta Nivens oral interview "Nicodemus Oral Histories." While *Promised Land on the Solomon*, page 58, states that the house was abandoned circa 1915, the Nivens oral history contradicts that date.

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79. Thomas Johnson/Henry Williams Homestead/ Site 14GH102, 1909-1920s
W of 390th St. and N of "U" Road, SW ¼ Sect. 23

1 contributing building
1 contributing structure
1 contributing object
1 archeological site
landscape feature

The Thomas Johnson/Henry Williams Homestead/Site 14GH102 is located in Nicodemus Township.⁷⁴ It is a multicomponent site that includes the remains of a domestic site (dugout/sod-up domestic structure and root cellar) dating to the early twentieth century (ca. 1906-1921) and a later frame farmhouse (ca. 1921) with associated outbuildings. The Williams Homestead includes a one-and-a-half-story, four-bay frame dwelling with a window, door, window, window façade arrangement, resting on a poured concrete foundation. It is side gabled with steeply pitched roof and west-facing front. Clapboard siding and a wood shingled roof cover the building. The eaves once were supported by triangular brackets. Flat topped molded architraves trim openings. There is a gabled dormer on east side. The interior is finished with five-panel doors and flat topped molded architraves. The house is unoccupied and deteriorated. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The house was photo documented in 1983 and assigned HABS No. KS 49-T.

[REDACTED]. Material culture excavated from the site has been used to evaluate the social and material conditions of the family who occupied the home. The structures on this property were occupied by the same family sequentially; from 1906-1921 (dugout/sod-up) and then from 1921 to 1970s (frame farmhouse).

[REDACTED] This property has the potential to yield important information on the development and evolution of farmsteads, and the emergence of cultural traditions among rural African American communities.⁷⁶

80. Modern Ranch House/Fairview School Site, 1913-1943
N side of "U" Road, east of 380th St., SW ¼ Sect. 23

5 non-contributing buildings
1 non-contributing structure
landscape feature

The property includes a ranch-style house with a central gable recessed entrance. There is also a frame gable-front garage, three frame sheds (garage and sheds appear mid twentieth century and associated with an earlier house), and metal grain bin (structure).

While this site now contains non-contributing resources, there may be archeological potential for a former school building that once stood somewhat near the site. The Fairview School house is reported to have been built in 1913 on the SW ¼ of Section 23, and moved to town ca. 1943 to a site north of the District 1 School House, where it was used for grades 1-4. About 1953 the school was moved again to Washington Street, for

⁷⁴ Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles," 72-99.

⁷⁶ Wood, "Explorations of the Struggles."

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use as a meeting hall for the American Legion. In its 1953 location, the Fairview School was photo documented in 1983 (abandoned) and assigned HABS No. KS 49-C.⁷⁷

81. Henry and Bernice Bates Property, ca. 1920*landscape feature*

N of "U" Road, east of 380th St., SW ¼ Sect. 23

This site consists of the ruins of a rock house with collapsed rock walls and one corner remaining, along with household and structural debris.

82. Unknown African American Homestead, ca. 1920*1 contributing building*

N side of "U" Road, west of 360th St., SE ¼ Sect. 20

This one-and-a-half- story frame, two-bay house is situated with its gable end facing the road. All openings are the same size and door-sized. It is covered with lapped wood siding and a wood shingled roof. Flat topped molded architraves trim openings, interior and exterior. There is an interior corner staircase to the upper level. Local tradition indicates this site is an African American Homestead; the HABS map documents that by 1920 the property owner was Mitch Adams, White.⁷⁸

83. Farm complex, ca. 1935*5 non-contributing buildings*

S side of "V" Road, east of 360th St., NE ¼ Sect. 21

Local tradition indicates that this property is not historically associated with African American ownership, although the HABS map for 1920 identifies the property owner at the time as J. A. Weaver, an African American.⁷⁹ The complex includes a frame house with projecting front and side gables, a board and batten frame shed, metal covered shed, concrete block gambrel roofed barn, and metal equipment shed.

84. Yvonne Dabney Savage Homestead, ca. 1920*1 contributing building*

E side of 330th Street, south of "U" Road, NW ¼ Sect. 26
Hill City Township (Mapped Township)

This one-story, four-bay stuccoed frame house has an offset L-extension to the rear. It is side-gabled with a metal roof. The east bay may be an addition. This appears to be an early twentieth century house with recent surface treatments and an addition.

85. Schuyler Jones Homestead, ca. 1920*3 contributing buildings*

E side of 330th St., south of "V" Road, NW ¼ Sect. 23
Hill City Township (Mapped Township)

This homestead features a one-story, three-bay frame side-gabled house with an L extension to rear. It has a window, door, window façade arrangement, vinyl siding and a new metal roof. There is an enclosed porch along the L. Support buildings include a metal-covered, gable-front equipment shed and two collapsed wooden sheds. The collapsed sheds are not counted, but are considered features of the property. Along

⁷⁷ Bettina C. Van Dyke, "Fairview School (American Legion Hall)," data pages, HABS No. KS-49-C, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>.

⁷⁸ *Promised Land on the Solomon*, settlement maps.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

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330th Street is a one-story, two-bay side-gabled frame building, covered with German siding and horizontal tongue and groove wood siding on the interior of the frame. The function of this building is unknown.

86. Ranch House ca. 1980

W side of 340th St., south of "V" Road, NE ¼ Sect. 23
Hill City Township (Mapped Township)

3 non-contributing buildings

1 non-contributing structure

This complex includes a ranch-style house with two large metal Quonset buildings and a grain bin. It has no historic association with African American families.

87. Samuels Cemetery, ca. 1890 to present

Kebar Vicinity, E side of 360th St. and N side of "M" Road, SW ¼ Sect. 33
Wild Horse Township

landscape feature

This small cemetery, situated in the northeast corner of a crossroads has a commanding view to the east from its location on high ground. The well maintained grass covered cemetery lot is enclosed with a barbed wire fence. There are no particular landscaping, pathways or driveways associated with this cemetery. Stones are arranged in rows, facing west. A stone post inscribed "Samuel" written vertically, identifies this cemetery, one of three in the Nicodemus area. It is named for the Samuels family that settled this land. Burials date from the late nineteenth century through the present in this still active cemetery. There are several markers for veterans including Buffalo Soldier Samuel Garland and several from World War I.

88. Causby Napue Homestead, ca. 1920

Keybar Vicinity, W side of 360th Street, south of "M" Road
NE ¼ Sect. 5, Wild Horse Township

landscape feature

The homestead includes a ruin of rock house (site) that was one-story, three-bay, with a window, door, window façade arrangement. Also there is a partially collapsed concrete shed and abandoned house trailer. The property remains in the Napue family.

89. Joseph Napue Homestead, ca. 1920

Keybar Vicinity, E side of 360th St., south of "M" Road, NW ¼ Sect. 4
Wild Horse Township

4 contributing buildings

On this homestead is a one-story, three-bay frame foursquare house with a steeply pitched hipped wood shingled roof and a central single flue chimney. There is an enclosed porch extension to rear. A gambrel-roofed frame barn with wood shingle roof, a frame gable-roofed shed and a stone gable-roofed shed complete the grouping. The property remains in Napue family.

90. Stockton Area Dugout, ca. 1880

N side of U.S. 24, NW ¼ Sect. 21, Stockton Quadrangle

1 contributing building

This cut limestone-walled dugout was included in the original nomination, but described as a "sod house." Comparisons of the 1975 photographs with the current building confirm that this is the same building.

It is cut into a southeast-facing hillside, has rock walls, a barrel vaulted ceiling, and a rock front entrance. The floor is dirt. Soil covers

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the top and sides. The front appears to originally have a triangular façade, but deterioration has removed the upper courses.

Integrity Evaluation:

To scholars familiar with evaluating integrity of historic properties, Nicodemus town and township might appear to have lost the ability to convey historical associations through physical features that portray when and why this place is important. Many of the homesteads and town's commercial and residential buildings are gone completely or are in ruins. What is left to represent or capture the essence of Nicodemus? The answer lies in the land itself and ownership of the land, largely by the descendants of the first settlers who homesteaded here. The land and the landscape are the essential physical features that tie Nicodemus to its Traditional Culture significance. Buildings are not particularly important to the people of Nicodemus. What is important is owning "a little piece of 'Demus'." Thus families cling to land that has been passed from generation to generation, ownership slices becoming smaller and smaller as children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren share inheritance of the land over the years. Some pieces of land now have many owners – cousins several times removed. But what counts is the feeling of connection to the land. With so many owners, buildings are sometimes not maintained or fall into ruin and disappear from the landscape, just as predecessor dugouts and sod houses have disappeared before them. Through time, however, the essential quality of the land and the landscape, and its bond with the cultural life that is Nicodemus remains fully intact.

The division of the land into sections and quarter sections and agricultural use continues essentially unchanged. Of course, dry land farming with horses and mules progressed to large diesel-powered tractors and combines. Tractor trailers now carry harvested grain from the fields to elevators in Stockton, Bogue or Hill City. Beef cattle graze on rangeland. While the land is still farmed and produces with modern equipment and technologies, other features of the landscape remain much as they were historically. Special places where good berries and wild plums grew are still there and generally known. Section roads of packed earth and gravel, barbed wire fences demarking property boundaries, windmills planted over wells to provide water for humans and livestock, grain bins for storage of annual harvests, cemeteries that hold the remains of Nicodemus' settlers and still serve for current burial places – all of these features show the human imprint on the land, both past and present.

Distinctive is the cultural imprint left by a community of formerly enslaved Africans from Kentucky and their descendants who continue to leave their mark on the landscape. Nicodemus and Nicodemus Township, and associated lands retain a high level of integrity of location, setting, feeling and association. A notable number of homes in the town and in the township—simple in design and function—remain from the historic period that serve as the markers of human occupation on this landscape. They define its character and possess integrity of design, materials and workmanship, perhaps not as typically viewed, but nonetheless present, very real and essential. The modest design of the buildings, which includes historic trailers, are character-defining features, and in fact set Nicodemus apart from other townships in the area. They are practical solutions for a community that historically utilized what little resources were available to them to retain their connections to this place. Within the greater township, the number of non-contributing farmsteads are relatively few and do not greatly intrude upon the landscape. Within the town of Nicodemus, the non-contributing resources tend to be modern trailers, a transitory resource that may move or be removed, lessening overall permanent impacts to setting, feeling, and association.



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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A B C X D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: Criteria 1, 5 and 6

NHL Theme(s): NHL Theme I: Peopling Places; 3. migration from outside and within; 4. community and neighborhood. NHL Theme III: Expressing Cultural Values; 6. popular and traditional culture.

Areas of Significance: Exploration/Settlement; Traditional Cultural Property; Archeology, subcategory:
Historic Non-Aboriginal

Period(s) of Significance: 1877 - present

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: African American

Architect/Builder: N/A

Historic Contexts: Historic Context Theme X: Westward Expansion of the British Colonies and the United States, 1763-1898; sub-theme F. The Farmer's Frontier, 4. Settling and Farming in the Great Plains, 1862-1900.
Historic Context Theme XXX: American Ways of Life; subtheme E. Ethnic Communities.

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Nicodemus Historic District is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its role in the post-Civil War African American westward migration, and as the oldest surviving all-Black settlement community west of the Mississippi River. It is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 6 for the district's exceptional archeological research potential to yield information about the westward migration of African Americans and their experiences as they created communities based on traditional and emergent values. Research potential also offers the opportunity to examine the dynamics of race relations and racial identities as they were defined and negotiated in a post-Emancipation rural context. The Nicodemus Historic District is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 5 as an African American Traditional Cultural Property (TCP), a community founded on the priority of land ownership as a marker of freedom and which nurtured, maintained, and continues to retain to an exceptional degree, traditional African American cultural values molded by slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and segregation. African American cultural values are a unique cultural expression not limited to Nicodemus residents or descendants, but are relatable to all African Americans. It is the degree to which these values are represented and retained in Nicodemus, supported and entwined within the context of its nationally significant history (Criterion 1) and archeological research potential (Criterion 6), and through the continuing existence of the Nicodemus community, which makes this a nationally significant Traditional Cultural Property.

Criterion 1: Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained.

NHL Theme I: Peopling Places; 3. migration from outside and within; 4. community and neighborhood. Historic Context Theme X: Westward Expansion of the British Colonies and the United States, 1763-1898; sub-theme F. The Farmer's Frontier, 4. Settling and Farming in the Great Plains, 1862-1900. Historic Context Theme XXX: American Ways of Life; subtheme E. Ethnic Communities. Both of these historic themes are more specifically addressed within the context of African American westward migration, the rural land and Black town development that followed, and the eventual decline or disappearance of many of these communities.

The men and women who settled Nicodemus Township from 1877-1879 mostly hailed from Kentucky, a border state during the Civil War where slavery remained legal until 1865. Only recently granted freedom from enslavement and facing increasing discrimination in their home state, these people left the land they knew for the promise of a truer freedom – freedom to own land, to operate a farm or business, to participate in governance, to educate their children – to be free from discrimination and violence. They were part of a trend of African American migration from the South into the western frontier that began as early as the 1830s when freemen and runaway slaves sought the “free soil” of the then-frontier region of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Eastern Kansas became a favored destination after the “free-soilers” won the fight for Kansas to be a free state – a non-slavery state – in the 1850s. The original Nicodemus settlers preceded a larger movement carried into the 1860s and early 1870s that reached its peak with the “Exoduster” mass migration of 1879 when upwards of 20,000 African Americans moved out of the Deep South, primarily to Kansas, the state associated with John Brown, and that many Black Americans saw as the “promised land.” Migration continued into the early twentieth century with many Black towns established in Oklahoma between 1890 and 1910.

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Many of the African American towns established in the early migrations failed when bypassed by the railroads in the 1880s, or were abandoned during the 1930s, a decade dominated by the “Dust Bowl” and Great Depression. It was a fate experienced by many frontier towns regardless of ethnicity, but the African American population of Nicodemus, though fewer in number by the 1930s, persevered. Nicodemus stands today (2016) as the oldest surviving African American frontier town west of the Mississippi.⁸⁰

Criterion 5: Property collectively composes an entity of exceptional significance and illustrates a way of life or culture.

NHL Theme III: Expressing Cultural Values; 6. popular and traditional culture. Nicodemus Historic District is a complex and multi-layered property which includes buildings, sites, landscapes, archeological, and ethnographic resources. All of these form the framework through which the significance of Nicodemus as an African American Traditional Cultural Property is revealed and supported. Both the Nicodemus town site and much of the surrounding Nicodemus Township and Kebar area in Wild Horse Township, continues today as a living community of African Americans, most of whom are descendants of the original settler families, and extends beyond its town site and township borders to include a widely-scattered descendant community. Regardless of where they live today, this community celebrates the feeling of Nicodemus, the feeling that Nicodemus will never disappear as long as the kinship, the land, and the history remain. It is a feeling that is celebrated in returns home to participate in annual Emancipation Day/Homecoming celebrations.

There is a special connection to this “homeland,” and while residents of Nicodemus and the descendant community do not ascribe sacred properties to their surrounding landscape, they do consider it an important link to their ancestors and a time of new beginnings. As a living cultural community, Nicodemus embodies and maintains the traditional values of the African American community – family, church, school, self-governance, land ownership, and mutual aid. These values on the surface may appear to be in common with all Americans, but are imbued with special cultural meaning for African Americans, molded by enslavement, emancipation, and racial discrimination. The landscape of Nicodemus is an intact historical community, representing traditional cultural life ways that may be considered uniquely African American and that would likely resonate as cultural memory with most African Americans today:

Nicodemus has and continues to function as an alternative space for African Americans who looked/looking to create an aesthetic that allowed them to produce and ultimately pursue American ideas and behaviorisms that empowered them as agents of change. Nicodemus citizens’ cultural products, then, live in a space, with its people, as they named/name and defined/define for themselves the limits of White power, domination, and supremacy. While Blacks at Nicodemus were not the only ones thinking and behaving in this manner, but each group of Black town-settlers worked to establish aspects of life and culture specific to some of their nuanced needs. A landed space, Nicodemus as a physical locality produced life and a livelihood that Blacks controlled through: (1) their self-governed politics; (2) transformative values that told them they were somebody; (3) their faith which helped them to re-imagine the world differently and with them being in it as an equal people; and (4) through a business culture they established to create stakeholders who purchased the idea that they could make a world filled with artifacts and visions that re-represented them as a people of great humanity.

⁸⁰ The historical and cultural significance of Nicodemus is widely acknowledged through video productions intended for national audiences, including *Sunday Today* with Lucky Severson, *Good Morning America* with Denise Richardson, an *HGTV* production entitled “Historic African American Towns” (reproduced at Nicodemus National Historic Site visitor center); and in the *PBS* “American Experience” film production entitled “Reconstruction: The Second Civil War,” accessed March 4, 2013, www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction.

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Consequently, Nicodemus, Kansas became/is a collectively owned property that represents exceptional historical, cultural, racial, and political significance for a group of Americans who attempted to make America's promise of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" real, moving their hopes from theory to practice.⁸¹

Criterion 6: Properties that have yielded and may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States, affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.

NHL Theme I: Peopling Places; 3. migration from outside and within; 4. community and neighborhood. Theme III: Expressing Cultural Values; 6. popular and traditional culture.

Archeological sites at Nicodemus are significant for their potential to yield important information about the westward migration of African Americans and their experiences as they worked for forge communities based on traditional and emergent values. One of the driving intellectual forces behind the development of African American archeology has been an interest in identifying how traditional practices have been maintained, redefined and transformed as part of the lived experience of the diaspora.⁸² Anthropological archeologist Laurie Wilkie, for example has demonstrated how material culture can be used in sophisticated ways to understand the dynamics of the development of African American cultures and the material expressions of those cultures.⁸³ Wilkie also calls for studies that focus on the ways that African Americans shaped the social, political, and physical contexts in which they lived through creative acts of their own. The archeological resources at Nicodemus offer just such an opportunity.

Archeological resources at Nicodemus also offer the opportunity to examine the dynamics of "race relations" and "racial identities" as they were defined and negotiated in a post-Emancipation, rural context. Archeological resources have the potential to inform archeological literature and the exploration of how material culture and landscapes are involved and implicated in the creation and maintenance of racial identities and social inequality in both antebellum and postbellum periods. Charles Orser, for example, critically evaluates how new forms of racism which arose to replace the formal institution of slavery could be traced in the material remains and on the landscape of Millwood Plantation in South Carolina.⁸⁴ Paul Mullins directly confronts issues of racism in his study of African American households in Annapolis, Maryland, and explores how urban African Americans strategically utilized consumer goods to negotiate their position in their community and society in general.⁸⁵ Barbara Heath and Amber Bennett investigate the uses and meanings of the slave quarters yard areas

⁸¹ Grim, personal communication. See also Jackson, "Intangible Cultural Heritage and Living Communities," and Hoseby for their documentation of the role of storytelling and maintaining Nicodemus cultural memory. A short, two-part documentary called "Nicodemus," produced by Scott Evans and posted on YouTube in February 2009, captures the depth of this "feeling" about Nicodemus, past and present (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlu_3hLrHyk, Part I, and www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqMOpwvDd5o, Part II).

⁸² Laurie A. Wilkie, *Creating Freedom: Constructions of African-American Identity at a Louisiana Plantation*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000); Charles E. Orser Jr (ed.), *Race and the Archaeology of Identity in the Modern World*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001); Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*, (Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Douglas V. Armstrong, *The Old Village and the Great House*, (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

⁸³ Wilkie, *Creating Freedom*; Laurie A. Wilkie, "Secret and Sacred: Contextualizing the Artifacts of African-American Magic and Religion," *Historical Archaeology*, 31, no. 4 (1997): 81-106; Laurie A. Wilkie, "Considering the Future of African American Archaeology," *Historical Archaeology*, 38, no. 1 (2004): 109-123.

⁸⁴ Charles E. Orser, *The Material Basis of Postbellum Tenant Plantations*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

⁸⁵ Paul R. Mullins, *Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African American and Consumer Culture*, (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999).

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surrounding African-American dwellings. Drawing on excavations at Poplar Forest, their work explores a spectrum of research questions, from community interactions, to work and leisure activities in home sites and yards, to landscape aesthetics and cultural changes over time.⁸⁶ Whitney Battle-Baptiste examines the use and meaning of the Kitchen Quarter courtyard area at the Hermitage in Tennessee, as the epicenter of Black cultural production.⁸⁷ Daniel Sayers and his colleagues investigate the remains of 18th and 19th century escape settlements in the Great Dismal Swamp. Archeological information aids in understanding how these maroon communities of persons from diverse cultural backgrounds formed and connected through a dynamic, swamp-wide political economy.⁸⁸ Terrance Weik investigates the 19th century maroon community at Pilakikaha in central Florida, where African Americans acceptance into the Creeks and Seminoles societies produced African Seminole cultural beliefs and practices that affected kinship, spirituality, ceremonialism, politics, economics and anti-slavery resistance. Weik also identifies the opportunities to examine social and cultural transformations through archeological investigations of Latin American.⁸⁹ The work of Paul Shackel and Christopher Fennell at New Philadelphia examines the racially integrated, mid-to late- 19th century Illinois community, the first town founded and platted by an African American. Their archeological investigations explore spatial relationships outside the plantation setting to address issues of space, race and power on the frontier. Material evidence offers the opportunity to understand life in multi-racial communities of the era.⁹⁰ In the Caribbean, researchers have conducted long-term projects examining periods during and after slavery. For example, the island of St. Maarten in the Dutch Caribbean hosts a long-term program of African diaspora research and community engagement. Similar studies have explored African-Bahamian heritage and histories in the period following slavery in the Bahamas.⁹¹

These and other scholars have been effective in exploring how the consumption and use of material goods and the creation of landscapes were instrumental in formulating and asserting specific gendered, class, and racial identities. Research examining the landscape and archeological remains of Nicodemus have the potential to explore how residents of this Black community negotiated their own racial identities in relation to the community itself and their primarily White neighbors. As has been observed by historical archeologist Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, by its very presence, Nicodemus represents the power of community to sustain itself in adversity. Many residents migrated and settled as a community; the archeological record and geographic

⁸⁶ Dr. Christopher C. Fennell, to Dena Sanford, comments on draft Nicodemus National Historic Landmark nomination, 21 July, 2016, National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, Nebraska, referencing Barbara J. Heath and Amber Bennett, "The little spots allow'd them' The archaeological study of African-American yards," *Historical Archaeology* 34, no. 2 (2000): 38-55.

⁸⁷ Fennell, referencing Whitney Battle-Baptiste, "'In this here place': Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces, *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. A. Ogundiran and T. Falola (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 233-248.

⁸⁸ Fennell, referencing Daniel O. Sayers, P. Brandan Burke and Aaron M. Henry, "The political economy of exile in the Great Dismal Swamp," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 11, no. 1 (2007): 60-97.

⁸⁹ Fennell, referencing Terrance Weik, "Archaeology of the African diaspora in Latin America. *Historical Archaeology* 38, no. 1 (2004): 32-49, Terrance Weik, "Allies, Adversaries, and Kin in the African Seminole communities of Florida: Archaeology at Pilakikaha," ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola, *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 311-331, Terrance Weik; "Mexico's Cimarron Heritage and Archaeological Record," *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* (June 2008), <http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/news0608/news0608.html#3>, and Terrance Weik, "The Role of Ethnogenesis and Organization in the Development of African-Native American Settlements: An African Seminole Model, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 13 (2009): 206-238.

⁹⁰ King and Seibert.

⁹¹ Fennell, referencing Jay B. Havisier, "Truth and Reconciliation: Transforming Public Archaeology with African Descendant Voices in the Dutch Caribbean," *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* 4, no. 3 (2015): 243-259, and Michael Craton, "Bay Street, Black Power and the 'Conchy Joes': Race and Class in the Colony and Commonwealth of Bahamas, 1850-2000," in *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publisher, 1998): 71-94.

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associations may therefore reflect these bonds and associations. Nicodemus has the potential to explore the community as an expression of American values and democratic principles and ideals.⁹²

Finally, the archeological resources of Nicodemus are significant because descendants and contemporary residents of the township ascribe powerful meanings to these remains that play a significant role in the way they construct personal and group identities and define the essential attributes and values of a shared history and cultural community. Nicodemus residents and descendants see Nicodemus as a place of origin or beginning (in the sense of the beginning of self-determination and opportunity); a traditional home to which many return annually; and a place where important cultural traditions took root. Residents and descendants are linked to this place through land ownership and kinship; both of which are embodied in the landscape. The link is continually maintained and strengthened through storytelling and oral traditions of the descendants. Ownership of the land was first achieved by the ancestors⁹³ who homesteaded, persevered, and created the physical and social community of Nicodemus. The presence of the ancestors is inscribed on the land itself and by the archeological remains of the first dugouts, later sod structures, and frame farmhouses that mark the by-gone generations. These sites link the contemporary community and ancestors in a web of kinship and shared culture that is mediated through space and place and extends from past to present.

HISTORIC CONTEXT – U.S. Westward Expansion and African American Migrations and Traditions

Introduction

Throughout the history of the United States, beginning with colonial aspirations, the West has held a special meaning for Americans as a place of freedom. Viewed from the crowded cities of the East or from the slave quarters of the South, it was seen as a place where a person could own land and support his or her own family; a place perhaps free of oppressive laws and societal norms, particularly regarding religion and race. By the end of the American Revolution in 1783, institutionalized slavery was entrenched as the foundation of the plantation economy in the South. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the Ohio Valley – then the western frontier – as a place of freedom, “free soil” where slavery could not take root.⁹⁴ While the majority of settlers in the region were White European Americans, for many enslaved African Americans the attraction of free soil north and west of the Ohio River was undeniable, drawing a continuous tide of fugitive slaves to the frontier, and frustrating their politically powerful owners. Thus began the territorial march westward that framed the political landscape of the U.S. through the first half of the nineteenth century, leading to the American Civil War in 1861, and which shaped the settlement of the American West. But for those who peopled the landscape, whether they were White European Americans who viewed it as their Manifest Destiny or free Blacks and fugitive slaves who saw it as the “promised land,” the lure was the land.

⁹² Dr. Cheryl Janifer LaRoche to Dena Sanford, “Response to Nicodemus Historic and Archeological District—Draft, Submitted by Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, Ph.D.,” 12 August 2015, National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Omaha, Nebraska, 6.

⁹³ The word “ancestor” is used to denote any person of an earlier generation.

⁹⁴ Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, “The Balance Principle,” in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 237. LaRoche points out however that the Ordinance did allow for “limited slavery in the region while concurrently seeming to proclaim an end to slavery.”

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U.S. Territorial Expansion through the First Half of the 19th Century

Westward territorial expansion of the United States officially began in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, which ceded all of the British land east of the Mississippi (except Spanish Florida) to the new United States government. Known then as the Northwest and Southwest Territories, the land was initially claimed by several of the original states, who extended their boundaries to the Mississippi River. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the territory north and west of the Ohio River as federal land, it laid out a plan for its eventual division into five new states, provided for religious freedom, and essentially banned slavery.⁹⁵ In his 1782 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson, perhaps with the Northwest Territory in mind, pondered the idea of colonizing emancipated slaves “to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper.”⁹⁶ However, Virginia slaves were not emancipated and fellow Virginian George Washington suggested that settlement of the Northwest Territory should be limited to Whites only, “to preserve an orderly and well-preserved White society.”⁹⁷ Eventually the territory was settled by both White and Black Americans seeking to determine their own fate on the new frontier.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase from the French added a vast territory covering nearly one-third of the continent. The lucrative fur trade fueled the expansion into this wild and mostly unexplored section. Lewis and Clark’s expedition, begun in 1804 and accompanied by Clark’s enslaved manservant York, not only documented the territory and blazed new trails, but also encouraged the exploitation of the wild lands by fur trappers. The men who explored and exploited the wilderness were loners who sought the solitude and freedom of the fur trapper’s life as well as the profits. “Like their more numerous White counterparts,” observed western historian Quintard Taylor, African American men too were drawn by profit, but also because “the frontier afforded freedom from racial restrictions typically imposed by ‘settled’ communities.”⁹⁸

While the trappers and traders explored the far West, westward migration of farmer-settlers worked its way across the Ohio Valley through the first decades of the nineteenth century, eventually crossing the Mississippi River into the Louisiana Territory. Burgeoning populations in the east coast pushed settlers westward across the Mississippi and into the American West.

Much of the southwestern territory came under Mexican authority after 1821. Slavery was banned in Mexico and its Texas territory became a magnet for fugitive slave settlers from southern U.S. plantations. But settlement in Mexico’s Texas territory was dominated by European Americans who sought to establish a slave labor-based plantation economy. Their independent spirit and alternate economic vision set in motion decades of strife.⁹⁹ In 1845, with tensions rising over American and Mexican boundaries and relations, the United States government annexed the Republic of Texas. In 1846, Congress declared war with Mexico. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the war and the United States added the California and New Mexico

⁹⁵ Northwest Ordinance, July 13, 1787; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M332, roll 9); Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789, Record Group 360; National Archives, accessed May 11, 2012, www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=8.

⁹⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, (Philadelphia: Prichard & Hall, 1782), 147, from electronic version: Text transcribed by Apex Data Services, Inc., University Library, UNC-Chapel Hill, 2006, accessed May 10, 2012, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/jefferson/jefferson.html>.

⁹⁷ LaRoche, 2010, 238.

⁹⁸ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1998), 48.

⁹⁹ Taylor, 37-39.

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territories to the list of acquisitions. With the purchase of the Oregon Territory from Great Britain in 1846, the United States government had annexed or acquired land as far as the Pacific Coast by 1848.

Manifest Destiny, the perceived superiority of White American culture and industry, buoyed United States government policy in the West, including its war with Mexico. More than just a vision of cultural superiority, Manifest Destiny served the American vision of economic expansion as well.¹⁰⁰ Many of the White Americans who migrated west carried with them the idea of their own Manifest Destiny: "They viewed the new and fabled lands of Oregon and California as regions of rebirth and hope, where upward mobility was not merely possible but virtually certain."¹⁰¹ That vision propelled a surprisingly large number of pioneering families across hundreds of miles of prairie, plains, mountain, and desert through the middle of the nineteenth century. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 accelerated the spread of that view and pushed the rush westward to a near frenzy. Though some African Americans were swept westward by the prospect of gold, Manifest Destiny did not describe the vision of most of the free Black pioneering families and fugitive slaves. Their destination was a biblical vision of the "promised land." Deliverance from enslavement and discrimination to freedom was the Destiny that drove their migration into the western frontier.

Extension into the West moved in waves across the land. The advance of agriculture defined the progress or "civilization" of the frontier, as articulated by late-nineteenth century historian Frederick Jackson Turner:

Stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization marching single file – the buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur-trader and hunter, the cattle-raiser, the pioneer farmer – and the frontier has passed by.¹⁰²

It should be noted that Turner's romantic image of the peopling of the West did not include African American pioneers who helped to shape the American frontier.¹⁰³ While the fur-trader followed the beaver and buffalo seeking wilderness areas and trading with Indians, the pioneer farmer tended to settle in regions already somewhat tamed by the miners and cattlemen, avoiding contact with Indians. The advance of agriculture into frontier areas generally signaled Indian removal to ever more marginal territory.

Settlement of the vast interior lands was spurred on by a series of federal land laws, though according to historian Lawrence Kinnaird, the laws "never seemed entirely satisfactory":

They either did not fit the conditions of soil and climate or they favored speculators and large landholders rather than "small farmers." The Land Law of 1820 reduced the price of public land as low as \$1.25 an acre and permitted the sale of eighty-acre tracts. Thus anyone who had \$100 cash could buy a farm from the government...

Despite the apparent cheapness of farm land, thousands of settlers could not raise the necessary cash; they simply settled in vacant areas without benefit of title. As this group became more numerous it brought pressure on Congress to legalize occupancy by establishing "preemption

¹⁰⁰ Robert W. Johannsen, "Theme XV: Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898: Overland Migrations West of the Mississippi," Nat. Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1959), 4.

¹⁰¹ John D. Unruh, Jr. *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West 1840-60*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 91.

¹⁰² As cited by Lawrence Kinnaird, "Theme XVIIa: Agriculture and The Farmer's Frontier," Nat. Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1963), 45.

¹⁰³ Taylor, 19, "Until the 1960s the images of the West centered on Frederick Jackson Turner's ideal of rugged Euro-American pioneers constantly challenging a westward-moving frontier, bringing civilization, taming the wilderness, and, in the process, reinventing themselves as 'Americans' and creating an egalitarian society that nurtured the fundamental democratic values that shaped contemporary American society. This interpretation was reinforced by western paintings, by novels, and, most important, by movies and television programs..."

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rights.” ...Finally a general pre-emption act was passed by Congress in 1841 which gave squatters the right to purchase lands upon which they had settled, and specified that the sale should be at minimum price....¹⁰⁴

What proved to be most unsatisfactory about these laws was abuse by speculators, who would buy up large tracts of land to resell at inflated prices, or who “often hired counterfeit farmers to pre-empt land for them.”¹⁰⁵

Horace Greeley, editor of the *New Yorker* (later *Weekly Tribune*) led the campaign to reform the land laws through the 1840s and 1850s in response to the rampant speculator abuse. He began his campaign after the Panic of 1837 when he had urged unemployed European immigrants, particularly in New York City, to “scatter through the country -- go to the Great West...”¹⁰⁶ Greeley viewed the prospect of free land in the West as a way to cure overcrowding and poverty in eastern cities, railing against the monopolies of land speculators and the railroad land grants as obstacles to economic development. His view was mirrored by the voices of the Black Convention Movement of the 1830s and 40s who envisioned African American agrarian colonies in the West as “sanctuary from discrimination without abandoning their American birthright.”¹⁰⁷ Greeley, a noted abolitionist, hoped the Free-Soil Party of 1848 would adopt his Free Land platform that might also benefit emancipated slaves, but to no avail.¹⁰⁸ In the end it was the 1861 secession of the southern states that provided the majority in Congress necessary to pass the Homestead Act of 1862, prompting the comment from Greeley: “Young men! Poor men! Widows! resolve to have a home of your own! ...make one in the broad and fertile West!”¹⁰⁹

The 1862 Homestead Act was a step forward. Any American citizen, White, Black, or naturalizing immigrant, was eligible to acquire 160 acres of government land. Stipulations included living on the land for five years, making improvements such as buildings and fencing, and cultivation of the land. With the five years of equity fulfilled, title to the land was obtained by paying the registration fee.¹¹⁰ The Homestead Act of 1862 spurred migration west of the Mississippi River among Whites and free Blacks, while fugitive slave migrations increased with the upheaval of the ongoing Civil War. Several later laws helped to target settlement in the more difficult climates, such as the Timber Culture Act of 1873 and the Desert Land Act of 1877, which attempted to address the issues of farming on arid and semi-arid land.¹¹¹

Soil quality and water accessibility were significant factors determining the advance of agriculture into the American frontier – the best agricultural lands settled first. As the frontier crossed the Ohio River early in the nineteenth century, first Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, then Missouri and Arkansas were settled through the 1830s. The landscapes in these areas were familiar, with land much like that found south of the Ohio River and east of the Appalachian Mountains. These were followed by Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, and on the west coast, Oregon and California’s fertile valleys in the 1840s and 50s, leaving an expansive swath of largely unsettled (uncultivated) land east of the Rockies and west of the Mississippi River – with the exception of the Mormon Great Salt Lake settlements.

¹⁰⁴ Kinnaird, 46-47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁶ As cited in Roy Marvin Robbins, published in *Agricultural History*, VII, no. 18 (January, 1933): 18-41, transcribed into hypertext by Andrew Chrucky, 11 August 2004, accessed May 11, 2012, www.ditext.com/robbins/robbins.html. Greeley is often quoted as saying “Go West, young man, go forth into the Country,” but there is disagreement among scholars as to whether this was his quote or that of someone else.

¹⁰⁷ *Black Abolitionist Papers* V, no. 128, as cited in Cheryl LaRoche, *Agrarian Settlements and Experiments*, draft manuscript under review, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Robbins.

¹⁰⁹ As cited in Robbins.

¹¹⁰ Kinnaird, 47.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 48.

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Known as the Great American Desert, this large expanse of land was primarily occupied by American Indian tribes forced to move west of the 95th meridian after 1820 by the frontier tide.¹¹² The semi-arid Great Plains and the arid Southwest territories became the final frontier of the American farmer.¹¹³ Successive discoveries of gold and silver, and more importantly the advance of the iron railroads through the 1860s, began to close the settlement gap and initiated the final phases of “Indian removal.”¹¹⁴

Free vs. Slave State Issue

From the earliest territorial expansions into the relatively small frontier claims of the original thirteen colonies through the large expanses of the Plains to the Pacific Coast, the political ramifications of institutionalized slavery reverberated across the decades of growth. Congress followed a carefully unofficial “balance principle” in the creation of new states, according to Cheryl LaRoche:

Balancing admission of free and slave states to the Union, what I term the “balance principle,” was a critical aspect of the project of sectional equilibrium that maintained the balance between slave state and free.¹¹⁵

The Senate did maintain a sectional equilibrium as a result, but “as legislators resorted to contorted arguments in support of the expansion of slavery into newly forming states, the landscape of the nation cleaved along an alternating North-South fault line.”¹¹⁶ The arguments, which eventually did cleave the United States in 1861, began in 1787 at the Constitutional Convention. Small states’ fears of being overpowered by the territorial claims of larger states led to the planned formation of new states from the then Northwest and Southwest territories. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the federal statute that established the non-slavery status of the Northwest Territory, set the stage for the battles to come over later western territories. In 1791, the free state of Vermont was carved from New York, followed in 1792 by the slave state of Kentucky carved from land originally claimed by Virginia.¹¹⁷

This delicate dance of “balanced” state formation caused repeated friction between the “free-soilers” and those who supported the extension of slavery across the developing continent. It reached its apex in “bleeding Kansas” in the 1850s. Embroiled in the national debate over federal control of western territories, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 effectively ended federal determination of slave or free territory as identified first by the Northwest Ordinance and later delineated by the 1820 Missouri Compromise.¹¹⁸ The 1854 Act opened the

¹¹² As the United States territory expanded westward following the Louisiana Purchase, the land west of the 95th meridian was, by the 1820s, to be the “Permanent Indian Frontier” beyond which it was believed the Indians could live in peace without interference from white settlements. It was demarcated by a line of forts from Fort Snelling, Minnesota to Fort Jesup, Louisiana, *Soldier and Brave*, Vol. XII, Nat. Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971) Web edition, accessed September 10, 2012, www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/soldier/credits.htm.

¹¹³ Johannsen, 2.

¹¹⁴ The term “Indian removal” was actually applied to the relocation of Eastern tribes west of the 95th Meridian. Western Indians, along with the Indians removed to the west (west of the 95th Meridian), began to be troubled by white migrations in the 1840s. While many tribes signed treaties which resulted in the taking of tribal land by the federal government and created smaller reservations of tribal land, some were moved to new lands. Tribes in Kansas were relocated to the Indian (later Oklahoma) Territory in the 1850s.

¹¹⁵ LaRoche, 2010, 234.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 237-239.

¹¹⁸ LaRoche, 2010, at 239 notes that “By prearranging the emergence of five free states in the Northwest, the Northwest Ordinance tacitly implied that the territory south of the Ohio River would remain open and welcoming to slavery,” and on page 249 that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 allowed for slavery in the Missouri Territory below the 36°30’ line.

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Kansas and Nebraska territories to settlement and “the right of self-determination on the slave issue.”¹¹⁹ Missouri slave-holders quickly laid claim to southeastern Kansas border lands, but their numbers paled in the face of thousands of immigrants drawn by the promise of new land.

The Kansas frontier attracted free-labor farmers, mostly from Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana.¹²⁰ Some settlers came from New York and Massachusetts, northern abolitionists recruited by the New England Emigrant Aid Company of Boston, who founded Lawrence, and the American Missionary Association from New York, who founded Osawatimie.¹²¹ Also significant among the Kansas frontier settlers were European immigrants, African American freemen, and fugitive slaves.¹²² The northern abolitionists, including John Brown and James H. Lane, chose the hotly contested Kansas territory along the Missouri border to wage their war against slavery. In defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 – a Congressional attempt to stem the tide of escaping slaves across the growing border between slave and free states – Brown, Lane and others actively aided fugitive slaves from Missouri and solidified the “free soil” future of Kansas.¹²³ Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state in January 1861, just a few months before the United States dissolved into Civil War.

Antebellum African American Migrations into the West

By the time of the American Civil War in 1861, the farming frontier had reached the edges of the Great Plains. Much of what was considered the best lands was claimed, whether by railroad companies, land speculators, or individual farming families. Among them were a growing number of African Americans, some fugitive slaves and others freed by manumission or born free, who sought the independence of land ownership and self-determination on western soil. Taylor noted that “African Americans viewed the West as a place of economic opportunity and refuge from racial restrictions,” citing the sentiment expressed in 1833 at the Third Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color:

To those who may be obliged to exchange a cultivated region for a howling wilderness, we recommend, to retire into the western wilds, and fell the native forest of America, where the ploughshares of prejudice have as yet been unable to penetrate the soil.¹²⁴

Such migration actually began as early as the 1820s, when many southern slaves escaped to Texas, then still Mexican soil where slavery had been abolished.¹²⁵ But the Texas Revolution of 1835 was in part initiated by White settlers from the U.S. “who had duplicated the U.S. slave system” and “now demanded protection of their

¹¹⁹ James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains*, (University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1995), 16-17; Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas*, (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1988), Section 21, “Kansas and Nebraska Territories and Indian Territory.”

¹²⁰ Shortridge, 19-37.

¹²¹ Diane Miller, “To Make Kansas Free: The Underground Railroad in Bleeding Kansas,” May 2008, accessed April 10, 2012, www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/discover_history/research_reports.htm. The New England Emigrant Aid Company of Boston founded Lawrence and the American Missionary Association from New York founded Osawatimie. Both were reportedly active Underground Railroad communities.

¹²² Shortridge, 19-37.

¹²³ Taylor, 95. LaRoche, 2010, at 252 notes that the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was a stricter re-working of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act, offered by Congress as a compromise to southern pro-slavery activists in order to allow California to enter the Union as a free state.

¹²⁴ Taylor, 81; *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention For the Improvement of the Free People of Color in the United States* (New York: Published by Order of the Convention, 1833).

¹²⁵ Taylor, 37.

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property.”¹²⁶ Independent Texas, and after 1845 the slave-state of Texas, became hostile territory for Black settlers.

Many more African Americans settled in the western frontier initially known as the Northwest Territory, consisting of the future free states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Ohio was in particular a destination for both fugitives and freemen. In 1830, Illinois became the destination for Kentucky freedman Frank McWorter, who purchased his own freedom in 1819. After also purchasing the freedom of his wife Lucy and fugitive son Frank, he bought land in Illinois where he settled with his growing family. Frank McWorter platted the town of New Philadelphia (NHL, 2009) in 1835 and began selling lots to both Black and White settlers.¹²⁷ By the time of the 1830 U.S. Population Census, Ohio numbered over 9,500 free African Americans, while Indiana numbered just over 3,600 and Illinois around 1,600.¹²⁸ By 1840, free Black populations had nearly doubled in all three states.

Much of this migration was spurred on by the Black Convention Movement that began about 1830 and continued through the 1850s. Free Blacks in the North called national and state conventions to discuss ways to challenge discrimination and prejudice.¹²⁹ Group migrations to Canada and the West were among the ideas presented. Black abolitionist Lewis Woodson advocated eloquently for land ownership and self-sufficiency:

The possession of houses and lands, and flocks and herds, inspires the possessor with a nobleness and independence of feeling, unknown to those in any other business.

...[it provides] unmolested enjoyment of the privileges of social life, the ability to establish churches on land controlled by congregants, a refuge and a home for extended families.¹³⁰

Woodson, who himself established an African American farming community in Jackson County, Ohio, in 1830, was active in that state's convention movement. Building on the success of settlements in Ohio and Indiana, notes LaRoche, “the Black National Convention, held in Buffalo in 1843, recommended formation of Black farming settlements in Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin and, as a result, sizable Black farming settlements took root in southern Illinois by 1860.”¹³¹ Michigan's Black population numbered 2,500 in 1850 and jumped to 6,700 over the next decade, with a similar increase in Iowa, while California's Black population more than quadrupled with an influx of African American gold miners and city dwellers.¹³²

Though certainly less hostile than Texas had become, even free states like Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, whose southern boundary along the Ohio River bordered the slave states of Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri, restricted African American migration and settlement. Despite the restrictions, notes LaRoche:

Free black communities transected the states. Small rural free black settlements along the borders of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers offered refuge to escapees and maintained a strong relationship to the Underground Railroad.¹³³

The Underground Railroad, most active from the 1830s to 1865, was the name given to the network of people, some White, but primarily free Blacks and even fellow slaves, who aided fugitives as they made their way from the southern and border states to freedom in the North and West.¹³⁴

¹²⁶ Ibid., 41.

¹²⁷ King and Seibert.

¹²⁸ “Historical Census Browser,” accessed April 10, 2012, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

¹²⁹ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, (3rd Edition, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1969), 236.

¹³⁰ *Black Abolitionist Papers*, III, 256-7, as cited in LaRoche, 2012 draft manuscript.

¹³¹ LaRoche, 2012 draft manuscript.

¹³² Franklin, 234.

¹³³ LaRoche 2010, 247.

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In the ante-bellum search for freedom, many free Blacks and fugitive slaves looked to the free soil of the western frontier. Establishing a tradition of mutual aid through churches and the Underground Railroad, they guided family, friends, and strangers to places where the land could set them free. The American Civil War changed the political dynamics of slave versus free states, but not the cultural traditions that began to evolve out of the institution of slavery in the United States.

Kentucky's Transition from Slavery to Freedom

The outcome of the Civil War in 1865 held great promise for the African American population. Nominal freedom came for some as early as 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves in the rebellion states. On January 1st, 1863 – Emancipation Day – celebrations erupted in the North, though few of those enslaved in the South who were freed by Lincoln's proclamation were even aware of it. "Emancipation," notes a University of South Florida Africana Heritage Project participant, "usually came with the Union army in most states..."

...Northwestern Alabama counties celebrate May 8th with neighboring Mississippi counties. Some areas of Arkansas celebrate on August 8th.

Other Southern states hold celebrations on the dates their states received the word and/or were occupied by Northern forces. Florida does so on May 12th; Alabama and Georgia on May 28th; and Tennessee on August 8th.¹³⁵

Though the celebration dates may differ, commemoration of Emancipation became a tradition that continues even today throughout the United States.¹³⁶ On January 4, 1868, a Lexington, Kentucky, newspaper, the *Lexington Observer and Reporter*, ran a story relating the "Negro Celebration" that had recently taken place:

On Wednesday last, it being the fifth anniversary of the freedom of the negroes it was celebrated by those in this city and county. Early in the day they formed a column, with music at its head, and marched through our streets until evening, when they proceeded to the Methodist Church (col'd) on Upper street, where they were addressed by [Stephen G.] Burbridge, [James S.] Brisbin and others. We heard of no disturbance at all during the day.¹³⁷

The Emancipation Day celebration was actually not new but a continuation of earlier commemorations: Freedom Day, celebrating the 1808 abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, or the August 1, 1834 Slavery Abolition Act, passed by the British Parliament that freed the slaves in the West Indies (Caribbean Islands) and

¹³⁴ "Underground Railroad Resources in the U.S." NHL Theme Study, Section E, Department of the Interior, National Park Service (Washington, D.C., 1998), 3.

¹³⁵ Joyce Reese McCollum, "Juneteenth and Emancipation Day Celebrations," *The USF Africana Heritage Project*, accessed April 17, 2012, http://www.africanaheritage.com/Juneteenth_Emancipation.asp. Slavery was abolished in Washington, D.C. on April 16, 1862, establishing a tradition of annual celebration on that day in the capital city, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://www.examiner.com/dc-in-washington-dc/d-c-emancipation-day-150-years-after-president-lincoln-freed-d-c-slaves>.

¹³⁶ The Gallia County, Ohio Emancipation Day Celebration has been an annual event since 1863. "It was conducted in a religious atmosphere. Activities and games such as baseball, sack racing, hog calling and greasy pole climbing were included to stimulate interest and maintain enthusiasm. Bands, famous orators, politicians, parades, dances and queen contest were also included in the celebration," *The Emancipation Day Celebration Website*, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://emancipation-day.com/>.

¹³⁷ As cited by Tim Talbott, "Emancipation Celebration," *Random Thoughts on History*, December 20, 2011, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://randomthoughtsonhistory.blogspot.com/2011/12/emancipation-celebration.html>.

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opened the way for U.S. fugitives to find freedom in Canada.¹³⁸ Slaves in Scott County, Kentucky, tacked their Emancipation Day celebration onto a “Colored Fair” tradition that occurred in late July/early August as part of the annual harvest and probably evolved from the celebration of both the 1808 and 1834 acts.¹³⁹

Still, the promises of freedom proved elusive. Physical freedom was promised by the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution of 1865, which officially abolished slavery in the United States. The Emancipation Proclamation did not free those men, women, and children still enslaved in the border states of Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky; all of which were slave states that stayed within the Union during the war years. Maryland slaves were freed by a new state constitution in November 1864 and Missouri slaves were freed by the Governor in January 1865. But enslaved individuals in Delaware and Kentucky had to wait until December 1865 when the 13th Amendment ended institutionalized slavery.

Civil freedom was promised by the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the 14th (1868) and 15th (1870) Amendments, guaranteed citizenship and voting rights to Black Americans. The civil rights gained in 1866 through 1870 held traction in the South only as long as the federal presence remained. Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, better known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, in 1865 to oversee Reconstruction in the southern and border states. The Freedmen’s Bureau would be abolished by Congress in 1872.¹⁴⁰

At the start of the Civil War, Kentucky remained neutral, neither seceding from the Union to join the Confederacy, nor officially sending troops to join the Union army.¹⁴¹ Like the other border slave states of Maryland, Delaware, and Missouri, Kentucky was deeply divided in its loyalties. Kentucky’s historical link to the South through trade along the Mississippi River was diminishing with developing railroad connections to commerce in the North.¹⁴² Similarly, reliance on enslaved labor throughout much of the state was declining. Kentucky’s enslaved population peaked at around twenty-four percent of the total state population in 1830 and by 1860 had fallen to just under twenty percent, with the majority of slaves concentrated in the central Bluegrass counties.¹⁴³

As the Civil War unfolded around them, the economic equation that maintained slavery as a viable labor system in Kentucky dissolved. Large numbers of slave families fled the farms of their enslavement for the safety of Union army camps; men were impressed into labor or enlisted in the army – both Union and Confederate.¹⁴⁴ After January 1863, slaves who joined the Union army earned their freedom serving in the United States Colored Troops (USCT), a prospect that proved to be an effective recruiting tool. In the border states of Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky, slave owners would be compensated \$300 “upon filing a valid

¹³⁸ Mitchell Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 16 and 54; Joyce Reese McCollum, “Juneteenth and Emancipation Day Celebrations,” accessed April 17, 2012, http://www.africanaheritage.com/Juneteenth_Emanicipation.asp.

¹³⁹ Angela Bates, personal communication with Paula Reed, October 2011. The “Colored Fair” is said to have taken place on the Daniel Pence farm, where the ggg grandfather of Ms. Bates lived as a slave of the Pence family.

¹⁴⁰ Elaine C. Everly, “Freedmen’s Bureau Records: An Overview,” *Prologue: Special Issue on Federal Records and African American History* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1997), National Archives (NARA) publication online, accessed April 19, 2012, www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/freedmens-bureau-records.html.

¹⁴¹ Lowell H. Harrison, *Kentucky in the Civil War*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 8. A faction of Kentuckians did secede, setting up a provisional government in Bowling Green with George W. Johnson of Scott County serving as governor and gaining acceptance into the Confederacy in December 1861 (Harrison, 21-22).

¹⁴² Harrison, 2.

¹⁴³ Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), xvi, xx.

¹⁴⁴ Lucas, 159.

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deed of manumission and of release, and making satisfactory proof of title.”¹⁴⁵ More than 23,000 African American men from Kentucky served in the USCT during the Civil War.¹⁴⁶

The ensuing labor shortage left farmers few options – some offered wages to their bondsmen to entice them to stay:

By the end of 1863, large numbers of slaves in Kentucky were refusing to labor without wages. They were abandoning the fields in favor of the villages, county seats, and cities or were crossing the Ohio River to look for work in the North. A planter in Lexington recalled in 1865 that he had summoned his servants in 1863 and told them they were free. He offered them \$15 per month if they would stay, and all remained with him.¹⁴⁷

Kentucky slave owners had long relied on a system of slave-hiring and leasing, some even allowing their bondsmen to “self-hire” in their spare time.¹⁴⁸ The development of a wage system, though often fraught with abuse, put Kentucky freedmen at a slight advantage over their Deep South comrades who would become mired in a sharecropping system little better than slavery. Additionally, the Kentucky office of the Freedmen’s Bureau “consistently discouraged sharecropping believing that it was only used by irresponsible employers.”¹⁴⁹

Continuing African American Cultural Traditions

Many of the African American cultural traditions established during the period of slavery in the U.S. continued following Emancipation. Though conditions for African Americans during the post-Civil War Reconstruction in Kentucky and the other border states were perhaps better (a relative term) than those in the Deep South, life was still difficult. White hostility was rampant. Many formerly enslaved Africans faced their new freedom with no home, no work, and no help. As Marion B. Lucas, professor of history at Western Kentucky University asked, “How could anyone expect Black Kentuckians without boots to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps?”¹⁵⁰

Black churches, which blossomed in the post-emancipation period, would play a central role in strengthening the family, establishing schools and garnering aid, particularly with the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Mutual aid, a tradition refined by the pre-emancipation Underground Railroad, would come from the more fortunate few, but, notes Lucas, “only the guidance, protection and assistance of the Freedmen’s Bureau, limited though it was, prevented starvation and death on a large scale.”¹⁵¹ But while the help of the Freedmen’s Bureau was vital, its success depended largely on emerging Black religious institutions as an organizational foundation of the African American community.

A strong foundation for the independent Black church was laid during pre-Civil War era. Despite restrictions on the independent Black church in Southern or slave states such as Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Texas, and

¹⁴⁵ War Department General Order No. 329, as cited in “Teaching With Documents: The Fight for Equal Rights: Black Soldiers in the Civil War Preserving the Legacy of the United States Colored Troops,” by Budge Weidman, accessed September 11, 2012, www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war/article.html.

¹⁴⁶ “Camp Nelson: Nicholasville, Kentucky,” *National Register of Historic Places African American History Month 2002*, accessed September 11, 2012, www.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2002/campnelson.htm.

¹⁴⁷ Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky*, (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 91, citing Rev. J.E. Roy’s letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribune*, 8 November 1865.

¹⁴⁸ Lucas, 103-107.

¹⁴⁹ Howard, 99.

¹⁵⁰ Lucas, 160.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

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for a time, South Carolina, African Americans established churches in these contested states in addition to California and in most states east of the Mississippi. Expansion of the church was largely an outgrowth of emancipation.¹⁵² Through the early period of African slave importations to America, as Christianity took root within the enslaved population, gatherings called “hush harbors” took place within the confines of the slave quarters, according to historian Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp,

...where they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with evangelical Christianity... it was here that the spirituals, with their double meanings of religious salvation and freedom from slavery, developed and flourished; and here, too, that black preachers, those who believed that God had called them to speak his Word, polished their “chanted sermons,” or rhythmic, intoned style of extemporaneous preaching.¹⁵³

Formal church attendance was typically limited to the established White church of the slave holder. Methodist (then known as Methodist Episcopal) and Baptist denominations were preferred by African Americans both slave and free, according to Maffly-Kipp, because the “clergy within these denominations actively promoted the idea that all Christians were equal in the sight of God...”

...They also encouraged worship in ways that many Africans found to be similar, or at least adaptable, to African worship patterns, with enthusiastic singing, clapping, dancing, and even spirit-possession. Still, many white owners and clergy preached a message of strict obedience, and insisted on slave attendance at white-controlled churches, since they were fearful that if slaves were allowed to worship independently they would ultimately plot rebellion against their owners.¹⁵⁴

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church grew out of northern African American’s discontent with the early Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church. Though vocal in its opposition to slavery, the general membership was not prevented from owning slaves. Black members split from the ME church over the issue of slavery around 1794.¹⁵⁵ Of those that remained with the ME Church, some formed their own all-Black churches, administered, however, by the White church leadership.¹⁵⁶

With emancipation in the South and the border states, independent Black sects and churches grew in numbers – the most abundant being the AME Church, the AME Zion Church, the Colored Methodist Episcopal, and the Baptists.¹⁵⁷ Melding the traditions of worship developed by slaves in their “hush harbors” with the doctrines of the established sects, the cultural distinctiveness of African American churches evolved and continues today (2016). Black theologian James H. Cone wrote of the significance of the Black church in 1969:

¹⁵² aRoche, 2015.

¹⁵³ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, “An Introduction to the Church in the Southern Black Community,” May 2001, Library of Congress, *Documenting the American South*, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/intro.html>. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* (page 134): “Those who have not thus witnessed the frenzy of a Negro revival in the untouched backwoods of the South can but dimly realize the religious feeling of the slave; as described, such scenes appear grotesque and funny, but as seen they are awful. Three things characterized this religion of the slave, -- the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy. The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a “boss,” an intriguer, an idealist, -- all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it.”

¹⁵⁴ Maffly-Kipp, “An Introduction...”

¹⁵⁵ Rev. Thomas Henry, *From Slavery to Salvation*, ed, Jean Libby (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 73.

¹⁵⁶ The Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church of Hagerstown, Maryland, an all-black congregation, was established in 1818 with their own church building just one block west of the white Methodist Church to which they were administratively attached.

¹⁵⁷ Maffly-Kipp, “An Introduction...”

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Black churches are very powerful forces in the African American community and always have been. Because religion has been that one place where you have an imagination that no one can control. And so, as long as you know that you are a human being and nobody can take that away from you, then God is that reality in your life that enables you to know that.¹⁵⁸

The church became the center of the Black community, notes Gail Lowe, historian with the Smithsonian Institution's Anacostia Museum in Washington D.C.:

Spirituality and religious expression always have been at the core of individual and community life for Americans of African descent...Churches doubled as school houses, recreation centers and lecture halls. They provided safe meeting places for community discussions of common problems. Church congregations supported insurance programs, employment centers and community development projects.¹⁵⁹

The central role of the Black church in post-emancipation African American communities is exemplified in the development of schools during the period of Reconstruction in the South.

While ultimately the greatest contribution the Freedmen's Bureau made to the future of African Americans was in establishing schools, it was the determination of the freedmen themselves to acquire an education for both children and adults that made the school programs successful. Though the Freedmen's Bureau did build schools, many were housed in church buildings offered by the Black community, who also paid teacher's salaries, sometimes provided room and board, and paid tuition to attend the school. The Kentucky Freedmen's Bureau school program in particular relied on the organization of Black religious institutions, which could provide both buildings and teachers:

When Gen. John Ely began his duties as chief superintendent for Kentucky under Gen. Fisk's supervision, there were 30 freedmen schools and more than 2,000 students. The schools were organized and maintained by black churches, with black clergy as instructors...Under Maj. Gen. Jeff C. Davis, who replaced Ely in the summer of 1866, the number of freedmen schools increased to 54, with some 67 teachers and more than 3,200 students...By September 1868, in spite of continued violence and opposition, the Bureau had provided support for 135 day schools and 1 night school, serving more than 6,000 students.¹⁶⁰

Two schools in Kentucky, in Lexington and Covington, were established with the aid of the Cincinnati Branch of the Western Freedmen's Aid Society and the Cincinnati Branch of the American Missionary Association. However, financial support for those schools came from subscriptions paid by parents and Black churches.¹⁶¹

The tradition of providing an education to African American children through Black community efforts began nearly 100 years earlier with Prince Hall, the first Black Free Mason in America. Hall became master of African Lodge #1 in Boston, Massachusetts, in July 1776 and in 1796 established a school for Boston's Black

¹⁵⁸ As cited on *Bill Moyers Journal*, "Black Churches, Black Theology and American History," an interview with Rev. Jeremiah Wright, April 25, 2005, accessed April 17, 2012, www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04252008/profile2.html.

¹⁵⁹ As cited in Fleur Paysour, "Historian's work shows importance of churches in African American culture," originally published in *Research Reports*, No. 93, (Summer 1998), accessed November 2002, www.si.edu/opa/researchreports/9893/church.htm.

¹⁶⁰ *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872*, published index of microfilm series M1904, RG 105, NARA, Washington, D.C., 2003, 4-5.

¹⁶¹ *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Kentucky...* 5. In the Deep South, the Freedmen's Bureau relied more heavily on financial aid and teachers from northern Christian missionary societies. The American Missionary Association (AMA) was formed in 1846 from several missionary groups of various denominations in an effort to advance the abolition of slavery. Henry Lee Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870*, (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967), 11.

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children.¹⁶² Benevolent societies such as the Prince Hall Free Masons became integral to the social network of northern free Blacks. John Hope Franklin, social historian, identified as many as thirty-five societies in Baltimore by 1835 “composed of young free Negro men,” including the Friendship Benevolent Society for Social Relief, the Star in the East Association, and the Daughters of Jerusalem.¹⁶³ The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was organized in 1843 from a Black New York literary society, the Philomathean Institute, who “saw the need for societies of mutual aid and protection in case of sickness and distress.”¹⁶⁴ Their charter, given by the English branch of Odd Fellows, had been denied by the American branch known as the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The Philomathean Lodge No. 646 of New York City was followed by ones in Philadelphia and Hartford, Connecticut, in 1844, and by 1848 as many as eighteen lodges were established throughout the northeast and as far south as Alexandria, Virginia (then part of the District of Columbia), and Baltimore, Maryland.¹⁶⁵

Baltimore’s relatively large free-Black population prior to the Civil War made possible the existence of such organizations in what was still a “slave state.” Further south, African American societies were “frowned upon” or even illegal, though Franklin identified the Band Society of New Orleans organized in 1860.¹⁶⁶ In Kentucky, Masons and Odd Fellows had ante-bellum memberships in Louisville, but most organizations formed after the Civil War, according to historian Marion B. Lucas:

Their largest and most popular social organizations were lodges and fraternal orders...secret organizations located in most urban areas, and many possessed separate orders for males, females, and juveniles. Lodges often established benevolent institutions, such as insurance companies, and most engaged in public service, including assistance to widows and orphans or rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents.”¹⁶⁷

Mutual aid within the African American community was a necessity borne of racial discrimination throughout the country, experienced by both slave and free, North and South. Whether along the Underground Railroad or through fraternal organizations and benevolent societies, the African American tradition of mutual aid maintained and supported the community through many decades of neglect by the larger American culture.

At the center of the African American community was the family. During the period of slavery, families were hard-put to remain intact, with the constant threat of sale to another owner – sometimes nearby but often out-of-state. “Slave marriages,” notes National Archives African American genealogy specialist Reginald Washington, “had neither legal standing nor protection from the abuses and restrictions imposed on them by slave owners...Couples who resided on different plantations were allowed to visit only with the consent of their owners.”¹⁶⁸ And of course, they could be separated by sale. William Still, a noted “conductor” on the Underground Railroad (UGRR), found it impossible to articulate the “horrors of the [auction] block, as looked upon through the light of the daily heart-breaking separations it was causing to the oppressed,” saying, “no pen could describe or mind imagine...”¹⁶⁹ It was the fear of these separations, observed Still, by which the “slave

¹⁶² Raymond T. Coleman, Grand Historian Prince Hall Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons Jurisdiction of Massachusetts, “Prince Hall History Education Class,” accessed May 15, 2012, www.princehall.org/History/Ray%20Colemans%20History.pdf.

¹⁶³ Franklin, 226.

¹⁶⁴ Charles H. Brooks, *The Official History and Manual of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows In America*, (Philadelphia, PA: Odd Fellow’s Journal Print, 1902), 12, accessed May 15, 2012, <http://books.google.com/>.

¹⁶⁵ Brooks, 18-51.

¹⁶⁶ Franklin, 227.

¹⁶⁷ Lucas, 322-323.

¹⁶⁸ Reginald Washington, “Sealing the Sacred Bonds of Holy Matrimony: Freedmen’s Bureau Marriage Records,” *Prologue* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2005).

¹⁶⁹ William Still, *The Underground Rail Road*, (Philadelphia, PA: Porter & Coates, 1872), “Preface,” accessed April 23, 2012, www.quinnipiac.edu/other/abl/etext/ugrr/ugrr.html.

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auction block indirectly proved to be in some respects a very active agent in promoting travel on the U.G.R.R.”¹⁷⁰ But the Underground Railroad – or the act of escaping from slavery – itself proved to be responsible for many family separations, including the family of William Still. Still recalled that his father bought his own freedom, and followed by his mother who escaped from slavery, but with only two of their four children:

Freedom was gained, although not without the sad loss of her two older children, whom she had to leave behind. Mother and father were again reunited in freedom, while two of their little boys were in slavery. What to do for them other than weep and pray, were questions unanswerable.¹⁷¹

The story ended on a somewhat happier note many years after the Civil War and Emancipation when Still’s older brother, by then almost 50 years old, found his lost family in Philadelphia.

Despite the struggle for enslaved African Americans to maintain their family relationships, kinship ties proved to be a human connection unbreakable by time or distance. With emancipation, families began the process of reconnection. The Freedmen’s Bureau aided the Black family by helping to legalize marriages, to reacquire apprenticed children, and find lost relatives.¹⁷² In reviewing the Freedmen’s Bureau records from Kentucky, Victor Howard found “substantial evidence of the Black family’s unity and solidarity as well as deep affection and concern for its members.”

The average freedman knew his family history and family tree and obviously valued blood relationships. The history of litigation relating to apprentices’ indentures reveals the strength of the extended family as a powerful force in maintaining the identity and resilience of the black community.¹⁷³

The strong bond of kinship maintained by African Americans in slavery despite the odds against them was strengthened during the hardships of the period of Reconstruction.

By 1878, with the failure of Reconstruction, in the South the depth of White resentment and fear was becoming clear. In writing the preface for his 1878 revised edition of *The Underground Rail Road*, William Still indicated his belief that African Americans would ultimately be responsible for their own improvement to reach the goal of true freedom and equality. Still observed:

...that as a class, in this country, no small exertion will have to be put forth before the blessings of freedom and knowledge can be fairly enjoyed by this people; and until colored men manage by dint of hard acquisition to enter the ranks of skilled industry, very little substantial respect will be shown them, even with the ballot-box and musket in their hands.

Well-conducted shops and stores; lands acquired and good farms managed in a manner to compete with any other; valuable books produced and published on interesting and important subjects—these are some of the fruits which the race are expected to exhibit from their newly gained privileges.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Still, “Preface”.

¹⁷¹ William Still, *The Underground Rail Road*, (Philadelphia, PA: Porter & Coates, 1872, revised edition 1878), “Preface to the Revised Edition,” accessed April 23, 2012, www.gutenberg.org/files/15263/15263-h/15263-h.htm. Still’s mother escaped twice, first with all four of her children when she was recaptured. The second time she escaped with just her two youngest, including William, which was successful.

¹⁷² Lucas, 206-207.

¹⁷³ Howard, 128.

¹⁷⁴ Still, “Preface to the Revised Edition.”

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Drawing upon the examples of the extraordinary acts of self-determination by fugitive slaves recounted in his book, and the tradition of mutual aid along the Underground Railroad, William Still believed that these were the historical qualities that would move his race forward: "These facts must never be lost sight of. The race must not forget the rock from whence they were hewn, nor the pit from whence, they were digged."¹⁷⁵

Post-Reconstruction African American Migrations

The federal plan for Reconstruction in the South, to disenfranchise Confederates and to reconstitute state governments with ones loyal to the Union, was failing even as it began. In his pioneering history of African Americans, *From Slavery to Freedom*, John Hope Franklin critiqued the progress of Reconstruction:

As early as 1865 many Southerners had resumed their places at home as respected citizens of their communities, and they entered public affairs on taking the oath of allegiance. Even during Radical Reconstruction they continued to return to the fold and to aid in restoring home rule. In 1869 the ex-Confederates of Tennessee were enfranchised...In 1871 the "iron clad" oath, which Congress had imposed at the beginning of Radical Reconstruction to disqualify many ex-Confederates, was repealed. In the following year a general amnesty restored the franchise to all but about 600 ex-Confederate officials. It then became possible for the South to take up where it left off in 1861 and to govern itself.¹⁷⁶

The Republican Congress attempted to regain control of Reconstruction from Democratic President Andrew Johnson when they overrode his veto of the 1866 Civil Rights Act. The Military Reconstruction Act of 1867, which put into effect the austere measures of Radical Reconstruction, divided the South into five military districts and strengthened the Freedmen's Bureau.¹⁷⁷ But while Blacks saw some gains in civil rights in the period of Radical Reconstruction, it would amount to little effect by the 1870s. Plans to redistribute land and improve economic and political opportunities for African Americans in the South came to an end in 1872 when Congress dismantled the Freedmen's Bureau.

Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction Kentucky

To many freedmen and freedwomen the prospect for a secure and prosperous future in Kentucky must have appeared very unlikely. In a state for which more Kentuckians fought for the North than the South, the tight reign of wartime martial law, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the perceived violation of racial order prompted White Kentuckians to embrace Jim Crow laws and engage in retaliatory political and racial violence.¹⁷⁸ The years between 1865-1870 saw an "unparalleled reign of terror" in Kentucky, and the Ku Klux Klan and other regulators used violence to squash Black and White Republican voters, and to terrorize Union veterans.¹⁷⁹ Before adjourning in 1866, the state legislature revised the old slave code, leaving much of it intact. Regulations limiting the movement of free blacks remained on the books. State law allowed county courts to

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Franklin, 329.

¹⁷⁷ Susan Salvatore, *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations*, NHL Theme Study, (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2004, revised 2009), 9-10. Tennessee was excluded from this because it was already "reconstructed."

¹⁷⁸ Darrel E. Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks, Emancipation and its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006) 136; and Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 206, 292. Kentucky would not officially ratify the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution until 1976.

¹⁷⁹ Bingham, 132.

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indenture children without parental consent, binding them to long-term apprenticeships. Schools, housing, libraries, cemeteries, hospitals, and public accommodations were separated by race and unequally funded. Biracial marriage was illegal. Maintaining family connections, and reuniting families torn apart by sale or flight was a challenge. Years after the end of the Civil War, in rural counties and small towns, a large proportion of Blacks continued to live in White households. Although African American acquired the franchise in 1870, voting was fraught with intimidation and fraud. Rarely did Black candidates successfully run for office.¹⁸⁰ African Americans would gain the right to testify against Whites in court by 1872, but they couldn't serve on state juries until 1882.

Property ownership, a key marker of autonomy and self-determination, remained elusive for most African Americans in Kentucky as well as in other areas of the South. In his comprehensive examination of postbellum Black urban and rural landholdings across the South, historian Loren Schweninger concluded that "... even under the best of circumstances it took extraordinary effort for former slaves to enter the landholding class."¹⁸¹ In the Upper South, Blacks confronted difficulties in obtaining credit, low prices for farm products and the refusal by Whites to sell land.¹⁸² Yet in the decade following the Civil War, African Americans in Kentucky were nearly twice as likely to own land as their rural counterparts in the former slave states of the Lower South, and their rate of real estate acquisition was much faster than rural Blacks along the eastern seaboard in the Upper South.¹⁸³ And while the overall numbers of property acquisition by Blacks compared to that of Whites in post-bellum Kentucky was miniscule, they was nonetheless impressive.¹⁸⁴ In rural areas of the Trans-Appalachian West, some Whites were not opposed to African American proprietorship, and some assisted freedmen and women in their quest for self-sufficiency.¹⁸⁵ In Kentucky only a handful accumulated more than 100 acres between 1866 to 1868, but farmers in many parts of the Commonwealth acquired between 30 to 50 acres.¹⁸⁶ By 1870 one of every fifteen rural Black Kentucky families owned land (2,513 owners), with an average of \$580 in real property holdings. Of these, 1,336 identified themselves as "farmer" or "planter;" others were part-time farmers, augmenting their income as laborers.¹⁸⁷ African Americans also acquired small plots of marginal land in central Kentucky, usually in the vicinity of where they had formerly been slaves. Their "street-front settlements" contained houses, a shared community well and small garden plots, although the residents generally worked on land owned by neighboring Whites.¹⁸⁸ Blacks were most active in ownership of urban retail businesses, due primarily to rapidly improving occupational opportunities and corresponding with substantial population increases.¹⁸⁹ Black real estate owners (rural and urban) increased more rapidly in Kentucky than in another Southern state, but tax valuation of these properties declined sharply in the late 1870s following the panic of 1873.¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, despite the impressive achievements in property ownership, post-Emancipation African Americans controlled only 1.3 percent of the greater region's real and personal wealth, although they represented one-third of its population.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁰ Lucas, 292, 303-312-; Bingham, 136, 150-151, 231.

¹⁸¹ Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 172.

¹⁸² Schweninger, 171.

¹⁸³ Schweninger, 153- 154

¹⁸⁴ Lucas, 277.

¹⁸⁵ Schweninger, 153.

¹⁸⁶ Lucas, 277.

¹⁸⁷ Schweninger, 153, 174.

¹⁸⁸ Lucas, 274.

¹⁸⁹ Lucas, 279; Schweninger, 155, 179.

¹⁹⁰ Schweninger, 157; Lucas, 277.

¹⁹¹ Schweninger, 161.

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The failure of Reconstruction in Kentucky paralleled events in other southern states, even as a Confederate identity grew. In the face of Kentucky's legal code, challenges to acquiring real property, and the abuse and harassment that characterized the 1870s and 1880s, Blacks asserted their own Constitutional rights in a number of ways. Annual statewide protest conventions began in 1866 to demand full civil rights, evolving over the years to include local and specific issues. They used celebrations of important historical significance to protest segregation, harassment and violence. In the 1870s, Emancipation Day celebrations and parades included political speeches to the Black community.¹⁹² Organized protests brought tangible results, such as the successful 1870 boycott against segregated streetcars in Louisville. In Paducah, Blacks acquired guns to protect themselves against white violence, and in Georgetown, African Americans started fires to protest lynchings.¹⁹³ Self-help African American organizations developed to address social, economic and legal needs; their activities inseparable from community ritual. Lodges and fraternal organizations frequently established benevolent institutions, and engaged in public service. The dominant societies were Masons, Odd Fellows and the United Brothers of Friendship. Churches provided social and spiritual nourishment, with the Baptist Church and the African Methodist Episcopal attracting the largest congregations. Churches, with concerned citizens, united to care for the indigent, forming organizations such as the United Relief Committee, the Christian Mutual Association, and Union Benevolent Societies. After the disappearance of the Freedmen's Bureau courts, groups such as Louisville's Law League and the Fayette County Justice Association provided legal aid.¹⁹⁴ By the 1890s, African American journalist Ida B. Wells would lead an anti-lynching crusade across the country, culminating in a protest in Washington, D.C. For those willing to undertake the journey, some chose to assert their rights by moving away from the region.

Migration West

As the South descended into its prolonged period of evermore stringent segregation of the races and outright violence, African Americans again turned their sights toward the western frontier. Black migrations west had not stopped during the Civil War, as fugitive slaves from Missouri poured into eastern Kansas after 1860. The Black population of Kansas grew from just 627 in 1860 to 12,527 in 1865, with more than half of those located in the eastern border counties of Leavenworth, Douglas, and Wyandotte.¹⁹⁵ But, like their White counterparts, post-war Black settlers would be drawn further westward by the railroads and open land. Central Kansas would soon be opened by the mainline of the Union Pacific Railroad, Eastern Division, as it reached as far as Salina by

¹⁹² Lucas, 298-299.

¹⁹³ Gerald R. Smith, "Reconstruction, African-Americans and the Struggle for Equality," *Kyleidoscope—Explore Kentucky History Online*, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://athena.uky.edu/kyleidoscope/reconstructionky/struggle/struggle.htm>, citing Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760–1891*, 1 (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992).

¹⁹⁴ Lucas, 312-314, 323; Bingham, 247-270. Because of the focus of this NHL nomination, additional details on the greater context of "push factors" are more appropriate for a future study. Regarding African American organizations and the rhetoric of the Black State Conventions held after the Civil War, future research could address the pressing concerns of conventioners during the post-Civil War and Reconstruction years. Fraternal lodges and societies were an invaluable element in confirming community and racial identity. Focusing more specifically on Nicodemus, further research could consider whether or not any residents of Nicodemus were found on the rosters of such conventions; if they were Free Masons; if the residents participated in the conventions of the African Methodist Episcopal Church or in the Baptist Conferences; if they were members of other institutions, and which associations survived into the contemporary period. Citizens of Nicodemus were members in such organizations into the twentieth century: Florence Howard's grandmother, Effie Johnson Moore, was the oldest member of the Order of the Eastern Star in about 1950, and Ms. Howard was the youngest. Due to attrition of membership, Ms. Howard was the last Nicodemus member, then joined the Hutchison Lodge chapter. See LaRoche, "Response to Nicodemus Historic and Archeological District—Draft," 5, 6; Florence Howard interview with Dr. Antoinette T. Jackson, "Nicodemus Oral Histories," *USF Heritage Research Lab*, accessed August 4, 2015, http://heritagelab.org/?page_id=2213.

¹⁹⁵ Taylor, 96-97.

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early 1867 and crossed western Kansas by late 1868. By 1872, the mainline of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad crossed Kansas to the south.¹⁹⁶

The federal government enticed the railroads to lay tracks prior to the settlement of central and western Kansas by awarding them with large grants of land along their right-of-ways, which they could then sell to potential settlers. Land along the railroad was preferred for its “transportation advantage,” notes cultural geographer James Shortridge, but cost was a consideration as well:

Costs and availability of land within the railroad belt and its two flanking zones were paramount considerations for potential immigrants to postwar Kansas. Initial discussions around most family hearths probably centered on the Homestead Act, for this law was recent (1862) and promised 160 acres of land for only a small filing fee and residence on that land for five years. Such a “free” offer would have had even greater appeal in the years immediately following the economic panic that gripped the nation in 1873.¹⁹⁷

Railroad grant lands, of course, were not offered under the basic terms of the Homestead Act. The bulk of the “free” lands of the Homestead Act were primarily located in the northern tier of Kansas counties and the southwest.

The farming frontier of Kansas attracted White, mostly mid-western and northern settlers, a variety of immigrants from Europe and Great Britain, and Blacks primarily from Kentucky. Much of the settlement was dominated by speculative land sales and town promotion, even among African Americans. However, the relatively small pool of African Americans with enough money to purchase a town lot or to establish a profitable outlying homestead made all-Black town promotion a risky investment. It was not until after the Civil War that the earliest all-Black towns were platted, beginning in 1869 in Texas with the towns of Kendleton and Board House.¹⁹⁸ These Texas towns, however, according to Alwyn Barr, were created not necessarily for profit, but “to allow themselves greater control of local political, economic, and social life away from constant white domination.”¹⁹⁹ Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, a former slave born in Tennessee who fled to Canada and settled in Detroit, would return to Tennessee after the Civil War to help his people improve their lives. In the 1860s he organized an effort to buy up Tennessee farmland for Blacks, a failed plan when White landowners refused to sell at fair prices. Singleton then turned his attention to Kansas, and with business partner Columbus Jackson, promoted settlement by Black Tennesseans.²⁰⁰

Frontier enclaves were relatively common, whether as formally platted towns or as clustered farming communities. Many of the immigrant settlers formed as groups or “colonies” in their home locations prior to the move. In the anticipated move to the frontier, these were viewed as mutual-aid insurance policies for safety and economic success, as well as for ethnic or religious solidarity or freedom.²⁰¹ Such groups were encouraged by some railroad agents and speculative promoters as insurance for their investments. Town developers often targeted specific audiences in promoting their town, as in the case of Nicodemus and Hill City, both in Graham

¹⁹⁶ Shortridge, 73.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹⁹⁸ Kenneth M. Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 1. Frank McWorter’s 1835 New Philadelphia was not promoted as an all-black town, with never more than 38% of the population being African American. See “New Philadelphia” NHL documentation, 22.

¹⁹⁹ Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, (originally published 1973, Austin, TX: Jenkins Pub. Co., 2nd Edition, 1996), 65.

²⁰⁰ “Benjamin “Pap” Singleton,” New Perspectives on The West, Public Broadcasting System, http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/s_z/singleton.htm.

²⁰¹ Craig Miner, *West of Wichita*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 68; see also Shortridge, Chapter 4.

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County (then part of Rooks County) Kansas. The Nicodemus Town Company was promoted specifically to African Americans living in eastern Kansas, Kentucky and Tennessee, while the Hill City Town Company targeted White settlers.²⁰² Members were required to “buy in” to the company that purchased or preempted the land and platted a town within which settlers would live and around which homesteads were established. Despite the relative poverty of most African Americans in the 1870s, the concept met with some success with the Black community of Nicodemus and eventually the homestead community in Hodgeman County, Kansas.²⁰³

This orderly, somewhat selective settlement process (selective by its monetary requirement), was interrupted in 1879 by a mass-exodus of mostly destitute African Americans from the Deep South states, primarily Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. By 1879 conditions for freedmen in the Deep South had deteriorated to such an extent that the free soil of Kansas was literally viewed by many as the “promised land” or, as one observer noted, they “regarded Kansas as a modern Canaan and the God-appointed home of the negro race.”²⁰⁴ The Exodusters, as the migration became known, numbered as many as 20,000, though population census figures reveal that perhaps just under 6,000 actually remained in Kansas.²⁰⁵

The Exoduster migration, which began in February of 1879 and continued through the year, was so remarkable that a U.S. Senate Committee was convened to determine the cause. In their December 1879 majority report, the committee blamed “Northern politicians” and “the Negro leaders in their employ, and in the employ of the railroad lines.”²⁰⁶ The minority report noted that Benjamin Singleton, by then an elderly man, proclaimed himself “the father of the exodus,” and was not in the employ of politicians or the railroads.²⁰⁷ Though in reality he was not solely responsible for the mass migration, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton did encourage migration from the South to Kansas, beginning perhaps as early as 1875. By 1877, Singleton advertised his “Singleton Colony” in Cherokee County Kansas, where as many as 120 African Americans initially settled.²⁰⁸ Singleton’s activity in Kansas reportedly “inspired the founders of Nicodemus” in 1877.²⁰⁹

The 1879 Exoduster migration was a rural movement, in which participants anticipated free or cheap land from the government where they could begin a new life as independent farmers. In reality, it swelled the populations of Kansas cities such as Topeka and Kansas City, as Exodusters without money to invest in farming, sought out work in the cities. After the initial rush of 1879, smaller planned migrations continued into the 1880s.²¹⁰ With the increasing discrimination and segregation of the Jim Crow era in the southern states through the 1890s and into the twentieth century, the all-Black town concept garnered renewed interest. Beginning with the 1877

²⁰² Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 6-7. Both companies were established jointly by W. R. Hill, who was White, and W. H. Smith, who was Black.

²⁰³ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*, (orig. pub. 1977; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., reprint 1992), 149, f.n. 13. The Hodgeman Colony did not establish a town center and reportedly petered out in the 1890s (Fort Hays State University, “Homesteading in Hodgeman County,” accessed August 23, 2012, www.fhsu.edu/library/ksheritage/Hodgeman-County/).

²⁰⁴ As cited in Painter, 187, F. R. Guerney, “The Negro Exodus,” *International Review* VII, no. 4 (Oct. 1879).

²⁰⁵ Painter, 147.

²⁰⁶ Reports of Committees of the Senate of the United States for the First and Second Sessions of the Forty-Sixth Congress, 1879-’80, Volume 8, Report No. 693, “Select Committee to Investigate the Causes which have led to the Emigration of Negroes from the Southern to the Northern States,” (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880), 100.

²⁰⁷ Reports of Committees of the Senate..., 110.

²⁰⁸ Gary R. Entz, “Image and Reality on the Kansas Prairie,” *Kansas History* (Summer 1996): 131-135. Erroneous newspaper accounts and Singleton’s own later erratic accounts of his early activities in Kansas have created an apparently false image of this settlement as large – up to 300 settlers – and prosperous. However, Entz’ research found that few settlers could actually afford to purchase the land and the colony essentially failed by 1878.

²⁰⁹ Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 6-7; Painter, 148-149 and f.n. 13, Colin A. Palmer, “Singleton, Benjamin ‘Pap’,” *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, 2nd edition (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006) .

²¹⁰ Painter, 200.

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establishment of Nicodemus, as many as sixty-four all-Black towns were developed, from Alabama to Michigan, from Kentucky to Texas and California, with the largest concentration in Oklahoma in the first decades of the twentieth century.²¹¹ And though these speculative towns were perhaps platted by their promoters with profit in mind, for the new arrivals, it was all about the freedom and the land.

All of the settlement in the West through the second half of the nineteenth century would not have been possible without the military service of African Americans known as “buffalo soldiers.” The mostly young African American men joined the U.S. Army beginning in 1866 to fight, according to one recruit, in “the Indian war that was then raging in Kansas and Colorado.”²¹² Specifically, it was the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry, all-Black regiments with White officers, who could not be deployed in the South for fear of precipitating “racial violence.”²¹³ Even in the West, however, the soldiers as well as the African American migrants that preceded and followed them faced discrimination from the dominant White population. Though the men voluntarily joined the service – some specifically to “see the West” – their role in defeating the American Indian tribes for the benefit of White westward progress has been questioned.²¹⁴ The above discussion, however, indicates that there were a significant number of African American settlers in the West that benefited from the land made available by the military conquest of the American Indians.

Railroads, Dust Storms, and Depression: Determining Settlement Survival

Aside from the physical dangers associated with western settlement, survival of a town, its residents, and outlying homesteads depended on a number of outside factors. Money was significant among these. A settler, whether Black or White, had to arrive with some cash in hand. Agents sent by Benjamin Singleton from Tennessee to Kansas to review emigration prospects there estimated the cost for travel and equipment to be around \$1,000.²¹⁵ Once settled, the new residents needed to generate income, farms needed to produce. The physical environment of the Great Plains was the least predictable of all the factors and the most relevant to a farmer’s ability to survive. The cycles of drought and rain, hot and cold, tornadoes, dust storms, and grasshoppers, were perhaps the most foreign to many settlers, particularly to southern Black migrants. Access to railroad transportation for goods and services figured largely in the future success of a town and its outlands.

Development of the transcontinental railroad was a direct outgrowth of westward expansion, particularly following the phenomenal rate of settlement in California through the 1850s. Communication between the east and west coasts of the now vast United States territory became a national imperative.²¹⁶ The Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), following a central route across the country, was completed in 1869 when it met the California-based Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) at Promontory Summit in Utah. The UPRR, under its Congressional authorization, began officially at the 100th meridian in Nebraska, but the legislation also

²¹¹ Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 153, Appendix 1. Oklahoma SHPO notes as many as fifty all-black towns were established in Oklahoma between 1865 and 1920 (Larry O’Dell, “All-Black Towns,” *Oklahoma Historical Society’s Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, accessed August 23, 2012, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/A/AL009.html>).

²¹² Taylor, 169, citing ex-slave Reuben Waller, who joined the Tenth Cavalry in 1867.

²¹³ Taylor, 165.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 169 and 164 citing Jack Forbes from a 1975 article by Lawrence B. de Graaf (f.n. 1).

²¹⁵ Entz, 130.

²¹⁶ Charles W. Snell, “Theme XV, Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific 1830-1898, Transportation and Communication,” (Washington, D.C.: The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, U.S. Dept. of Interior, NPS, 1960), 1.

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authorized four eastern branch lines, including the main one to Omaha, Nebraska and one to Kansas City, Kansas called the Union Pacific, Eastern Division (UPED).²¹⁷

The UPED was originally intended to follow the Republican River Valley northward to rejoin the UPRR at the 100th meridian in Nebraska. In 1866, that route was altered to instead cross western Kansas, joining the UPRR at Denver. The line, known as the “Smokey Hill route,” was completed in 1868. Its north-central route through the dry plains of western Kansas was somewhat unexpected however, as the region was not likely to attract large numbers of settlers. But the West Kansas route to Denver did provide regional access to timber for building supplies and access to the Colorado mining camps – ready markets for western Kansas products – thereby enhancing its settlement prospects. The UPED through Kansas, called the Kansas Pacific (KP) after 1869, was quickly followed by a second competing railroad, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad (AT&SF), completed in 1872. The AT&SF followed a more southerly route across Kansas into southeastern Colorado and turning south to New Mexico.²¹⁸

Both the UPED (KP) and the AT&SF received federal land grant support and indeed settlements grew along the main lines, though not to the extent that the railroad companies had hoped.²¹⁹ In particular, noted Kansas historian Craig Miner, was the lack of farmers:

Ellsworth County had 2,476 acres of improved land in 1870... However, other western counties along the KP are conspicuously absent from census agricultural statistics. In 1872, acres in cultivation in Ellsworth County had risen to 5,723, but Russell Co. had only 711 and Ellis, Ford, Pawnee, and Rooks Counties none.²²⁰

Federal land offices, where homestead claims could be filed, were not even established in western Kansas until in 1874 at Larned and Hays City, and in 1875 at Kirwin.

The vagaries of the climate and lack of timber on the Plains deterred many prospective farmer-settlers, described by one as “one broad limitless expanse of desert.”²²¹ Early settlers found the farming challenging. The dense short grass prairie sod made for a viable building material in the absence of timber, but proved difficult to plow. Agricultural experimentation was the key to development. And while some believed that the sheer act of cultivation would alter the dry western Kansas climate by increasing rainfall, the theory did not hold up to the continuing cyclical droughts and dry winds. Instead it was the farmers who adapted to the Plains environment who were most likely to endure and prosper economically. Dry-land farming, particularly the cultivation of hard winter wheat as pioneered in the 1870s by T. C. Henry, helped to transform western Kansas and other Plains states into significant grain producers.²²²

Through much of the 1880s, a time of relatively good climate and good crops, settlement on the dry plains of western Kansas boomed. Town promoters platted dozens of towns throughout the region in anticipation of branch line railroad construction. Paper railroads, that is railroad companies that existed only on paper but promised rails on the ground, sought out monetary commitments from communities in the form of bonds to help pay for construction. But few of those branch lines were ever actually constructed and many town plans died when the line failed to materialize.²²³

²¹⁷ Snell, 50.

²¹⁸ Miner, 28-32. In 1880, the Kansas Pacific was again renamed, becoming the Union Pacific, Kansas Division (Miner, 29).

²¹⁹ Socolofsky and Self, 30.

²²⁰ Miner, 36.

²²¹ Miner, 39, citing John B. Edwards, one of the founders of the town of Ellsworth.

²²² Miner, 41.

²²³ Ibid., 189-190.

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For communities beyond the main lines that had survived the initial difficulties of attracting settlers and establishing an agricultural base, access to the railroad via a branch line ensured a connection to markets and supplies, and thus their survival. Whether predominantly Black or White, towns bypassed by the railroad typically withered as businesses and residents moved away. New Philadelphia, Illinois, a biracial town platted and already well-established long before the railroad boom, began its decline after 1869 when a branch line through Pike County bypassed the town; by 1940 New Philadelphia had completely reverted to farmland.²²⁴ A similar decline occurred in Nicodemus, Kansas after the KP branch line dipped south of Nicodemus to establish a depot at Bogue.²²⁵ Nicodemus, a predominantly Black town whose residents were tied by kinship and strong traditions brought with them from Kentucky, survived this railroad disaster, though it lost its commercial core and never again saw any population growth.

After 1887, when the period of favorable rain cycles ended abruptly, the boom went bust.

The rain stopped, the wind and snow started, population dropped, crops failed, credit tightened, railroad companies withdrew, the land-office business shriveled, cattlemen gave up, irrigation ditches dried up, sugar mills burned up, towns had safes full of worthless bonds to give away, and farm families found that suddenly it was 1880 again.²²⁶

Thousands of settlers “went back east ‘to see their wife’s folks’,” wrote Miner of the bust, “a common population loss for a western Kansas county in the initial bust was 2,000 people, with a slower but steady decline thereafter until the early twentieth century.”²²⁷ The Kansas state legislature created Graham County in 1867, though it remained administratively part of Ellis County and later Rooks County until 1880.²²⁸ Graham County, where Nicodemus is located, appears to have weathered the bust relatively well. In 1880 it had a total population of about 4,200 people with 484 African Americans, about half the total population of Rooks County. By 1890 the population of Graham County actually increased, just topping 5,000 (529 Black), while Rooks remained level. At the turn of the century the Graham County population increased by just 150 people (2 additional Black), but the Rooks County population had fallen slightly.²²⁹

Shortly after the Kansas settlement bust, Oklahoma Territory was opened for settlement in 1889. Viewed by many African Americans as “the last chance for a free home,” migrants flooded to the area.²³⁰ By the first decade of the twentieth century thirty-two all-Black towns had been established and Black farmers owned 1.5 million acres of land.²³¹ Among the new settlers was Edward P. McCabe, who left Nicodemus, Kansas, in 1889 after the bust, and established the all-Black town of Langston City, Oklahoma, in 1890.²³²

As the century turned, the intrepid farmers that stayed on the Plains added substantial acreage to their farms and benefited from unprecedented agricultural growth as wheat became the cash crop of World War I. These years of prosperity crashed with the Stock Market in 1929 and the country descended into the Great Depression of the 1930s. The economic suffering of the Depression was compounded on the Plains by the environmental disaster known as the Dust Bowl. A prolonged drought, howling prairie winds, and the loss of protective grassland

²²⁴ “Historical Landscapes of New Philadelphia, Illinois,” accessed May 16, 2012, www.anthro.illinois.edu/faculty/cfennell/NP/.

²²⁵ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 56.

²²⁶ Miner, 212.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 43.

²²⁹ “Historical Census Browser,” accessed May 16, 2012, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

²³⁰ Taylor, 144.

²³¹ Ibid., 147-148.

²³² Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope A History of Blacks in Oklahoma*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 13.

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through extensive plowing produced ideal conditions for dust storms that removed much of the productive topsoil of the region. Though northwestern Kansas was on the periphery of this disaster, the town residents and farmers that remained there suffered through the drought, dust, and Depression as well.

Surviving All-Black Frontier Towns

Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, in his study of the economic foundations of African American frontier towns, *Black Towns and Profit*, concluded that “the patterns of founding and developing predominantly Black-populated towns were not fundamentally different from those of predominantly White-populated towns in the Trans-Appalachian West.”²³³ Likewise, he concluded that the demise of frontier towns followed similar patterns, regardless of a town’s racial make-up:

Hundreds of Trans-Appalachian towns founded between 1877 and 1915 shared the fate of Allensworth, which did not attract a sufficient initial population, or Nicodemus, which could not sustain its early growth. Settlers lured to new townsites by glib promises from unscrupulous promoters had their dreams of prosperity blasted by inclement weather, the vagaries of railway alignment, and the unpredictable detours in the stream of immigration.²³⁴

Yet despite its encounters with all of these mitigating factors, Nicodemus remains intact – a smaller and largely residential, but still viable townsite – while other communities vanished. What then determined the long-term survival of a frontier town like Nicodemus? Purdue University professor R. Douglas Hurt outlined the conclusions of 1930s historian James C. Malin:

...he contended that while the environment influenced human behavior, it could not predetermine actions. Instead, the prevailing social conditions and cultural values of the settlers played a more significant role in historical developments. He wrote, “People are more important than the physical environment. People can make choices.”²³⁵

Thus, while money, environment, and railroads all played an important role in what determined the survival of a town and its agricultural community in “the Great American Desert,” in the end it was the people themselves who either chose to stay or chose to leave.²³⁶

²³³ Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 149.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

²³⁵ R. Douglas Hurt, “The Agriculture and Rural History of Kansas,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Autumn 2004): 200.

²³⁶ Hamilton compiled a list of sixty-four “Black Towns in the Trans-Appalachian West.” The list appears to be limited to towns established after 1865 and before 1920. Sixteen towns in seven states were located east of the Mississippi River: Alabama-Cedarlake, Greenwood Village, Hobson City, Plateau, Shepherdsville; Arkansas-Edmondson, Thomasville; Illinois-Brooklyn; Kentucky-Camp Nelson, New Zion; Michigan-Idlewind, Marlborough; Mississippi-Expose, Mound Bayou, Renova; Tennessee-Hortense, New Bedford. Hamilton listed forty-eight towns in six states west of the Mississippi: California-Abila, Allensworth, Bowles, Victorville; Iowa-Buxton [1927 demise]; Kansas-Nicodemus; New Mexico-Blackdom [1920s demise]; Oklahoma-[32 total] Arkansas Colored, Bailey, Boley, Bookertee, Canadian Colored, Chase, Clearview, Ferguson, Forman, Gibson Station, Grayson, Langston City, Lewisville, Liberty, Lima, Lincoln City, Mantu, Marshalltown, North Fork Colored, Overton, Porter, Redbird, Rentiesville, Summit, Taft, Tatum, Tullahassee, Vernon, Wellston Colony, Wybark; Two unnamed towns in the Seminole Nation; Texas-Andy, Board House, Booker, Independence Heights, Kendleton, Mill City, Oldham, Roberts, Union City. Hamilton’s citation for the list of towns reads: “Note: With the exception of several of the Oklahoma towns and Board House and Kendleton, Texas, most of the sixty-four towns listed here are recorded in Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book, 1918-1919: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Institute, 1919), 354. The remaining Oklahoma towns are listed in Arthur L. Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972* (New Orleans: Edwards Printing, 1974), 104. Board House and Kendleton, Texas, are given in Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of Negroes in Texas, 1828-1971* (Austin, Tex.: Jenkins, 1973), 65.” (Hamilton, 154).

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For the African American men and women who occupied the towns – who farmed the land and supported the businesses, churches, schools, and government – it appears the difference arose from the cultural context of their search for a freedom denied them because of their race. Likewise, though the patterns of the demise of frontier towns may have been similar, it is likely the odds against Black towns were not. Nicodemus was bypassed by railroads three times, despite it being the most highly-developed townsite in the area at the time. The main road from Stockton to Hill City (old Rt. 24) bypassed Nicodemus three miles to the north before turning southwest toward Hill City four miles west of Nicodemus. Many frontier towns gained a significant economic boost as the county seat, but what predominantly Black town could hope to attract enough county-wide votes to achieve that status? African American settlers were typically not the poorest of the poor (except during the Exoduster movement), but certainly their backgrounds and future prospects could rarely be compared to that of the majority of White migrants.²³⁷

To date (2016) no comprehensive inventory of historic all-Black towns in the United States has been compiled. A thematic study of African American settlement, migration, and community development would likely produce a significant number of surviving resources. Such resources could be categorized chronologically and by region, for example: Pre-Civil War/East of the Mississippi River would include New Philadelphia, Illinois (1835, designated an NHL in 2009), as well as the kinds of settlements cited by LaRoche, “Small rural free Black settlements along the borders of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers offered refuge to escapees and maintained a strong relationship to the Underground Railroad.”²³⁸ Pre-Civil War/West of the Mississippi resources would include perhaps the large landholdings in Texas of the Ashworth brothers or William Goyens.²³⁹ These properties would be representative of the African American settlement and migration experience prior to the demise of slavery in the United States. The post-Civil War African American migration and settlement story is somewhat different and thus would form at least two additional resource categories: Post-Civil War/East of the Mississippi River and Post-Civil War/West of the Mississippi River. Additionally, some of these resources (towns or communities) were racially mixed, but still strongly associated with the African American migration story such as New Philadelphia, or were “all-Black” such as Nicodemus.

This section reviews only the post-Civil War all-Black communities established west of the Mississippi River, with common factors such as transportation, weather, and soil conditions, including surviving towns in the states of California, Iowa, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas will be identified. In Kansas, neither the Hodgeman County colony nor the Cherokee County Singleton Colony survived to the twentieth century. The towns of Buxton, Iowa, and Blackdom, New Mexico, were both abandoned in the 1920s. In California no information could be found on the settlements of Abila, Bowles, and Victorville. In Texas, nothing could be found on Andy, Booker, Mill City, Oldham, Roberts, or Union City. The Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office notes that there were more than fifty towns established in Oklahoma (Indian Territory until 1889, then Oklahoma Territory before 1907) between 1865 and 1920, of which only thirteen survive as of 2012.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ African American ties to the land are examined in the critically acclaimed play by Pearl Cleage, “Flyin’ West,” first performed in 1992. The play is set in Nicodemus, Kansas, in 1898, “it illuminates the rich history of a group of black homesteaders and explores the unique challenges they faced as pioneer women.” *Pearl Cleage*, “books & plays,” accessed March 5, 2013, www.pearlcleage.net/booksplays-plays.html.

²³⁸ Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, “The Balance Principle,” in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, ed. Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 247. The NPS *Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* website would likely be a valuable resource for this category, www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/index.htm.

²³⁹ Taylor, 37-38.

²⁴⁰ Larry O’Dell, “All-Black Towns,” *Oklahoma Historical Society’s Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History & Culture*, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/A/AL009.html>, accessed 23 August 2012.

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Seventeen surviving all-Black towns established west of the Mississippi River between 1865 and 1920 are discussed below, including: Allensworth, California; the thirteen surviving Oklahoma towns – Boley, Brookville, Clearview, Grayson, Langston, Lima, Red Bird, Rentiesville, Summit, Taft, Tatums, Tullahassee, and Vernon; and Kendleton, Board House (Peyton Colony), and Independence Heights (now part of Houston) in Texas. It should be noted that, with the possible exception of Boley, Oklahoma, none of the communities discussed below have detailed documentation currently available. Only three have had National Register nominations prepared that address the greater communities, none include an archeological component.

CALIFORNIA

Allensworth appears to be the only all-Black frontier town remaining in California. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 (NR 72000263). The town was established in 1908 in the San Joaquin Valley in southern California and promoted to potential African American settlers as a place designed “...to enable colored people to live on an equity with Whites and encourages industry and thrift in the race.”²⁴¹ Located at a “whistle-stop platform” of the Santa Fe Railroad, the town experienced only moderate growth through the 1920s. Hamilton, in his detailed study of Allensworth, noted “problems with supplying adequate water” and the Great Depression as factors in the decline of the town’s population through the twentieth century.²⁴² Allensworth is now a restored townsite museum within the California State Park system. The following is taken from the “Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park” website:

In August 1908 Colonel Allen Allensworth and four other settlers established a town founded, financed and governed by African Americans. Their dream of developing an abundant and thriving community stemmed directly from a strong belief in programs that allowed blacks to help themselves create better lives. By 1910 Allensworth’s success was the focus of many national newspaper articles praising the town and its inhabitants.

An unavoidable set of circumstances made it impossible for the residents of this tiny town located 30 miles north of Bakersfield to achieve their founders’ dreams over the long term. But the town did remain home to a handful of families and individuals throughout the 20th century, and true to the courage and resolve of its founders, the town has survived and persevered, earning the well-deserved title “The town that refused to die.”

In 1974 California State Parks purchased land within the historical townsite of Allensworth, and it became Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park. Today a collection of lovingly restored and reconstructed early 20th-century buildings—including the Colonel’s house, historic schoolhouse, Baptist church, and library—once again dots this flat farm country, giving new life to the dreams of these visionary pioneers.²⁴³

The historic town of Allensworth is restored but unoccupied and sits within the Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park (SHP). The 2010 U.S. Population Census listed Allensworth as a “census-designated place” covering three square miles. Census information indicates the demographics of Allensworth have changed dramatically, with a total population of 471 people, 34% are White, 5% are African American, 2% are Asian, and 59% listed as “other races.”²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ As cited in Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 140.

²⁴² Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 138-146.

²⁴³ “Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park,” *CA.gov California Department of Parks and Recreation*, www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=583, accessed 27 August 2012.

²⁴⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Fact Finder*, “Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010 Demographic Profile Data,” Allensworth CDP, California, accessed August 23, 2012, <http://factfinder2.census.gov>. Of the 471 occupants of the Allensworth CDP, 436 identified themselves as Hispanic/Latino in addition to their racial identification.

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OKLAHOMA

The following text produced by the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office (Oklahoma Historical Society) provides a brief context of the all-Black frontier towns of Oklahoma:

The All-Black towns of Oklahoma represent a unique chapter in American history. Nowhere else, neither in the Deep South nor in the Far West, did so many African American men and women come together to create, occupy, and govern their own communities. From 1865 to 1920 African Americans created more than fifty identifiable towns and settlements, some of short duration and some still existing at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

All-Black towns grew in Indian Territory after the Civil War when Africans formerly enslaved by the Five Civilized Tribes settled together for mutual protection and economic security. When the United States government forced American Indians to accept individual land allotments, most Indian “freedmen” chose land next to other African Americans. They created cohesive, prosperous farming communities that could support businesses, schools, and churches, eventually forming towns. Entrepreneurs in these communities started every imaginable kind of business, including newspapers, and advertised throughout the South for settlers. Many African Americans migrated to Oklahoma, considering it a kind of “promise land.”

When the Land Run of 1889 opened yet more “free” land to non-Indian settlement, African Americans from the Old South rushed to newly created Oklahoma. Edward P. McCabe, former citizen of Nicodemus and former state auditor of Kansas, helped found Langston and encouraged African Americans to settle in that All-Black town. To further his cause, McCabe established the Langston City Herald and circulated it, often by means of traveling agents, throughout the South. McCabe hoped that his tactics would create an African American political power block in Oklahoma Territory. Other African American leaders had a vision of an All-Black state. Although this dream was never realized, many All-Black communities sprouted and flourished in the rich topsoil of the new territory and, after 1907, the new state.

In these towns African Americans lived free from the prejudices and brutality found in other racially mixed communities of the Midwest and the South. African Americans in Oklahoma and Indian Territories would create their own communities for many reasons. Escape from discrimination and abuse would be a driving factor. All-Black settlements offered the advantage of being able to depend on neighbors for financial assistance and of having open markets for crops. Arthur Tolson, a pioneering historian of Blacks in Oklahoma, asserts that many African Americans turned to “ideologies of economic advancement, self-help, and racial solidarity.”

Marshalltown, North Fork Colored, Canadian Colored, and Arkansas Colored existed as early as the 1860s in Indian Territory. Other Indian Territory towns that no longer exist include Sanders, Mabelle, Wiley, Homer, Huttonville, Lee, and Rentie. Among the Oklahoma Territory towns no longer in existence are Lincoln, Cimarron City, Bailey, Zion, Emanuel, Udora, and Douglas. Towns that still survive are Boley, Brooksville, Clearview, Grayson, Langston, Lima, Red Bird, Rentiesville, Summit, Taft, Tatum, Tullahassee, and Vernon. The largest and most renowned of these was Boley. Booker T. Washington, nationally prominent African American educator, visited Boley twice and even submitted a positive article on the town to Outlook Magazine in 1908.

The passage of many Jim Crow laws by the Oklahoma Legislature immediately after statehood caused some African Americans to become disillusioned with the infant state. During this time Canada promoted settlement and, although the campaign focused on Whites, a large contingent

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of African Americans relocated to that nation's western plains, forming colonies at Amber Valley, Alberta, and Maidstone, Saskatchewan. Another exodus from Oklahoma occurred with the "Back to Africa" movements of the early twentieth century. A large group of Oklahomans joined the ill-fated Chief Sam expedition to Africa. A number of other African Americans migrated to colonies in Mexico.

White distrust also limited the growth of these All-Black towns. As early as 1911 Whites in Okfuskee County attempted to block further immigration and to force African Americans into mixed but racially segregated communities incapable of self-support. Several of these White farmers signed oaths pledging to "never rent, lease, or sell land in Okfuskee County to any person of Negro blood, or agent of theirs; unless the land be located more than one mile from a White or Indian resident." To further stem the Black migration to eastern Oklahoma a similar oath was developed to prevent the hiring of "Negro labor."

Events of the 1920s and 1930s spelled the end for most Black communities. The All-Black towns in Oklahoma were, for the most part, small agricultural centers that gave nearby African American farmers a market. Prosperity generally depended on cotton and other crops. The Great Depression devastated these towns, forcing residents to go west and north in search of jobs. These flights from Oklahoma caused a huge population decrease in Black towns.

As people left, the tax base withered, putting the towns in financial jeopardy. In the 1930s many railroads failed, isolating small towns in Oklahoma from regional and national markets. As a result, many of the Black towns could not survive. During lean years Whites would not extend credit to African Americans, creating an almost impossible situation for Black farmers and businessmen to overcome. Even one of the most successful towns, Boley, declared bankruptcy in 1939. Today, only thirteen All-Black towns still survive, but their legacy of economic and political freedom is well remembered.²⁴⁵

Following are the thirteen surviving all-Black towns of Oklahoma, with descriptions from the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) website and discussion of integrity at the end.

Boley, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 1,184 people in the 2010 census, the Boley Historic District was listed as a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1975. The national significance of Boley's business district is stated in the NHL nomination:

Boley is of national historical significance because it is representative of the many towns established by blacks who migrated from the South to northern and western communities in hopes of escaping oppression and making new lives for themselves. It was the largest of the exclusively black towns in Oklahoma and probably the largest all black town in the United States. Boley's political strength was a major factor in Oklahoma's adoption of an amendment to its constitution disenfranchising blacks. This law later lead to the historic Supreme Court decision in 1915, *Guinn and Beal v. United States*, declaring acts to disenfranchise blacks unconstitutional under the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment. Boley, begun in an era of black oppression and segregation, is a symbol of the sacrifices and effort; of its early pioneers who sought to demonstrate the ability of black men to govern themselves.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ O'Dell.

²⁴⁶ Marsha M. Greenlee, "Boley, Oklahoma Historic District," National Historic Landmark nomination, September 27, 2015.

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Following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Boley, located halfway between Paden and Castle in Okfuskee County, is the largest and most well-known of the more than fifty All-Black towns of Oklahoma and one of only thirteen still existing. The town, established on land allotted to Creek freedman James Barnett's daughter Abigail, was named after J. B. Boley, a railroad official of the Fort Smith and Western Railway. Founded in 1903 and incorporated in 1905, Boley and the African Americans living in the area prospered for many years. The Boley Progress, a weekly newspaper, began in 1905. The paper and various advertising campaigns circulated through the South and lured many formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants to the new town.

By 1911 Boley boasted more than four thousand citizens and many businesses, including two banks and three cotton gins. Booker T. Washington, founder of the National Negro Business League and the Tuskegee Institute, in Alabama, visited the town in 1905 and proclaimed it "the most enterprising and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the United States." The town supported two colleges: Creek-Seminole College, and Methodist Episcopal College. Boley also had its own electrical generating plant, water system, and ice plant. The Masonic Grand Lodge completed a majestic Masonic Temple around 1912. At the time, it was said to be the tallest building between Okmulgee and Oklahoma City.

Like many rural towns, Boley suffered through hard times in the 1920s and 1930s. By World War II the population had declined to seven hundred. At the dawn of a new century, the town was experiencing economic rejuvenation. The town still hosts the nation's oldest African American community-based rodeo every Memorial Day weekend. Boley's downtown business district is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 75001568) and has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service.

Brooksville, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 63 people in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Located in Pottawatomie County four miles southwest of Tecumseh, Brooksville was established in 1903. Originally the town was named Sewell, after a white doctor who owned much of the surrounding land and attended the residents. In 1912 the name changed to Brooksville in honor of the first African American in the area, A. R. Brooks, a cotton buyer and farmer. His son, W. M. Brooks, became the first postmaster. In 1906 Rev. Jedson White organized St. John's Baptist Church. Soon afterward, the congregation built a church that still exists. White also promoted the town throughout the South, urging African Americans to settle in Brooksville. Brooksville had a Santa Fe Railroad station, three hotels, two doctors, and two mills.

In 1924, with the aid of the Rosenwald Fund, a new school was built. Banneker School, under management of W. T. McKenzie, was a rock building of four large rooms, a three-hundred-seat auditorium, a small library, and a well-equipped domestic science room. George W. McLaurin, the first African American graduate student at the University of Oklahoma, taught at the school. After a fire, the original building was replaced by a wooden one that served students until the school closed in 1968. The building then became a community center for the town and stands next to the new city hall. A declining cotton market and the Great Depression made life difficult in Brooksville, as in many Oklahoma communities. Most of the residents departed, but the town

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survived. At the beginning of the twenty-first century Brooksville was steadily increasing in population.

Clearview, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 48 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Located in Okfuskee County eight miles southeast of Okemah.... The town was founded in 1903 along the tracks of the Fort Smith and Western Railroad. J. A. Roper, Lemuel Jackson, and John Grayson platted the town site and formed the Lincoln Townsite Company to attract settlers and advertise the settlement. Originally the post office designation was Lincoln, but in 1904 a postal service order changed it to Abelincoln. This, however, was rescinded a month later. From its beginning the community supported a newspaper, the Lincoln Tribune, that evolved into the Clearview Patriarch. Grayson and Roper also organized the Abe Lincoln Trading Company to operate a general store, deal in farm produce, and buy and sell real estate. Grayson also became the town's first postmaster, and Roper owned a sawmill and lumberyard.

By 1904 the town boasted a two-story hotel and a print shop. Very early in its existence Clearview enjoyed a brick school building and two churches. Around 1911 Roper and Jackson departed, and J. E. Thompson moved to Clearview. In 1914 he announced to Booker T. Washington, at a Negro Business League meeting, that he owned or managed a total of fifty-eight hundred acres of land in Okfuskee County. From 1916 to 1920 John C. Leftwich operated Creek and Seminole Agricultural College northeast of town. A 1907 population figure of 618 declined by the late 1930s to 420. The Great Depression and the falling price of cotton had severely crippled the town. The 1990 census recorded only forty-seven people residing in Clearview. The community still hosts an annual rodeo and in the 1990s experienced a resurgence of population.

Grayson, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 159 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Formerly known as Wildcat, Grayson is situated in southeastern Okmulgee County. Until 1918, when the Okmulgee and McIntosh county boundaries were changed, the town lay within McIntosh County. Named for Creek Chief George W. Grayson, the community lies at the intersection of U.S. Highway 266 and State Highway 5 and approximately eleven miles southeast of the county seat of Okmulgee and eight miles northeast of Henryetta.

A Grayson post office was established on February 10, 1902, and was discontinued on April 30, 1929. At 1907 statehood the town had 375 residents. By 1909 the small rural community boasted five general stores, two blacksmiths, two drug stores, a physician, and a cotton gin. It was served by the Pioneer Telephone Company, and the town of Hoffman, located 1.5 miles away, was the nearest banking and shipping point. In 1910 Grayson had a population of 411, which declined to 298 by 1920 and to 134 by 1930. Numbers rose to 188 by 1940, but decreased during the next two decades. The population remained steady at 142 reported in 1960 and 1970. In 1980 the number of inhabitants increased slightly to 150, then dropped sharply to 66 by 1990. The 2000 federal census counted 134. At the turn of the twenty-first century Grayson's population was 64.1 percent African American, 9.8 percent white, and 9.8 percent American Indian. It had two public schools, two churches, and a community center where area residents voted.

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Langston, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 1,724 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

The town of Langston in Logan County is located on State Highway 33, ten miles northeast of Guthrie. The name honors John Mercer Langston, an African American educator and U.S. congressman from Virginia. Langston and Brooksville differ from the other thirteen surviving All-Black towns because they began in Oklahoma Territory. Although Edward P. McCabe has been credited for founding the town, Charles Robbins, a white man, owned the land and filed a town survey and plat in 1891. The two men opened the town on April 22, 1890. McCabe initiated the Langston City Herald in October 1890, using it to promote African American migration to Oklahoma and the newborn Langston community.

Reportedly, by 1892 there were twenty-five retail businesses, including a bank, and the town's first common school opened. In 1893 Rev. Bishop Theophile Meerschaert and the Benedictine Sisters established a Roman Catholic mission in the community. In 1895 the town gained limited telephone service. In 1897, through the influence of McCabe, the Oklahoma Territorial Legislature established the Colored Agricultural and Normal University (later Langston University) at Langston. The Western Age and Church and State newspapers followed the City Herald, but none continued into the 1920s. In 1890 the population stood at 251, increasing to 339 in 1910. The college helped Langston endure the Great Depression, which depopulated many of Oklahoma's small towns, black and white. In 1930 the U.S. Census reported a population of 351, slowly rising to 685 in 1950, and declining to 443 in 1980.

Many prominent Oklahomans have made Langston their home or were affiliated with the university, including Melvin Tolson, Ada Louis Sipuel Fisher, Clara Luper, E. Melvin Porter, Frederick Moon, Marques Haynes, Zelia Breaux, Isaac W. Young, Inman Page, and Zella Black Patterson. Simon Alexander Haley, the father of acclaimed author Alex Haley, taught at the college. Langston University Cottage Row Historic District (NR 9801593) and the Morris House (NR 94001082) have been added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 2000 there were 1,670 residents.

Lima, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 53 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Lima is located in Seminole County south of U.S. Highway 270 on County Road N3600 between Seminole and Wewoka. At the turn of the twentieth century Seminoles and Seminole Freedmen occupied the area. The community known as Lima, named for the local limestone quarries, existed at least by 1904 and probably earlier. The post office survived from 1907 to 1957, and Grudge V. Gross served as the first postmaster. Established on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, Lima was incorporated in 1913.

In 1914 the town had a newspaper, the Lima Observer. The Mount Zion Methodist Church was constructed in 1915 and at the dawn of the twenty-first century still stood. In 1921 the Rosenwald Fund helped the community build Rosenwald Hall, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places (NR 84003427) in 1984. The brick building served as the school, educating students through the eighth grade. Also in 1921 John A. Simpson, a leader of the Farmers' Union, spearheaded an effort to integrate African Americans into the association. The union's first state and national black affiliations were established in Seminole County, and Local

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Number One was formed in Lima. In 1925 Lima residents won a lawsuit, *Moore et al. v. Porterfield et al.*, in which the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that because African Americans held the majority of population (232 black students to 16 white), the black school would be designated as its own independent school district and any white school would be legally considered the racially separate school.

In 1926 the discovery and development of the Greater Seminole Oil Field brought prosperity and white settlers to the town. The newcomers started a separate village east of Lima, which became known as New Lima. This community never incorporated but built its own school, post office, and businesses. The combined population numbered 239 in 1930 and 271 in 1940. With the decline in the oil boom, the population dropped to 99 in 1950 and 90 in 1960. In 1957, with the end of segregation, the Lima and New Lima schools merged. The population of the two communities climbed to 256 in 1980, but slowly fell to 74 in 2000. As the twenty-first century began, almost 90 percent of the population of Lima and New Lima commuted to work, most to Seminole or Wewoka.

Red Bird, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 137 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Red Bird, located in Wagoner County five miles southeast of Coweta.... The Barber and Ruffin families settled in the Red Bird community before 1900, and other families soon followed. The settlement attained a post office in 1902, with A. A. White as the first postmaster. In 1889 E. L. Barber, one of the town's developers, organized the First Baptist Church, the largest church in Red Bird. He also became Red Bird's first justice of the peace and served as an early mayor. The Red Bird Investment Company recruited African American families from all parts of the South to settle in the newly established town. More than six hundred people attended the grand opening at Red Bird, August 10, 1907.

In 1919 Professor J. F. Cathey, the principal of the school, planned Miller Washington High School, which flourished until 1959 when it closed for lack of students. The high school and Red Bird City Hall are both listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 84003448 and NR 84003450). Sharp's Grocery/Masonic Hall and the Red Bird Drugstore, both constructed in 1910, are the two commercial properties listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory. In 1938 I. W. Lane, a former mayor of Red Bird, successfully challenged a law, similar to the grandfather clause, that made it difficult for African Americans to register to vote in Wagoner County. Like many rural towns in Oklahoma, Red Bird faced devastation and population decline brought about by falling cotton prices and by the onset of the Great Depression. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the town was steadily rebuilding.

Rentiesville, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 128 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Rentiesville, founded in 1903 and developed on twenty acres owned by William Rentie and twenty acres owned by Phoebe McIntosh, is located in McIntosh County five miles north of Checotah. ...Rev. N. A. Robinson, I. J. Foster, W. D. Robinson, and Rentie organized the town site company with Robinson serving as president. J. J. Hudson opened the first mercantile business and became the first postmaster when the post office opened on May 11, 1904. B. C. Franklin followed Hudson as postmaster. By this time, as a flag stop on the Missouri, Kansas

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and Texas Railway, the town had five businesses along Main Street, and eighty-one children were enrolled in the school. In 1905 the community elected F. P. Brinson as the first mayor, and Robinson succeeded Brinson in 1909. William Rentie, the town's only lawyer, arrested Garfield Walker for drunkenness and disorderly conduct in 1908. Walker later shot and killed Rentie for revenge, taking away not only the marshal but a principal founder and namesake. The town recovered and prospered for a time, boasting a lumber store, cotton gin, and many thriving businesses.

The Great Depression and lure of opportunities in urban centers caused an exodus of citizens from Rentiesville. By the late 1930s the population dwindled to 154, and the 1990 census reported 66 residents. The site of the Civil War battle of Honey Springs is only a half-mile east of town. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the "Honey Springs Battlefield" (NR 70000848). A noted attraction is the Down Home Blues Club of nationally famed Blues artist D. C. Minner. Every Labor Day weekend Minner hosts the Dusk 'til Dawn Blues Festival in the town. Rentiesville is also the birthplace of Dr. John Hope Franklin, dean of African American historians and author of the award-winning book *From Slavery to Freedom*.

Summit, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 139 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Summit, platted as South Muskogee in 1910, had a post office as early as 1896. ...The town is located in Muskogee County six miles southwest of the city of Muskogee. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway had a depot in the community. The town may have been named Summit because it was the highest point on the railroad between Arkansas and the North Canadian rivers. Rev. L. W. Thomas organized the St. Thomas Primitive Baptist Church in 1923; in 1929 the congregation constructed a church building that still stands. The many businesses in Summit before World War II included a cotton gin, filling station, grocery, and garage. Although not incorporated until 1980, the town has always been self-governed.

Summit's W.E.B. Du Bois School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, before burning to the ground in 1991. The St. Thomas Baptist Church was listed on the National Register in 2004 (04000123). Like many rural communities, Summit suffered during the Great Depression, and after World War II flight to urban centers added to the decline. The 1990 census listed 162 residents; in 1999 the town completed a new community center and remained optimistic about future growth.

Taft, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 250 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

The All-Black town now known as Taft started as the community of Twine, which had a post office by 1902. Taft, located eight miles west of Muskogee, in Muskogee County.... The town name honored William H. Twine, who later moved and edited the Muskogee Cimeter. In 1904 citizens named the town Taft in honor of then Secretary of War (later President) William Howard Taft. The settlement developed in the Creek Nation on land allotted to Creek freedmen.

Early in the town's history the citizens promoted their community throughout the South. The Reaves Realty Company advertised Taft as the "fastest growing Colored community in Oklahoma." Taft had two newspapers, the Enterprise and the Tribune. The first mayor, Charlie

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Ford, owned Ford's Cotton Gin, and W. R. Grimmitt operated a sawmill northwest of town. Before 1910 the community supported three general stores, one drugstore, a brickyard, a soda pop factory, a livery stable, a gristmill, a lumberyard, two hotels, a restaurant, a bank, and a funeral home.

Educational and state-agency facilities have always been important economic activities. Halochee Institute, founded in 1906, was the first of several educational institutes to locate there: W. T. Vernon School (1908), the Industrial Institute for the Deaf, Blind, and Orphans of the Colored Race (1909), Moton High School, and the State Training School for Negro Girls followed Halochee. In 1934 the Taft State Hospital for the Negro Insane was established. The state later placed two state penitentiaries in Taft: Dr. Eddie Warrior Correctional Center, for women, and Jess Dunn Correctional Center, for men.

From a population of 250 in 1907, Taft grew to 690 by 1937 and then slowly declined; by 1990 the population was four hundred. Taft City Hall is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 84003330). The Reeder Walker House and St. Paul Baptist Church are listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory. In 1973 the town elected Lelia Foley-Davis as mayor, making her the first female African American mayor in the United States. Davis stepped down in 1989 but was reelected in 1999. At the approach of the twenty-first century Taft exhibited a strong economy and a trend toward population growth.

Tatums, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 151 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Lee Tatum and his wife, Mary, applied for a post office designation in 1895, beginning the town of Tatums in Indian Territory. The town, located in Carter County four miles northeast of Ratliff City.... In addition to running the post office, the Tatums operated a small grocery in one corner of their house. Henry Taylor owned the community's largest home and offered overnight accommodations for travelers. In addition to his postal duties, Lee Tatum was appointed U.S. marshal. Tatums residents soon established a church and school.

A hotel was built in 1899, a blacksmith shop in 1900, a cotton gin and sawmill in 1910, and a motor garage in 1918. Oil wells were drilled in the area in the 1920s, bringing wealth to several of Tatums' farmers and landowners. The Julius Rosenwald Fund helped build a brick school in 1925, and a gymnasium was added in 1949; the building is still standing. Tatums' Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NR 94001519), was completed in 1919. In 1927 Norman Studios filmed a silent movie, *Black Gold*, in Tatums and enlisted Marshal L. B. Tatums to play a role. Although a copy of the film cannot be found and probably no longer exists, the script and camera are preserved at the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage in California. Like most rural towns, Tatums experienced the crippling effects of the Great Depression, and many residents migrated to urban areas. At the end of the twentieth century the population stood at 172, and the town awaited economic revival.

Tulahassee, Oklahoma. Listed with a population of 106 in the 2010 census, following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

Tulahassee is considered the oldest of the surviving All-Black towns of Indian Territory. Located in Wagoner County five miles northwest of Muskogee.... The roots of the community

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were planted in 1850 when the Creek Nation built a school along the ruts of the Texas Road. Near the school, the population of Creek freedmen increased while the population of Creeks declined. The council transferred the American Indian students to another school and gave Tullahassee to the freedmen on October 24, 1881. The town was incorporated in 1902 and platted in 1907. The post office was established in 1899, with a Professor Willis serving as the first postmaster. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway line ran through the town, helping to attract settlers. Community growth was aided by the Tullahassee Town Site Company, which solicited residents throughout the South. A. J. Mason served as president and L. C. Hardridge as secretary.

In 1916 the African Methodist Episcopal Church established Flipper Davis College, the only private institution for African Americans in the state, at Tullahassee. The college, which occupied the old Tullahassee Mission, was closed after the end of the 1935 session. The site of the Tullahassee Mission was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 (71000674). The A. J. Mason Building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 85001743). Carter G. Woodson School is listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory as a resource related to African American history.

Tullahassee's population held steady at nearly 200 from 1920. In 1970 it dropped to 145 residents. In 2000 the town sheltered 106 citizens.

Vernon, Oklahoma. The community was not included in past census counts. Following is a brief description from the Oklahoma SHPO website:

An All-Black town located in southwestern McIntosh County ten miles southeast of Dustin, Vernon was established in 1911 on the Tankard Ranch in what was then the Creek Nation. Vernon.... Thomas Haynes secured much of the land for the town site and played a large part organizing the community. Its name honored Bishop W. T. Vernon of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The town received a post office designation in 1912, with Ella Woods as the postmistress. Edward Woodard served as the town's first president, but the office did not last long. Mrs. Louise Wesley established the first school and church. The congregation conducted church under a tree; Mrs. Wesley taught school in her home. In 1917 the community built the New Hope Baptist Church. The Julius Rosenwald Fund provided money to help build a public school. Vernon was one of the first communities in Oklahoma to receive assistance from the Rosenwald Fund.

The Vernon Rock Front Post Office is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 84003152). Rock Hill School is listed in the Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory as a resource related to African American history. Like many rural towns of Oklahoma, Vernon suffered economic distress during the Great Depression. The exodus of many residents to urban centers after World War II added to the loss of population.

Discussion of Significance and Integrity - Oklahoma

Of the thirteen surviving all-Black towns in Oklahoma, nine were located on existing railroads. All but one (Tullahassee) were established around the turn of the twentieth century after the Oklahoma Territory was opened to settlement. The all-Black towns of Oklahoma tell a similar story of the African American search for freedom of land ownership and governance through the establishment of all-Black communities. Like

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Nicodemus, most saw initial growth then decline through the 1930s due to the Great Depression and falling cotton prices. Several (Boley, Langston, and Taft) gained stability and significance through their association with Black colleges and institutions. Several towns (Brooksville, Lima, Tatum, and Vernon) were recipients of Julius Rosenwald Fund schools. The town of Red Bird gains additional significance for its role in a lawsuit challenging efforts to disfranchise Black voters in Oklahoma.

Based upon available 2010 U.S. Population Census data, seven of the Oklahoma towns retain a significant majority Black population: Clearview – 75%, Grayson – 72%, Langston – 95%, Summit – 76%, Taft – 88%, Tatum – 86%, and Tullahassee – 64%. Rentiesville retains a 59% Black population; Boley and Lima are similar to Nicodemus Township with a near 50-50 Black-White population (the census does not separate Nicodemus town from township, though the town of Nicodemus does appear to have a 100% Black population); Brooksville is 56% White, 27% Black, and 27% American Indian; Red Bird and Vernon, have no separate listing.²⁴⁷

TEXAS

Kendleton, Texas. The Texas State Historical Association provides information on the history of the town of Kendleton. Texas was an early destination for freed slaves in the South and Kendleton may be an important survivor to help tell that story. Black settlement began in Kendleton in the 1860s; however, its town history began later:

KENDLETON, TEXAS. Kendleton is at the intersection of U.S. Highway 59 and Farm Road 2919, fourteen miles southwest of Rosenberg in western Fort Bend County. It was once the site of a plantation belonging to William E. Kendall. In the 1860s Kendall divided the plantation into small farms, which he sold to formerly enslaved Africans. The community that resulted became known as Kendleton. In 1882 the New York, Texas and Mexican Railway Company laid track between Rosenberg and Victoria, passing through Kendleton. A post office was established in 1884 with Benjamin F. Williams as postmaster. In 1890 Kendleton had a general store and twenty-five residents; by 1896 it had grown to include three general stores and a Methodist and a Baptist church, which served some 2,000 people in the surrounding rural area. The census of 1900 reported 116 residents in the town itself. The Kendleton schools also served a wider population than Kendleton proper. In 1903 the community had two schools for twelve white students and three schools for 202 black students. The population of Kendleton fell to thirty-six in 1933 but rose again to 100 by the late 1940s. It fluctuated between 150 and 200 in the 1960s and early 1970s but, after voters chose to incorporate Kendleton in 1973, rose to more than 600. In 1990 Kendleton reported 496 residents. Locals estimated that there were around 2,200 people in the town and the surrounding area, however the 2000 census still reported a population of 466.²⁴⁸

The 2010 U.S. Population Census reported a total population in Kendleton City at 380 with 85% of the population giving their race as black and 11% White. Kendleton (as of 2016) is a collection of twentieth century residences with a Town Hall and Post Office. The linear town is bisected by the railroad and U.S. Route 59. It is unknown if any of the historically associated buildings still exist in Kendleton such as churches

²⁴⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Fact Finder*, "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010 Demographic Profile Data," accessed August 27, 2012, <http://factfinder2.census.gov>.

²⁴⁸ Elizabeth Smyrl, "Kendleton, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed August 27, 2012, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hlk05. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

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or schools (Kendleton Independent School District was eliminated in 2010). The Henry G. and Annie B. Green House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996 (NR 960001016).

Board House (Peyton Colony), Texas. The settlement of Board House, Texas, originally known as the Peyton Colony, has a history that closely mirrors that of Nicodemus, Kansas. No National Register documentation could be located, although there were several online sources that provided brief historical backgrounds for the town:

Peyton Colony was a freedmen's community established in 1865 by Peyton Roberts (c.1820-1888), an ex-slave who migrated to Caldwell County, Texas. Roberts was born enslaved on the William Roberts Plantation in Virginia. Roberts and several families on the Roberts Plantation gained their freedom at the end of the Civil War.

In late 1865, Peyton Roberts led these families to the Texas hill country eight miles southeast of the present-day town of Blanco. They homesteaded public land and built cabins on their new properties. Their small community, along Boardhouse Creek, became known as the Peyton Colony.

In 1874, Rev. Jack Burch, a freedman, from Tennessee, arrived in the Colony and pitched a tent for the first meeting of the Mt. Horeb Baptist Church. Jim Upshear, one of the colonists, donated land for a permanent site and the settlers built a log church, which also served as a community school. Part of the Colony site, now a state park, includes a cemetery with 176 graves, including Peyton Roberts and many of the original settlers.²⁴⁹

Additional information was found in *The Handbook of Texas*, produced by the Texas Historical Association:

PEYTON, TEXAS (Blanco County). Peyton (Payton), formerly known as Peyton Colony and Board House (Boardhouse), is near Boardhouse Creek just west of the junction of Farm roads 165 and 2325, seven miles east of Blanco in southeastern Blanco County. The settlement was called Freedman's Colony by white inhabitants of the area, when it was founded around 1865 by Peyton Roberts, an exslave from Lockhart, who had acquired public land there by preemption. Other freedmen followed suit, and though preemption technically ended in 1876, land patents in the area continued to be issued as late as 1880. In 1872 or 1874 the first church in the area was built on land donated by Jim Upshear, who had come with his wife to Peyton by wagon train from Virginia. Also built was a small log schoolhouse. A post office operated in Peyton from 1898 to 1909. Another post office operated from 1918 to 1930, but it was officially named Board House because it was located in A. V. Walker's board house, the first in the community. Though Board House has not appeared on Texas maps since then, Peyton still existed in the 1990s and housed the descendants of many of the original settlers. Community life centered around the Mount Horeb Baptist Church. In 2000 the population was thirty.²⁵⁰

Current population statistics could not be accessed. A map search revealed that the Mt. Horeb Baptist Church remains an active church on Peyton Colony Road (Co. Rd. 409) in Blanco County, Texas, along with several ranches and the nearby "Payton Cemetery" off Ranch Road 165. The abandoned Peyton Colony school

²⁴⁹ Sarah Massey, "Peyton Colony (Boardhouse), Texas," *BlackPast.org Remembered & Reclaimed, An Online Reference Guide to African American History*, accessed August 27, 2012, www.blackpast.org/?q=aaw/peyton-colony-boardhouse-texas. Produced by Quintard Taylor, Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History, University of Washington, Seattle.

²⁵⁰ Mary H. Ogilvie, "PEYTON, TX (BLANCO COUNTY)," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed August 27, 2012, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hrp77. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

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building was still standing, its blackboard and desk/chairs still in place, when it was photographed by a “ghost town” blogger in 2012.²⁵¹

Independence Heights. The town of Independence Heights has been enveloped by the expanding city limits of Houston. It is now a suburban section located in the northwest quadrant of the city, just outside the inner beltway (Interstate 610) but well within the outer beltway (Interstate 69). Despite this it has a remarkably rural feel with modest homes on small lots. *The Handbook of Texas Online* provides a brief history of Independence Heights:

INDEPENDENCE HEIGHTS, TEXAS. Independence Heights was originally northeast of Houston in an area now within the Houston city limits, bounded on the south by Thirtieth Avenue, on the north by Fortieth Avenue, on the west by Yale Street, and on the east by Airline Drive in Harris County. The Wright Land Company secured the land, incorporated in 1910, and developed a new community for blacks. By doing their own financing they made it possible for people with small incomes to become homeowners. Resident contractors built most of the houses and churches. Independence Heights incorporated on January 25, 1915, when it had a population of 600. G. O. Burgess was the first mayor. The Houston Informer was the city newspaper. The Independence Heights School was established in 1911, and O. L. Hubbard was its first teacher. Churches organized while Independence Heights was a separate city were the New Hope Missionary Baptist, the Green Chapel African Methodist Episcopal, the St. Paul Colored Methodist Episcopal, the Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal, the Concord Missionary Baptist, and the North Main Church of God in Christ. Businesses included a cooperative store, grocery stores, cafes, and contractors. Some residents were employed in Houston, in Houston Heights, and in other areas. In 1920 Independence Heights had a population of 715. According to the Houston Post dated January 17, 1915, it was the first incorporated black city in Texas. In 1989 a Texas Historical Commission marker was placed on the grounds of Greater New Hope Missionary Baptist Church to mark the city site. In November 1928 Independence Heights residents voted to dissolve the city’s incorporation because of their desire to become a part of Houston. The area was annexed to Houston on December 26, 1929.²⁵²

An oral history project on the Independence Heights neighborhood was completed in 2003 by Hogg Middle School, Burrus Elementary School, and the Historic Independence Heights Neighborhood Council with the Rice University, Center for Technology in Teaching and Learning in Houston.²⁵³ A context statement (NR 64500641) and multiple property document was prepared in 1997, and the same year the Independence Heights Residential Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 97000542).

²⁵¹ Gary Nicholson, “Peyton Colony,” posted February 16, 2012, *Ghost Towns and Abandoned Places: A Personal Travel Blog*, accessed August 29, 2012, <http://artistforlandscapes.wordpress.com/category/ghost-towns/>.

²⁵² Vivian Hubbard Seals, “INDEPENDENCE HEIGHTS, TX,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed August 27, 2012, www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hri07. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

²⁵³ “Independence Heights: A Portrait of a Historic Neighborhood,” accessed August 27, 2012, <http://indepheights.rice.edu/>.

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History of Nicodemus*Introduction: “There’s something about Nicodemus”*

“There’s something about Nicodemus,” visiting Pastor Allen D. Smith repeated several times during the Sunday morning service at First Missionary Baptist Church in Nicodemus, Kansas.²⁵⁴ The sanctuary was full for the installation of a new pastor at the church – on the front pew sat the church “mothers” each with a special hat for the occasion. In the pews behind were families with squirming children and visitors from a sister church – all, perhaps, more excited for the anticipated dinner and festivities scheduled to follow the service. As the service progressed the Spirit filled the room through prayer and song. “There’s something about Nicodemus,” said the pastor. And indeed there is. It is a palpable sense of community, of history, and of hope for the future.

The story of Nicodemus, Kansas is a familiar American story of westward migration and settlement. It is the story of families leaving their homes and farms for an unknown territory; of hardships and triumphs; of growth and decay. But the Nicodemus story is unique because it is an African American story. Families who retained their connections despite the separations that slavery entailed; who left the land of Kentucky that they could never really “own” for the “free” land of Kansas; and the generations who stayed through the hardships of high plains farming, who persevered without the promised railroad, who ate the dust of the 1930s and held onto their land as it passed from parents to children and to grandchildren. It is these bonds of kinship and the ties to the land – couched within the context of slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and the Jim Crow South – that makes the Nicodemus story exceptional.

And it is a continuing story. Though the physical town is in decline and many of the homesteads are abandoned, the feeling of Nicodemus lives on through the generations that still call it “home” regardless of where they actually live today. It lives on in the annual Emancipation Day/Homecoming Celebration – a time to “go home” to renew their connection to each other and to the land. It is a feeling that Nicodemus will never disappear as long as the kinship, the land, and the history remain. The connection to this land is an important link to their ancestors and a time of new beginnings.

The Nicodemus community is blessed with a remarkable record of its history, not only through the documentary record, but through the efforts of community members, particularly the women of the community, to record and share what they knew and what they learned from their parents and grandparents.²⁵⁵ As early as the 1940s Lulu Sadler Craig began writing a history of Nicodemus based largely on the stories told to her by those who were there at the beginning. Teacher Ola Wilson and St. Francis Hotel owner Ora Switzer also preserved the history as it was handed down to them. Over the last thirty years two HABS projects, several NPS projects, as well as Samuels family descendent Angela Bates and the Nicodemus Historical Society, have compiled an impressive collection of oral history interviews of community members dating back to the 1970s through today (2016). Genealogies, family photographs and documents have also been gathered. Numerous manuscripts detailing the history of Nicodemus are available, from undergraduate term papers to graduate thesis and dissertations, archeological reports and chapters within published books, to NPS history, landscape, resource, and structure

²⁵⁴ The special service for the installation of Rev. K. E. Brown as pastor at Nicodemus First Missionary Baptist Church took place on 30 October 2011. Paula Reed and Edie Wallace attended the service as guests.

²⁵⁵ Justin Hosbey’s thesis, “Inalienable Possessions and Flyin’ West: African American Women in the Pioneer West,” explores how the Nicodemus descendants maintained the continuity of their community for over 140 years. He found that family histories, folklore and the ‘passing down’ of property are the main ways that descendants connect to Nicodemus (page 65). Women, equal partners in the flowering and growth of the community, were also the protectors of family histories and genealogies. They were and are “primary catalysts” in the formation and reproduction of Nicodemus cultural heritage and Nicodemus descendant identity (page 2).

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reports. Land records, estate records, historic newspapers, historic photographs and handbills have all been mined and compiled for documentation of the town and township's history.

In an effort to understand Nicodemus not only as an historic community but also as a Traditional Cultural Property, the following text will trace the traditional values of the African American community identified in the Statement of Significance: family, church, school, self-governance, land ownership, and mutual aid, as they are revealed through the history of Nicodemus and particularly through the thoughts and recollections of the community members themselves – supported or challenged by documentation as necessary.²⁵⁶ The story begins in the Kentucky homeland from which most of the Nicodemus settlers came, and with the cultural traditions established there during the period of enslavement, the same traditions that carried them through their migration and settlement in Kansas and continue as an integral part of the Nicodemus community today.

Kentucky – Plantation Slave Roots

To anyone who did not know Col. Richard M. Johnson, his large Scott County plantation along Elkhorn Creek appeared typical of the Bluegrass Region of central Kentucky. The son of a wealthy landowner, Johnson inherited his “Blue Spring” farm and 100 slaves from his father in 1815. Col. Johnson was a hero of the War of 1812 credited with killing Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and served in public office through much of his life. His life of public service culminated with his election – by the Senate – to the office of U.S. Vice President under Martin Van Buren in 1836.²⁵⁷ But Johnson served only one term as Vice President and failed to achieve his goal of the Presidency, largely due to his “domestic situation.”²⁵⁸

Though many slave owners were known to have relations with their female slaves, Richard M. Johnson openly lived with his mulatto slave Julia Chinn in a common-law marriage. He raised their two daughters, Imogene and Adaline, “as carefully and tenderly...and their paternity as unconcealed as the most gently nurtured belle of the Bluegrass.”²⁵⁹ Thomas Henderson, school master of Johnson’s Choctaw Academy on the plantation and who tutored the Johnson daughters, observed that “a stranger would not suspect them of being what they really are – the children of a colored woman.”²⁶⁰ Fully integrated into the society of their father, both girls married White men, much to the chagrin of the local Whig press who commented on the occasion of Adaline’s marriage in 1832:

This is the second time that the moral feelings of that part of the people of Scott County, who possess such feelings, have been shocked and outraged by the marriage of a mulatto daughter of Col. Johnson to a white man, if a man who will so degrade himself, who will make himself an object of scorn and detestation to every person who has the least regard for decency, can be considered a man.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ For more detail-oriented histories of Nicodemus, the reader is referred to the attached bibliography.

²⁵⁷ “American President: A Reference Resource – Richard M. Johnson 1837-1841,” Miller Center, University of Virginia, accessed June 11, 2012, <http://millercenter.org/president/vanburen/essays/vicepresident/1862>.

²⁵⁸ “An affecting scene in Kentucky,” accessed June 11, 2012, www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661287/.

²⁵⁹ William H. Townsend, *Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), 76.

²⁶⁰ Townsend, 76. Johnson ran the Choctaw Academy on his Blue Spring farm beginning in 1825 through 1843, see Ethel McMillan, “First National Indian School: The Choctaw Academy,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 52, accessed June 12, 2012, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v028/v028p052.pdf>.

²⁶¹ *Lexington Observer & Reporter*, November 29, 1832, as cited in Townsend, 77.

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Not all of Scott County society agreed with this assessment though many were slave-holders themselves, but he did eventually lose his support for elected office. Col. Johnson's alternative lifestyle continued even after the death of Julia Chinn in 1833, as he is said to have taken two additional mulatto mistresses from his stable of enslaved African Americans.²⁶²

Also among the Johnson "Blue Spring" plantation slaves, according to Nicodemus historian and Scott County slave descendent Lulu Sadler Craig, were a number of future settlers on Nicodemus soil, including Mary Johnson, her son Joseph and his family, and Thomas Johnson and his family.²⁶³ John Samuels, great-grandfather of Lulu Craig, was enslaved in a hemp factory before he was sold onto the plantation adjoining Col. Johnson, owned by Johnson's son-in-law Daniel Pence.²⁶⁴ Samuels' wife Ann and their children lived enslaved on the farm of the widow Luvenia Pence. Mrs. Pence moved with her slaves to Missouri, dividing the Samuels family. They were reunited three years later when Daniel Pence arranged to sell John to a Missouri farm nearby.²⁶⁵

Unlike Julia Chinn, Col. Johnson's slave/wife who reportedly "was in complete charge of all the domestic concerns" on the Blue Spring farm until her death in 1833, most of the Pence and Johnson slaves likely experienced the more typical daily routines as house servants or field laborers.²⁶⁶ One Nicodemus settler identified by Lulu Craig only as "Beverly" recalled his antebellum Kentucky home on another plantation near the Blue Spring farm:

I was born and reared on Willis [Willa] Viley's plantation in Scott County Kentucky. The plantation was large stretching miles beside the Elkhorn Creek containing hundreds of acres of rich land that produced fine crops of corn, hemp and tobacco. The place was well stocked with mules, cattle, horses, hogs and sheep. There were over one hundred slaves on the place among them a gang of men who did the work...²⁶⁷

The diversity of crops and animals reflected the seasonal climate of north-central Kentucky. Willa Viley, whose daughter Matilda married into the Johnson family and eventually built Ward Hall nearby, was also considered a pioneer in the breeding and training of Kentucky thoroughbred racehorses.²⁶⁸

Work was not all there was in the life of a Scott County slave. Beverly recalled banjos and fiddles and singing and dancing on the Viley plantation – particularly following the announcement of their emancipation in 1865. On the Daniel Pence farm, the enslaved African Americans from surrounding plantations gathered annually to

²⁶² "American President: A Reference Resource."

²⁶³ Craig manuscript, 210? (handwritten); "Colonel Richard M. Johnson," Nicodemus Historical Society vertical files, Nicodemus, Kansas. Craig also identified "Beverly, Herring, Hiram, Travis, and John Samuels" as slaves on the Johnson farm as well, however, other records seem to indicate that at least Beverly Samuels and John Samuels were enslaved on nearby or adjoining farms. One on-line genealogical source notes that the Blue Spring farm was given to Adaline and her husband Thomas Scott in 1832 at the time of their marriage: "The Pence, Jackson, Brent and Adams Families of Kentucky: Information About Thomas w. Scott," *Geaneology.com*, accessed June 11, 2012, <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/g/o/r/Brenda-G-Gordon/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0068.html>.

²⁶⁴ Angela Bates, personal communication with Paula Reed, 25 October 2011. Daniel Pence was the husband of Imogene Johnson. Angela Bates is the great-great-great granddaughter of John Samuels.

²⁶⁵ Craig manuscript, "John Samuels Leaves Kentucky," pp. 234-240 (handwritten).

²⁶⁶ Townsend, 76.

²⁶⁷ Lulu Mae Sadler Craig, "Leaving the old Plantation," Lulu Craig vertical files, Graham Co. Historical Society, Hill City, Kansas. The story was told to Lulu Craig by Beverly Samuels.

²⁶⁸ William Elsey Connelley and E. M. Coulter, *History of Kentucky*, Vol. IV (New York: The American Historical Society, 1922), 113.

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celebrate the “Colored Peoples Fair.” The event was held around the 1st of August each year to celebrate both the harvest and the 1834 emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies.²⁶⁹

Kentucky – “Now that you are free... You must go.”

Emancipation did finally come to the slaves of Kentucky in December 1865, with the passage of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery in the United States. Like Beverly, the Viley “ex-slave,” many were turned out from the only home they had ever known. Beverly recalled his master’s words, “Now that you are free, this is not your home any longer. You must go.”

...We stood speechless. Not one of us had thought of that. Leave home! Where could we go?²⁷⁰

Beverly Samuels, his wife Emaline and their two children did find a new home and work on another farm. Recounting his story to Lulu Craig, Samuels described seven days of travel over seventy miles of road by foot. They landed in Jefferson County Kentucky, according to the 1870 U.S. Population census, where Beverly (noted as “Benj.” by the census-taker) Samuels, age 22, was a Farm Laborer. Living in the household were his wife Emaline, age 27, oldest daughter Sallie (?), age 12, Mary, age 8, and Angie, just one year old. Also living in the household was Fanny Bates, age 16, who was working as a Domestic Servant.

For ten years Beverly Samuels worked and saved money with the intention of eventually establishing himself and his family on their own farm. “I had saved a good share of my wages and was thinking of starting out for myself in some way,” he told Craig:

...About that time a man came around telling us about free farm land in Kansas and urged us to better our conditions by going out there at once. We saw in that venture a chance to get the home that we were so anxious for...²⁷¹

William R. Hill, the man who Samuels recalled spoke to them about Kansas, had been making the rounds to Black communities in central Kentucky promoting his latest venture, the Nicodemus Town Company. Hill, a White man from Indiana, along with six Kansas Black men who originally hailed from Kentucky and Tennessee, organized the company in April 1877 just as Reconstruction in the South was formally coming to an end. Their target audience was African American, both in eastern Kansas and in Kentucky, where they hoped to find families like the Samuels’ that had the desire to leave and could afford the \$5 fee for a townsite plot, or the \$2 to \$30 cost of a homestead claim.²⁷²

The desire to leave was strong among Kentucky ex-slaves, judging by the stories passed down to their descendents. Grace VanDuvall’s father John Deprad was taken from his mother at age four as a slave and did not see her again until he was emancipated at age eight. At age twenty, he and a brother left Kentucky for Kansas, “Anything to go out of the South.”²⁷³ The story handed down to Hattie Craig Burnie by her great-grandfather, who came to Nicodemus in 1878, reflected the growing violence against freedmen in the South as Reconstruction came to an end:

Now, when my great-grandfather and his wife came in...1878...he brought five children with him that were homeless. Now when the Ku Klux found out that the slaves were leaving those

²⁶⁹ Angela Bates, personal communication with Paula Reed, October 2011. The event was probably also tied to the 1808 abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

²⁷⁰ Craig, “Leaving the old Plantation.”

²⁷¹ Craig, “Leaving the old Plantation.”

²⁷² Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 7-9.

²⁷³ Interview with Grace VanDuvall, age 83, 1977 or 1978, page 7, “Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978,” Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

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slave states, they killed them. They killed a lot of them and threw them in the river. And, uh, there was one man and his wife was – they'd been trying to hurt this man for a long time, and he fought like a tiger. They couldn't whip him...and it was a night they thought they could...So that night...they broke in and shot and killed this man and his wife, both of them in the bed. So they had these five children, and when my great-grandfather and mother moved away, they brought these five children with them...²⁷⁴

Ola Wilson, daughter of original Nicodemus settler Grave (R. B.) Scruggs, recalled her father's reason for leaving Kentucky was their inability to acquire land:

Well, you see, the white people didn't let the Negroes buy land – not these slaves, not at that time. They wanted them to stay there to work, but they didn't want them to have any land.²⁷⁵

Promoting the Promised Land

Some of W. R. Hill's most successful promotional meetings occurred among Black Baptist congregations in the Georgetown, Kentucky, area. Daniel Hickman, born a slave in Kentucky about 1840, joined the Baptist Church in 1862. He taught himself to read in spare moments using scraps of paper and at the age of 25 in 1866, just one year after his emancipation, he became a Baptist minister. Rev. Hickman preached at both the Owens Baptist Church at Big Eagle and the Mount Olive Baptist Church at Dry Run, organized in 1870.²⁷⁶ In the summer of 1877 Rev. Hickman and Rev. Morris Bell gathered their congregations to listen to William Hill speak. George Moore sat among the families that gathered to hear the presentation. Moore's recollection of the event was retold by a Kansas newspaper reporter in 1934:

There came to the little colored Baptist church one night a white man expounding the theories of a negro colony away out in western Kansas. With many others George listened to the stories of the wonderful opportunities for the colored man out on the prairies where 160 acres of land could be had for the asking, where horses were running wild but could be caught and tamed and turned into beasts of burden for doing farm work; where game was plentiful and would supply their every want in the meat line; where the colored man clasped hands with the white man as his equal; where there were no Jim Crow laws to humiliate the race. The great out-of-doors could be reclaimed with but little effort and bounteous crops would result.²⁷⁷

This idealistic image of the western Kansas plains may actually reflect the 1930s reporter's spin on what Moore recalled. Though such hyperbole was typical of frontier town promotion, this report appears to go well beyond the descriptions given on the Nicodemus Town Company promotional handbills. Still, the most descriptive surviving handbill was perhaps unrealistically optimistic, particularly about the ready availability of water, timber, and coal:

...we are proud to say it is the finest country we ever saw. The soil is of a rich, black, sandy loam. The country is rather rolling, and looks most pleasing to the human eye. The south fork of the Solomon river flows through Graham County, nearly directly east and west and has an abundance of excellent water, while there are numerous springs of living water abounding

²⁷⁴ Interview with Hattie Craig Burnie, age 90, 1977, page 6, "Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978," Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Ola Wilson, age 86, summer 1978, page 5, "Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978," Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

²⁷⁶ Craig manuscript, p. 200 (handwritten), "Rev. Daniel Hickman," "Mount Olive Baptist lives on through Dry Run Missionary," (n.d.), Sadieville Town Hall vertical files, Sadieville, Kentucky.

²⁷⁷ "When Nicodemus Was Thriving Village," *Concordia Kansan*, 28 June 1934, as cited in Burden et. al., 61.

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throughout the Valley. There is an abundance of fine Magnesian stone for building purposes, which is much easier handled than the rough sand or hard stone. There is also some timber; plenty for fire use, while we have no fear but what we will find plenty of coal.²⁷⁸

The handbill, dated July 2nd, 1877, noted that there were already “several members permanently located on their claims.” The initial “colony” of 30 settlers was from Topeka Kansas, organized by company president W. H. Smith, company secretary Rev. S. P. Roundtree, and Z. T. Fletcher who would become the first postmaster of the Nicodemus post office.²⁷⁹

The Nicodemus Town Company was incorporated in June 1877, shortly after filing their Nicodemus townsite plat at the Kirwin, Kansas, land office.²⁸⁰ They issued the first advertisement handbill two months earlier, in April 1877, at which time they confidently announced:

By September 1st the Colony will have houses erected and all branches of mercantile business will be opened out for the benefit of the Colony. A Church edifice and other public buildings will be erected. No Saloons or other houses of ill-fame will be allowed on the town site within five years from the date of this organization.

We invite our colored friends of the Nation to come and join with us in this beautiful Promise Land.²⁸¹

References to the “Promised Land” and the name Nicodemus itself held deep meaning for formerly enslaved African Americans. The story of Nicodemus was recounted in a song by Henry Clay Work published in 1864.²⁸² Some of the lyrics were reprinted on the July 2, 1877 Nicodemus Town Company handbill – with an altered Chorus to aid in the town promotion:

Nicodemus was a prophet, at least he was as wise,

For he told of the battles to come:

How we trembled with fear, when he rolled his eyes

And we heeded the sake of his tomb.

Chorus:

Good time coming, good time coming,

Long, long time on the way:

Run and tell Eliza to hurry up Pomp,

To meet us under the cottonwood tree,

In the Great Solomon Valley

²⁷⁸ “To the Colored Citizens of the United States,” July 2, 1877, Item #208456, Kansas Historical Society, “Kansas Memory,” accessed June 13, 2012, www.kansasmemory.org/item/208456.

²⁷⁹ Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 10. A “colony” referred to the group that formed in preparation for the migration. Each group was typically called a Colony and occasionally the Nicodemus settlement itself was called a Colony, for example the April 1877 Nicodemus Town Company handbill had a headline “The Largest Colored Colony in America!”

²⁸⁰ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 31.

²⁸¹ “Advertisement for Nicodemus, Kansas,” 16 April 1877, Item #210499, Kansas Historical Society, “Kansas Memory,” accessed June 13, 2012, www.kansasmemory.org/item/210499.

²⁸² “Wake Nicodemus,” published by Root & Cady, Chicago, IL, in 1864, copy from the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI, as cited in Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 34.

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At the first break of day.²⁸³

The original song was about Nicodemus, an African slave who purchased his own freedom and prophesied the “battles to come” – presumably referencing the Civil War – and the “Great Jubilee” – referring to emancipation of the slaves.²⁸⁴ Ola Wilson recalled the story as it was handed down to her:

It come from Africa. ...this Nicodemus was the oldest boy of the family, I guess. But they brought him to America as a slave, and he didn’t like it...his people to be in slavery. And he had the desire to want to free them...²⁸⁵

Thus Nicodemus, Kansas, in 1877 took on the symbolic association of freedom from enslavement and oppression. Additionally, Kansas, whose soil was so closely associated with the battles for freedom of the 1850s, had taken on an almost religious aura as the “Promised Land” among the deeply religious Southern freedmen. This image was succinctly evoked by G. R. M. Newman, an ex-slave from Louisiana, in his 1879 letter to Kansas Governor St. John:

I am anxious to reach your state...because of the sacredness of her soil washed by the blood of humanitarians for the cause of freedom.²⁸⁶

The Nicodemus Town Company developers carefully cultivated these images to fit their target audience and it likely influenced many to embark on the migration.

Back in Kentucky, the *Georgetown Weekly Times* began regular reporting on the preparations of local African Americans intending to go to Kansas – the reports liberally colored with disparaging remarks. On June 30th, 1877, the newspaper reported that there were a “number of colored in Scott [County] talking of moving to Kansas” and on August 29th:

The Kansas emigration fever has fairly taken hold of the negroes. The trouble is that the thrifty ones want to go. The trifling ones have no intention of leaving.²⁸⁷

In September 1877 several groups boarded the train, 60 from Paris in Bourbon County just east of Georgetown, an unreported number from Lexington, and 20 at the Sadieville depot – the *Georgetown Weekly Times* reporting “Sorrow – sorry that more of ‘em didn’t go.”²⁸⁸ Known as the “Lexington Colony,” the group was reportedly led by Rev. Morris Bell and numbered around 300 in total.²⁸⁹ In March of 1878, the Georgetown newspaper

²⁸³ “To the Colored Citizens of the United States.” Some historians have suggested that the name Nicodemus was actually a religious reference, but since the town developers themselves referenced the song it seems clear that they wished to tie the town name to freedom from slavery and oppression.

²⁸⁴ Lyrics available in the Rare Books and Special Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Ola Wilson, summer 1978, page 7.

²⁸⁶ As cited in Painter, 159.

²⁸⁷ *Georgetown Weekly Times*, 29 August 1877, as cited by Rick Johnston, “Sadieville black history notes,” Sadieville Town Hall vertical files, Sadieville, KY.

²⁸⁸ *Georgetown Weekly Times*, 26 September 1877, as cited by Rick Johnston, “Sadieville black history notes,” also notes from Stuart Sprague, *From Kentucky to Canaan: The Migration of Blacks to Kansas, 1877-1886*, citing the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 24 September 1877, Sadieville Town Hall vertical files, Sadieville, KY.

²⁸⁹ The various histories of Nicodemus do not always agree concerning the number of people in this “first wave” of Kentucky settlers. The July 2011 *Historic Resource Study* described “300 individuals...who came from Lexington, Kentucky,” citing Glen Schwendemann, page 14; Schwendemann’s 1968 *Kansas Historical Quarterly* article states (without citation), “By early September, Hill and a black minister, the Rev. M. M. Bell, had enrolled nearly 300 freedmen from the vicinity of Lexington. The group arrived in the colony on September 17, 1877...” and that approximately 70 farms were established in the surrounding countryside. The Bahr Vermeer Haecker *Cultural Landscape Report* says “On September 17, 1877, the first formal group of emigrants led by W.R. Hill, numbering 350 people, arrived in Nicodemus from Fayette, Scott and Bourbon Counties, Kentucky,” citing Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, “The Settlement of Nicodemus: Its Origins and Early Promotion,” Chapter 1, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 5-7; See

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editor got his wish as “115 colored left Georgetown for Kansas, went to Paynes Depot then by the short line to Louisville.” The *Lexington Press* reported that 25 people left from Lexington, 75 from Paynes Station, 70 from Midway, and 150 from Kincaid Station, “all over the same route to the same destination.”²⁹⁰ The travelers were primarily family groups; many were inter-related and associated through their church memberships, as with the Georgetown area Baptist Church members.

Nicodemus, Kansas, Town & Township – Initial Settlement and Development 1877-1881

The railroad carried most of the prospective settlers as far as Ellis, Kansas. From Ellis they walked or hired carriage to their destination, 35 miles to the northwest. Few of the travelers brought more than they could carry themselves, thus they arrived without farm equipment, livestock, furniture, or even basic supplies. Grace VanDuvall recalled that her father told her “All he brought from Kentucky was the clothes he had on his back...when he left home, his mother give him a pair of pillows, couple of sheets and pillowcases, and, I believe, blankets and quilts.”²⁹¹ The first arrivals in the summer and fall of 1877 were too late in the growing season to begin cultivation and so had to improvise ways to provide food for their families. VanDuvall recalled, “...my dad said he walked to Ellis and carried a sack of flour...from Ellis to here.”²⁹² Ola (Scruggs) Wilson, daughter of March 1878 settler R. B. (Grave) Scruggs, responded when asked how the early settlers survived, “Well, God had plenty good fish in the creek...” and in the winter:

There were animals here, too. Rabbits – a lot of rabbits and – two kinds of rabbits: there were cottontails and then the big jackrabbits. And then there were birds that they ate.²⁹³

Some men found work in Ellis or Hays, or on the railroad, periodically returning “home” to Nicodemus to bring supplies. Jenny Fletcher recalled help from Indians in the winter of 1877, though at first the colonists hid in fear from their Indian visitors:

...assuredly he [the Chief] persuaded them to come out, and that if they would there should be no harm befall them. When they did emerge from their refuge, they were given corn and other provision which the Indian brought...Being low on supplies, the Indians gave them supplies enough to last several weeks and these friendly visitors came again and again to see the newcomers.²⁹⁴

George Sayers suggested that the Indian visits prevented starvation in the colony, “the Indians would kill buffalo and bring them some meat.”²⁹⁵ The struggle for food through the first winter was just the first of many trials for the new settlers.

Claire O'Brien, “With One Mighty Pull,” *Great Plains Quarterly*, Spring 1996, f.n. 8 (page 129), “There is some discrepancy in the scholarship regarding the exact number of settlers in each group, their respective points of origin, and their arrival dates. However, all are agreed on the overwhelming majority being from Georgetown and Lexington, Kentucky and on this general chronology.”

²⁹⁰ *Georgetown Weekly Times*, 20 March 1878, as cited by Rick Johnston, “Sadieville black history notes,” also notes from Stuart Sprague, *From Kentucky to Canaan: The Migration of Blacks to Kansas, 1877-1886*, citing the *Lexington Press*, 14 and 24 March 1878, Sadieville Town Hall vertical files, Sadieville, KY.

²⁹¹ Interview with Grace VanDuvall, 1977 or 1978, page 3.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Interview with Ola Wilson, age 86, 1977 or 1978, page 11, “Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978,” Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

²⁹⁴ From Craig manuscript, “The First Colony with Morrism [sic] Bell,” as cited in Burden, et. al., 31-32; the authors note that informants described the Indians as either Osages or Potawatomis, “or to an unidentified tribe” (p. 32).

²⁹⁵ Burden, et. al., 32.

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With the coming winter, shelter too was a significant need. Little timber was available for building, so “home” for the first colonists – like their white counterparts elsewhere on the plains and prairie frontier – were dugouts, little more than a hole in the ground with a roof.²⁹⁶ In 1879 a *Chicago Tribune* reporter visited Nicodemus and described the dugouts he observed:

...roofed with poles and brush, with a covering of earth sufficient to keep out the rain. As lumber floors were regarded as an unnecessary luxury, all the lumber required was for a door and its frame, and one window. A fireplace at one end, in most cases, takes the place of a stove, and serves the double purpose of heating and cooking.²⁹⁷

The roof, according to Ora Switzer, was “sunflower weeds” with “a little grass and dirt on top of it...”²⁹⁸ Grace VanDuvall described the dugout houses recalled from her childhood, a hybrid dugout with walls built up with sod blocks, commonly called a “sod-up”:

You seen a cellar? You see people dig those holes out to put – make a basement? Well, they’re dug out just like that. And then they would take sod and build it up in there and on the sides and all around and put a top on it. And then they’d get out and get clay and sand and stuff to plaster them.²⁹⁹

The appearance of these underground houses to the hope-filled later arrivals in the spring of 1878 was strikingly disappointing. Willina Hickman, wife of Rev. Daniel Hickman, who migrated in March 1878 with a large group from Georgetown, Kentucky, is most often cited for her recollection of the sight:

I looked with all the eyes I had. ‘Where is Nicodemus? I don’t see it.’ My husband pointed out various smokes coming out of the ground and said, ‘That is Nicodemus.’ The families lived in dugouts...The scenery was not at all inviting, and I began to cry.³⁰⁰

Fresh from the city of Chicago, Abram T. Hall recalled his first impression of “demus” as he arrived with his traveling companion Edward P. McCabe, and town agent John Niles, in April 1878, bringing relief supplies from Leavenworth:

Then Mr. Niles bade us look to the North, in the direction he was pointing, just beyond a fringe of trees, where we’d see some black spots. That was “Nicodemus.” I confess to feeling disappointed. I had never seen a “Dug-lur” [sic] nor a “Sod-up” and I had not the least conception of how either of them looked.³⁰¹

The first dugout was reportedly built as a community effort for Charles Williams and his wife Emma (Johnson) Williams, who soon after gave birth to Henry Williams, the first child born in Nicodemus.³⁰²

The tradition of mutual aid, such as building the Williams dugout or sharing supplies in the first winter at Nicodemus, had been cultivated within African American culture throughout the nineteenth century. Mutual aid was basic to the operation of the Underground Railroad during the period of enslavement and was institutionalized in the form of benevolent societies during Reconstruction as freedmen struggled to participate

²⁹⁶ Hamilton, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 7.

²⁹⁷ “About Nicodemus,” article reprinted in *The Daily Journal*, Lawrence, 30 April 1879, Item #210648, Kansas Historical Society, “Kansas Memory,” accessed June 13, 2012, www.kansasmemory.org/item/210648.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Ola Wilson, 1977 or 1978, page 11.

²⁹⁹ Interview with Grace VanDuvall, 1977 or 1978, page 5.

³⁰⁰ As cited in Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 37.

³⁰¹ As cited in William J. Belleau, “The Nicodemus Colony of Graham County, Kansas,” Master’s thesis, Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1943, 56. The letter from Abram T. Hall to Mrs. Kathryn Henri, dated September 6th, 1937, was noted as sent “On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the town of Nicodemus.”

³⁰² Interview with Grace VanDuvall, 1977 or 1978, page 3.

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fully in American society. The first arrivals to Nicodemus initially shared what little they had among themselves. Andrew Alexander, Sr., visiting Nicodemus in the spring of 1878, observed that “food was scarce,” but the settlers “were generous dividing or sharing their food with each other.”³⁰³ Outside aid came too, from as far away as Leavenworth by April 1878. Abram T. Hall recalled overhearing a conversation in Leavenworth, which precipitated his decision to travel to Nicodemus. It concerned “a mass-meeting to be held that night, in an A.M.E. Church directly across the street, at which the final disposition of quite a lot of relief supplies, donated for some Colored Colonists in Graham County, would be made...”³⁰⁴ Hall subsequently volunteered to help transport the supplies to the struggling colony. The First Grand Benevolent Society of Kansas, which was headquartered in Topeka, chartered a chapter in Nicodemus in 1879.³⁰⁵ According to Lulu Sadler Craig, by 1880 the Nicodemus chapter “had a membership of between three and four hundred men and women; prestige and a well filled treasury with which they did welfare work.”³⁰⁶

For some of the new arrivals the outlook in Nicodemus was so bleak that they immediately turned around for home. Sixty from Rev. Hickman’s flock reportedly fled the day after their arrival, saying:

Brother Hickman, I am sorry; but we have to leave you. We promised to stay as long as you stayed; but on account of our women, we can’t do that...Our women cried all night; and if we do not go away we will probably have to send them to the asylum.³⁰⁷

Approximately 600 people arrived in Nicodemus between July 1877 and February 1879 in five groups or “colonies.” Not all of these people stayed, as indicated by the Hickman group. The first thirty arrived from Topeka, Kansas (mostly ex-slaves from Kentucky), the second of 300-350 people from Lexington, Kentucky, the third and fourth groups totaling about 200 came from the Georgetown area of Kentucky, and the “last large group of settlers, led by Reverend Goodwin, had 50-75 people and arrived from Mississippi during February 1879.”³⁰⁸ The 1878 Kansas State Board of Agriculture Report listed the total population of Nicodemus Township at 600 souls; certainly a large majority of that population was African American.³⁰⁹

It was in the summer of 1878 that the first Emancipation Day celebration occurred, sponsored by the Benevolent Society of Nicodemus. John Samuels and Tom Johnson, who migrated to Nicodemus from Leavenworth, were members the Leavenworth chapter during their short tenure there.³¹⁰ Samuels and Johnson, who both had been enslaved on the Johnson and Pence farms of Scott County Kentucky, likely recalled the “Colored Peoples Fair” tradition as well. The Benevolent Society’s Emancipation Day celebration at Nicodemus carried on the August 1st tradition of celebrating the harvest as well as emancipation and may well have been an extension of the Kentucky slave tradition.³¹¹ Lulu Craig said of the early celebration:

The celebration was the most powerful advertisement that Nicodemus and Graham County had. People came to the picnic from all parts of the State of Kansas and from the surrounding states

³⁰³ Craig manuscript, p. 187 (handwritten), “Alexander,” Nicodemus Historical Society vertical files, Nicodemus, Kansas.

³⁰⁴ As cited in Belleau, 54. The letter from Abram T. Hall to Mrs. Kathryn Henri, dated September 6th, 1937 was noted as sent “On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the town of Nicodemus.”

³⁰⁵ Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 18.

³⁰⁶ Craig manuscript, p. 174 (handwritten), “The First of August.”

³⁰⁷ Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church history files, citing Lulu Sadler Craig Manuscript, Sadieville Town Hall vertical files, Sadieville, KY. The record is not clear on whether this was 60 people or 60 families who left.

³⁰⁸ Hamilton, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 8; O’Brien, 119.

³⁰⁹ Belleau, 20.

³¹⁰ Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 41.

³¹¹ Angela Bates, personal communication with Paula Reed, October 2011.

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also. Good will and a good time for everyone was the first consideration of the early promoters, and the same spirit dominates the celebration over 70 years later.³¹²

Initially “the Picnic” or “Celebration,” as many later called it, was held in town. It was moved from town to “Scruggs Grove,” according to Ola (Scruggs) Wilson, about 1896 when her father moved to his homestead just south and west of Nicodemus townsite.³¹³

Despite the initial image of barrenness and a distinct need for supplies, by the spring of 1878 Nicodemus was clearly teeming with people and was showing signs of their determination to build a thriving town of their own. Beginning with the dugouts constructed for initial shelter, Nicodemus buildings have been a story of change as they moved to sod-ups, then “came up on top of the ground” with “soddies” built with blocks of sod held together with mud, and then to stone and frame buildings by the 1880s. Abram Hall recalled storing the supplies brought from Leavenworth in 1878 in Charles Williams’ “stone-front dug out, along the Stockton Trail,” then described the Main Street (Washington Street) as it appeared on his arrival:

I was assigned to the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Scott, and Mr. McCabe to the Buckner’s, both of whom had homes along the Main Street opposite the post-office, and Fletcher’s General – generally out of everything store.³¹⁴

Ora Switzer recounted the evolution of the post office building, which began “in a dugout, and then later they came up on top of the ground in a little grout [sod] place. Then later they built the first stone house that was built up here on the town site – of which is standing now.”³¹⁵ Just down the street on the corner of Fourth Street, the First Baptist Church, organized by Rev. Roundtree in the spring of 1878, began meeting in a dugout located on the town lot occupied by the current church buildings.³¹⁶ In 1880, the First Baptist congregation completed construction of a stone sanctuary at the same location.³¹⁷

As more settlers arrived, the number of soddies and dugouts increased. Most were oriented eastward, and were put up in irregular clusters in and around Nicodemus. A contemporary report of one house described chicken coops made of corn stalks surrounding the home, “... and in front were marigolds and bachelors’ buttons and four-o’clocks.” Some homes were built north and northwest of the townsite; others south of the Solomon River and southwest of the townsite.³¹⁸

Abram Hall described the town square as it had evolved by 1881:

³¹² Craig manuscript, “The First of August,” 176.

³¹³ Interview with Ola Wilson, 1977 or 1978, page 7.

³¹⁴ As cited in Belleau, 57.

³¹⁵ Interview with Ora Switzer, age 75, 1977 or 1978, page 4, “Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978,” Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS. The stone house, known at the St. Francis Hotel/Switzer House is still standing today (2016). However, documentation indicates that the stone building was constructed in 1881. See Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45-46.

³¹⁶ Wigfall Fly, Historic American Building Survey No. KS-49-K. This record states that the congregation met in a dugout “located approximately between the old and new existing church buildings.” Most of the Nicodemus histories state that the congregation met in “various dugouts” around town. Both the HABS record and Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, page 45, state that Rev. Hickman had a sod church house built on this site in 1879, and Grace VanDuvall recalled, “...the first sod house that was built in Nicodemus was that church that was built.” (Interview with Grace VanDuvall, 1977 or 1978, page 4). However, other histories including Lulu Craig, page 201, indicate that the Hickman sod church was the Mount Olive Church in Nicodemus Township.

³¹⁷ Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 45.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38, citing McDaniel, 45-46; and *Topeka Capital*, 15 November 1953; and *Atchison Weekly Champion*, 23 July 1881.

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...Green's store adorned the northeast point, the Post-Office and Fletcher's Emporium – the southeast point, Wilson's Store, at the northwest point, and the "Land Office," at the southwest point, with the well box adorning the center.³¹⁹

The Green and Wilson store buildings were substantial two-story cut stone constructions. Both Green and Wilson were White merchant settlers who filled a need in Nicodemus for consistently stocked general stores.³²⁰ Wilson also built a stone dwelling house on the town site in 1880, which was reportedly purchased by the Free Methodist congregation and converted to a sanctuary the following year.³²¹ By 1881, Nicodemus town site included a post office, two churches (three congregations), three general stores and three hotels, two livery stables, a lumber yard, drugstore, and butcher shop, and a number of dugout and sod dwellings.³²²

The Nicodemus townsite also included a school by 1879, the first school established in Graham County, though informal classes were reportedly held in six dugout locations as early as 1878.³²³ Lulu Craig, who taught in the District 1 School in Nicodemus around the turn of the twentieth century, wrote of the first formal school: "The effort to organize a school started during the summer of 1879, when Reverend Myers of the A.M.E. Church called the people together to discuss the school problem..."³²⁴ Craig identified the organizing committee as Charles Page, John Samuels, Jerry Myers, Zach T. Fletcher, and John Scott, and identified Lizzie Miles, the sixteen-year old daughter of Marie Scruggs (first marriage) from Kentucky, as the first teacher. The school occupied John Niles' stone dwelling, according to Craig, and the children sat on "stone blocks." Henry Williams, the first child born in Nicodemus in 1878, recalled attending school in the First Baptist Church until the first official school building was constructed in 1887.³²⁵

By 1880 Nicodemus Township had at least three schools, including the District 1 School in town. The Mount Olive School was located near the Mount Olive Baptist Church, a sod building erected by Rev. Daniel Hickman, and its adjoining cemetery four miles west of Nicodemus townsite; the Fairview School sat on a hill about two miles north of town.³²⁶ These schools were associated with clusters of settlement primarily established as family enclaves.³²⁷ Though Kansas passed a compulsory education law in 1874, it was likely not necessary to convince Nicodemus parents of the value of educating their children. Denied formal education as slaves, a remarkable number of the early Nicodemus adult settlers could read when they arrived in Kansas. John Samuels and Daniel Hickman were self-taught; others, like Zach T. Fletcher, learned to read and write while serving in the Union army during the Civil War.³²⁸ R. B. Scruggs reportedly impressed the value of

³¹⁹ As cited in Belleau, 57.

³²⁰ Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 42.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 46, citing an 1880 and 1881 newspaper report; Burden, et. al., 93, citing Schwendemann, 26. This building, located on the NW corner of Third St. and Adams Ave., was purchased in 1897 by the Mt. Pleasant (Second) Baptist Church, and then in 1910 by the A.M.E. Church. The 1983 HABS study, 1997 Cultural Landscape Inventory, and 2003 Cultural Landscape Report do not include mention of the 1881 Free Methodist ownership and conversion of the dwelling house to a church sanctuary. Only the 1983 HABS record addresses the meaning of the date mark on the front of the church "A.M.E. Church 1885" saying that it was the Mt. Pleasant Baptists that built the stone building in 1885. This information was apparently gleaned from Alvin Bates, the owner of the building in 1983.

³²² O'Brien, 121.

³²³ Belleau, 23, citing the 1878 Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *First Biennial Report*, Vo. VI, 378.

³²⁴ Craig manuscript, 140-142 (handwritten), "Nicodemus School Organized July 1879," Nicodemus Historical Society vertical files, Nicodemus, Kansas.

³²⁵ Belleau, 23, citing Henry Williams, personal interview, June 20, 1942; Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 47.

³²⁶ Bahr Vermeer Hacker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 47.

³²⁷ Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 38, citing La Barbara Fly interviews with Anita Alexander, Juanita Williams Redd, and Alvin Bates, 8 July 1983.

³²⁸ Craig manuscript, "John Samuels Leaves Kentucky," 235-236; "Rev. Daniel Hickman," 200; "Z. T. Fletcher," 195.

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education on his ten children, according to his daughter Grace VanDuvall, “you went to school and learned everything you could know.”³²⁹

The town of Nicodemus was clearly active through the initial years of settlement, largely the result of the ability of settlers to begin agricultural production on their outlying homestead lands. Many of the early migrants, like the Charles Williams family, had a town lot with a house, but also held a homestead claim where they were required to build a home and improve the land.³³⁰ Most were determined to homestead the 160 acres allowed them by the Homestead Act. As many as twenty-seven Nicodemus settlers were USCT veterans of the Union army.³³¹ By an 1872 Provision of the Homestead Act, those men were entitled to apply up to four years of service in the Union army to the five-year occupancy requirement for title to homestead land. Cultural geographer James Shortridge notes that “This 1872 ruling was significant in that titles were a prerequisite before land could be mortgaged, and mortgages, in turn, were an important way to obtain the capital needed to keep a new farm or business solvent.”³³²

Thornton and Elvira Williams came to Nicodemus with the 1877 Lexington Colony with the idea of owning a place of their own “a happy thought”:

When we went to our homestead I was disappointed, discouraged and troubled. It was such an unusual place. I wondered if we could live there. There was nothing to arrest the night and my eyes ached from looking so far and seeing nothing.

We had always lived in the woods before we came here. We had been on our homestead two days when I broke down and cried, I wanted to stop crying but just couldn't. Thornton said, “Now, Vira, don't take on so, there is no sense in that, we have got to try to stay here. We can't move away and if we work as hard here as we did in Kentucky we ought to be able to make a living for the children and besides we will have a home of our own, same as the rich people in Kentucky had.”

We lived in the dugout that he had made. He spaded up [?] garden in which we planted beans, squash and a few rows of corn. We raised enough beans and squash for the winter. He continued to enlarge the garden each year and the children and I cared for it when he was away at work, and in a few seasons he had a [?] to farm instead of a garden.³³³

The struggle and determination to stay in a place so difficult and different from all they had known before, as described by Elvira Williams, was similar to that experienced by many of the Nicodemus homesteaders. Nearly all were formerly enslaved Africans from the South who felt that they had nothing to return to if they chose to leave Kansas. The chance to own land, where they could raise their children and their own food, the chance to make a living, was an overriding motivation to stay. Lulu Craig quoted settler Mrs. John Jackson, who recounted her conversation with her husband after her delayed arrival in 1879:

“How do you like it Honey?” he asked, “Oh John, it is so beautiful, I said but there are no trees, no wood.”

³²⁹ Interview with Grace VanDuvall, 1977 or 1978, page 5.

³³⁰ Charles and Emma (Johnson) Williams and their family lived in a dugout/sod-up on the Thomas Johnson-Henry Williams Farm (14GH102). See Wood, “Explorations of the Struggles,” 47.

³³¹ Based upon military stones in the three cemeteries; Craig manuscript, “Civil War Veterans,” 184-186; and the NPS “Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Database,” accessed August 2012, www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm.

³³² Shortridge, 76.

³³³ Craig manuscript, “Thornton Williams Family,” 243.

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“Well dear we have this land. It is our very own. If I stay, I believe I can make a living on it by the help of God.”

“Well John, I said if you stay, I will stay with you and help you all I can.” Through all the troublesome time we stayed, and worked... There were many dark days. Drought, prairie fires, sickness, and food shortage, but we managed to stay.³³⁴

In a 1942 interview, then-90-year-old Kebar settler William Kirtley recounted “the procedure followed to procure his homestead,” as retold by interviewer William Belleau:

He went to the Land Office located at Kirwin, Kansas, and secured squatter rights and pre-emption claim. He lived on the place six months and then homesteaded. He paid a fee of \$2.50 for the quarter of land [160 acres]. Three sod houses were made before he built the frame building in which he now lives.³³⁵

Belleau wrote of Kirtley, who was born a slave in Kentucky in 1852, and the other Nicodemus settlers, “Many of these colonists had never owned a home and no doubt felt a glow of pride upon being settled with his family beneath his own roof, even if it was a dirt roof.”³³⁶

That bond with the land, irrespective of the character of the improvements upon it, was passed down through the later generations. Second generation descendent Katherine Buckner, at age 76 in a 2010 interview, recalled the words of her settler grandmother, Katherine Edwards (Edwards Homestead), who told her: “...always hold on cause if you have a piece of dirt you have something.” That advice stayed with Buckner as she navigated through her life:

...and I remember when I, I bought some property or something and that phrase came out, now you have a piece of dirt. And when I paid it off and I was oh, this is mine, this is mine.³³⁷

Fourth generation descendent Angela Bates (Samuels family) expressed the sentiment in identifying her favorite site just south of Nicodemus Township in the Kebar (also spelled Keybar) area:

...being up there and knowing I’m on land that my [great-great-]great-grandfather had settled and being able to see all of the towns and see all of that land, it makes me feel like first of all this is God’s land this is God’s country and is absolutely beautiful, so the people must have felt that – they had to have felt that, even though there’s that contrast in the environment versus what they were experiencing in Kentucky, but to be able to see that amount of land, and to look out at – at that point in maybe their time say 1879, 1880 or even the 188 [sic] – it doesn’t matter, and to know that when they look toward ‘Demus and they look towards Damar and to look past Bogue which wasn’t even there, and to look towards Hill City, and they could look all the way over to where Nicodemus is, they must have felt a sense of pride, they must have felt this feeling of, we have accomplished something, we own land – and not just a little plot – not just ten acres, but I’m looking at thousands of acres that are being occupied by black people – they must have thought they were in their own all-black state!³³⁸

³³⁴ Craig manuscript, “Jackson Home,” 202-203?

³³⁵ Belleau, 15.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Interview with Katherine Buckner, age 76, 2010, page 17, Angela Bates, interviewer, Nicodemus Historical Society, Nicodemus, KS.

³³⁸ Interview with Angela Bates, October 2011, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

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John Samuels claimed a homestead in the area known as Kebar in 1879. The following year he “raised the first crop of broom corn in the county...and sold it in Ellis, Kansas.”³³⁹

Andrew Alexander, upon visiting Nicodemus in the spring of 1878, “did not believe that anyone could make a home there,” but he returned several years later and found an active and thriving agricultural community.³⁴⁰ Beginning with the 1878 growing season, the Nicodemus farmers broke the sod and planted the seeds they brought with them.³⁴¹ Although only a few of the migrants brought livestock with them, the plow teams – estimated to be less than a dozen – were shared among the settlers. Many simply broke the soil with spades and mattocks. The Chicago newspaper reporter who related the scene at Nicodemus in 1879 estimated “the amount of land under cultivation to each family will average about six or seven acres, ranging from twenty acres as the highest to one or two.”³⁴² The following year the *Lawrence Daily Journal* reported “three to fifty acres of winter wheat” on each homestead, enough to make a profit.³⁴³

The 1878 Kansas state agriculture report listed the crops raised in Graham County for that year, including “1,200 acres of winter wheat; 200 acres of rye; 2,500 acres of corn; 50 acres of oats; 25 acres of Irish potatoes; 3 acres of sweet potatoes; 10 acres of sorghum; 150 acres of millet and Hungarian, and a large quantity of garden produce.”³⁴⁴ Likely every homestead in the Nicodemus area included a kitchen garden like that described by Elvira Williams. The unpredictable rainfall of the plains of western Kansas made corn, not typically drought-resistant, a risky crop. The key to growing corn successfully in the dry climate of western Kansas, according to former Nicodemus Township farmer Bernard Bates, was to plant the corn deep so the roots could reach the moisture underground.³⁴⁵ Hattie Craig Burnie described the labor-intensive process for raising corn:

You see, those older people who farmed used just the hand material. Plant corn – they’d plant corn with a spade. Go down there and make a hole in the ground, and these boys come along and drop two grains of corn in each of the spade holes. That’s the way they planted the corn. When it was time to gather it, they had to break it off the stalks and throw it in the shed, if they had one, or shuck it in the field.³⁴⁶

The corn and wheat was taken to Stockton to be ground for cornmeal and bran, recalled Burnie, saying “That was in the 1880s – had it good then.”³⁴⁷ Measuring success by land ownership, by 1885, 96% of Nicodemus township residents owned their property.³⁴⁸

Though Stockton grain dealers welcomed Nicodemus farmers’ agricultural products, the Black residents of Nicodemus did encounter institutionalized racial discrimination outside of their community. Their separateness

³³⁹ Craig manuscript, “John Samuels Free,” 240.

³⁴⁰ Craig manuscript, “Alexander,” 187-188.

³⁴¹ Craig manuscript, “The First Wheat,” 253.

³⁴² “About Nicodemus,” article reprinted in *The Daily Journal*, Lawrence, 30 April 1879, Item #210648, Kansas Historical Society, “Kansas Memory,” www.kansasmemory.org/item/210648, accessed 13 June 2012.

³⁴³ Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 16.

³⁴⁴ “Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, Graham County, 1878,” as cited in *Historic Resource Study*, 86. Today’s common crop called milo is a variety of sorghum.

³⁴⁵ Interview with Bernard Bates, October 2012, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

³⁴⁶ Interview with Hattie Craig Burnie, age 90, 1977, page 9, “Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978,” Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, page 13, “Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978,” Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

³⁴⁸ Morrow, 19, citing *Census of Kansas* (State of Kansas, 1885).

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within White Kansas society was emphasized by the rise of “sundown towns” across Kansas, and indeed across the United States.³⁴⁹ Enforced by custom, ordinance, or law, these towns prohibited the presence of African Americans within a so-called “sundown town” after sunset. Oral tradition in Nicodemus suggests that nearby Stockton and Hays were such towns, although they also were sources of necessary supplies, materials, and agricultural markets. Nicodemus residents therefore frequently overnighted in caves along Dibble Creek, and a dugout storehouse west of Stockton city limits, rather than undertake the 38-mile round trip in one day.³⁵⁰

In 1880, the year Nicodemus Township was officially established, the U.S. Population Census for the township indicated that African Americans were in the majority with 316 and only 58 Whites.³⁵¹ The Black residents of Nicodemus did not waste the opportunity to exercise their majority power in the voting booth. Township governing boards reflected the Black majority in both civic and school administration. Graham County became administratively independent in 1880 and though Whites were in the majority in the county overall, a number of county elected offices were filled by Black men from Nicodemus. In a speech given at the dedication of the Township Hall in 1939, W. L. Sayers noted that “the voters of this community have been especially loyal in the support of Colored men for public office,” continuing with a list of familiar names – some of them original settlers formerly enslaved in Kentucky – who became elected officials:

Even before this County was organized, this little community gave its moral support to the appointment of Abram T. Hall as the first Census taker who took the census for the establishment of Graham County. Later, this community gave its support to John Niles for County Clerk, to John DePrad for County Clerk, to E. P. McCabe for County Clerk and for State Auditor of Kansas, to Dan Hickman for County Commissioner, to Louis Welton for County Commissioner, to John R. Hawkins for Clerk of District Court, to J. E. Porter for Clerk of District Court, G. W. Jones for County Attorney, to John Q. Sayers for County Attorney, and to W. L. Sayers for Clerk of District Court and for County Attorney.³⁵²

The African American voting block of Nicodemus was among the “substantial majority” that voted in 1888 to move the Graham County seat of government from Millbrook to Hill City – the nearby White town established by W. R. Hill and W. H. Smith at the same time as Nicodemus.³⁵³ By 1881, the African American community in and around Nicodemus was a relatively stable population that was making physical and agricultural improvements, and having an impact on local governance as well. Edward P. McCabe would successfully win the position of Kansas state auditor in 1882, making him the most important African-American office holder outside of the South.³⁵⁴

The Promise of the Railroads

Though the 1880-1883 growing seasons were challenged by drought and grasshoppers, the mid-1880s brought with them good rains, improved agricultural production, and a sense among the Nicodemus settlers that

³⁴⁹ James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

³⁵⁰ Burden, et. al., 69, citing Angela Bates, personal communication with Paul Sadin, March 29, 2011; Morrow, 8, citing “W.L. Chambers, “Niles of Nicodemus: A True Sketch of an Early Kansas Character,” *Oakley Graphic*, 4 December 1931; and “Possible Sundown Towns in KS,” <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/sundowntownsshow.php?state=KS>.

³⁵¹ As cited in Hamilton, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 14. Interestingly, the Kansas State Board of Agriculture Report for 1880 counted a total population of 452 in the township (as cited in Craig manuscript, 254).

³⁵² “Speech Delivered on the Occasion of the Opening of the Nicodemus Township Hall by W. L. Sayers, Hill City Attorney,” in Belleau, 65-66.

³⁵³ Burden, et. al., 89.

³⁵⁴ Caelen Anaker, “McCabe, Edward P. (1850-1920),” *BlackPast.org, Remembered and Reclaimed*, accessed September 8, 2016, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/mccabe-edwin-p-1850-1920>

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remained that their decision to stay was a good one. In 1886, local newspaperman A. G. Tallman, who published the *Western Cyclone* from Nicodemus, wrote an article entitled “Visit to the Thomas Johnson Farm.” He described the Johnson farm, a collection of four 160-acre claims jointly farmed and occupied by Johnson and his adult children’s families including Charles and Emma Williams:

A visit to the farm of Thos. Johnson is enough to encourage the homesick farmer of any state. He and his children, all with families, own a tract of land of a thousand acres about one fourth of which is under cultivation. He has about 60 fine hogs and the whole family owns a large herd of cattle and several fine horses. They have recently bought a twine binder and are in the midst of harvest. When you make a visit to Mr. J’s farm do not forget to look at Mrs. Johnson’s chickens and ducks.³⁵⁵

Tallman’s glowing description reflected the positive outlook of the Nicodemus settlement by the mid-1880s. After hitting a population low of 239 people living in the township in 1884, by 1888 the total population of Nicodemus Township reached 407 souls.³⁵⁶ The town of Nicodemus was bulging with people – 200 residents by 1887 – as well as businesses and a new crop of buildings.³⁵⁷ In 1886 alone thirteen commercial buildings, four residences, and the stone Masonic Hall were constructed.³⁵⁸ In 1887, another eleven businesses were added and a new frame, two-story District 1 School building was constructed. This dramatic increase was likely due in part to the improved agricultural climate, but another significant attraction came in the form of the promise of the approaching railroad.

By the 1880s the Missouri Pacific Railroad line had reached Stockton, 25 miles east of Nicodemus, and in December 1886 the company relayed its intention to possibly continue the line through Nicodemus. The citizens of Nicodemus overwhelmingly voted in March 1887 to issue a \$16,000 bond and provide the right-of-way requested by the railroad company. As the most populous and commercially active town in Graham County at the time, Nicodemus was a prime candidate for a railroad depot. Yet despite this, they were disappointed in their expectation as the line was laid to the north, by-passing Nicodemus.³⁵⁹ The local newspapers fueled the enthusiasm – and the disappointment – as they reported the ups and downs of the railroad promise. In March 1887 the *Western Cyclone* announced “The Railroad is Coming,” saying the people of Nicodemus had decided, “...we shall develop into a town, with all advantages derived from a railroad.”³⁶⁰ The *Western Cyclone* emphasized the “boom” the railroad would produce for the town’s development and land values, while the *Enterprise*, later the *Nicodemus Cyclone*, emphasized increasing business in town.³⁶¹ The scenario was repeated again in 1887 with the Santa Fe Railroad, and again in 1888 with the Union Pacific Central Branch (UPCB). Each time their hopes were dashed as the railroads by-passed the town – the UPCB passing just six miles to the south where the company established a new town for its depot called Bogue.³⁶²

The establishment of a railroad stop at any frontier town, White or Black, was seen as vital to its future survival. Many towns that were by-passed by the railroads did indeed disappear from the map, some right away, and others, like New Philadelphia in Illinois, held on for years before vanishing into cultivated fields.³⁶³ Nicodemus did suffer great losses as a result of its failure to secure a railroad stop. Most of the businesses in town moved,

³⁵⁵ Wood, “Explorations of the Struggles,” 47, citing *Western Cyclone*, 1 July 1886.

³⁵⁶ Craig manuscript, “Population Changes,” 254, citing the Kansas State Board of Agriculture Biennial Reports.

³⁵⁷ Bahr Vermeer Haecker *Cultural Landscape Report*, 50.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 56; see also f.n. 124.

³⁶⁰ As cited in Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 32.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.* All of the Nicodemus newspapers were White-owned.

³⁶² Hamilton, *Black Towns*, 29-30.

³⁶³ King and Seibert.

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some moving the physical building as well; many moved to the new railroad depot town of Bogue. Edward McCabe would move to Washington, then Oklahoma, where he established Langston City as a Black community. According to historian Kenneth Hamilton, “All of the white and most of the black business people moved to places with more opportunity.”³⁶⁴ Lulu Craig recited a litany of stores that left after the railroad bust, beginning with Mr. Young, noted as “(white),” who in 1884 “came to Nicodemus and put in a good blacksmith shop but closed it when he moved to his homestead in 1887.”³⁶⁵ Craig also cited the Milo Parish store on the east end of town on the “Stockton trail,” which was established in 1885 and remained until the 1890s when it was moved by Milo Jr. to Bogue; and the Foster Williams Store, opened in 1886 and moved in 1889 to Coffeetown.³⁶⁶ In 1884, A. L. McPherson, a White man, established a bank in Nicodemus:

McPherson did a great deal of business in banking and real estate...He transferred his bank and other movable property to Bogue Kansas. He lived in Bogue about ten months, then moved to Oklahoma. When he left Nicodemus many unsuspecting people who had depended upon his plans and advice, lost all of their property.³⁶⁷

One business that did not move, but continued to operate under various owners was the S. G. Wilson store, built of stone by Wilson in 1880. Craig noted that Wilson sold the store in 1885 to H. S. Henrie and S. G. Craig, who sold it to Jack Lovelady, a White man, in 1887. Lovelady then sold the store to Jeff Wyatt, who was the Nicodemus postmaster at the time, and in 1896 he sold the store to G. M. Sayers, the next postmaster and general store keeper, who remained there into the twentieth century.³⁶⁸ The St. Francis Hotel, owned and operated by the Fletcher family also remained in Nicodemus, along with their livery and implement businesses. It was essentially the original Nicodemus settlers who remained steadfastly committed to the town’s survival.³⁶⁹

Nicodemus did not die with the failed promise of the railroad, though it did experience a decrease in population. Still, the township population remained around 300 throughout the 1890s and began to rise again through the first decade of the twentieth century. The continued operation of the G. M. Sayers store through this period illustrates the determination among the town residents and outlying farmers who chose to keep their “piece of dirt.”

Nicodemus through the First Half of the Twentieth Century

The strength of the Nicodemus community as it moved into the twentieth century grew from their strong connection to the land and their deepening bonds of kinship through each new generation. Among the town residents and township farmers that remained, most had roots that grew from the original settler families and a collective commitment to Nicodemus through its social institutions – church, school, and several active societies – and to their farms. In 1910, on the occasion of the Farmer’s Institute held in Nicodemus and sponsored by the Kansas State Agricultural College, a Topeka newspaper reporter commented on the more than 150 local farmers in attendance:

Most of these men own the farms on which they live. The people dress well; the children are warmly clad, and the women wear hats that are by no means out of style....

³⁶⁴ Hamilton *Black Towns*, 35.

³⁶⁵ Craig manuscript, “The First Stores,” 154.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

³⁶⁷ Craig manuscript, “Nicodemus Bank,” 165.

³⁶⁸ Craig manuscript, “The First Stores,” 158.

³⁶⁹ Fraser, *Promised Land on the Solomon*, 52-57.

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...They have made money and improved their farms; bought machinery for planting and harvesting their crops, until today most of them have comfortable homes and though working hard, they are as contented as their white neighbors.³⁷⁰

Through the second decade of the twentieth century, particularly during World War I, agricultural commodities, especially wheat, were in high demand.

Improvements on the farms brought improvements in town. By the 1920s most of the sod dwellings, both in town and around the township, were replaced with frame constructions.³⁷¹ Recalling the appearance of Nicodemus during the 'teens, Ada and Alvin Bates described a relatively busy main street with several restaurants, "Uncle George Sayers" store, at least two small hotels, a livery stable, a meat market, a drugstore in the first floor of the Masonic Hall, and the schoolhouse. The schoolhouse burned about 1916 and was replaced the following year, recalled Alvin Bates, "We went to school in the church while they were building it."³⁷² The church used was likely the First Baptist, enlarged beginning in 1907. This congregation, which formed as the first settlers arrived in Nicodemus, met originally in a dugout. They built a small stone or "rock" sanctuary in 1880 over the dugout according to Alvin Bates. Though the congregation split shortly after, forming the Second Baptist or Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, the First Baptist congregation continued to grow. In 1907 they began building a larger stone sanctuary around the smaller church building where they continued to hold services:

They just used the dugout as a basement and built a little one room stone building over the dugout. Then as years went on why they...quarried rock and built this church, right there. I think...there was, oh, it must have been 4 or 5 years building this church.³⁷³

When the building was complete, the smaller stone building inside was dismantled and carried out the front doors of the new church.³⁷⁴

The Emancipation Day celebration, held in "Scrugg's Grove," grew to include carnival rides, local food vendors, baseball games, and even barnstorming airplanes rides by Charles Lindbergh in 1924 or 1925 recalled Bates:

...he just take them up for a ride, circle them around two or three times and bring them back and get another load.³⁷⁵

"It is a good thing that Grove can't talk," laughed Bates, "They had some wonderful times there, wonderful times." He continued:

³⁷⁰ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 1910, cited in Bugarin, "If the Cottonwood Could Speak," 23. The 1910 Farmer's Institute was the precursor to the Stehno school farm and Sturgeon school farm, as described in the *Cultural Landscape Report* pages 66-67: "A year later, the first of two agricultural school was created in Nicodemus Township. In 1911, W. O. Sturgeon and his wife purchased 160 acres from W. L. Sayers in the southeast quarter of Section 33, Township 7S, Range 21W, 'for the use and benefit' of the trustees of the Western Kansas Industrial Training School. This was to be an agricultural school for farmers in northwestern Kansas. The Sturgeon property had at least two dwellings on it...Towards the second quarter of the twentieth century, farmers could borrow farm machinery stored on the property." A second school farm was established near Bogue.

³⁷¹ Bahr Vermeer Hacker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 64.

³⁷² Interview with Alvin and Ada Bates, ages 79 and 74, 1983, pages 9-15, Nicodemus National Historic Site HABS Oral History Project.

³⁷³ Ibid, page 23, Nicodemus National Historic Site HABS Oral History Project.

³⁷⁴ Wigfall Fly, HABS No. KS-49-K.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Alvin and Ada Bates, 1983, page 8.

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I know when people, before they had automobiles, white and colored come from miles. They'd come with their buggies, wagons, whole families. They'd bring enough food to last during the whole celebration, oh, 2 or 3 days. Then they just camped and stayed there...

...they had carnivals. Some of the wonderful times, carnivals, baseball games. They had some of the best teams that there were, in this, in any area that came and played.

...[The Kansas City] Monarchs and they had several teams from Texas and Louisiana and some of the great players like Satchell Page [sic] and all those, they use to play with the Monarchs. They use to come right here in Nicodemus.³⁷⁶

The Kansas City Monarchs played professional baseball in the Negro National League from 1920 to 1931 and played as an independent professional barnstorming team from 1932 to 1936 during which time Satchel Paige was their star pitcher.³⁷⁷

The good times were clouded through the 1930s by the Great Depression and the climate disaster known as the Dust Bowl, a prolonged drought with wind that produced destructive dust storms. The Great Depression came on the heels of the financial hard times of the 1920s, created by increased production during World War I and the commodity price collapse that followed. Many farmers had mortgaged property to finance purchases of additional land, seed, and machinery, only to default when prices fell after the end of the war in 1918.³⁷⁸ With the 1929 Stock Market crash and ensuing economic depression, many farmers already teetering on the edge were forced to give up. Still, most of the memories of Nicodemus residents centered around the dust storms of the "Dirty Thirties," as they called it.

Northwestern Kansas was actually outside of the official "Dust Bowl" region which centered in Oklahoma. However, many of the Nicodemus informants interviewed in the 1977-78 and 1983 HABS Oral History projects, who were in their 20s during this period raising families and taking responsibility for farm operations, retained clear recollections of the dust storms and crop devastations that occurred. Ora Switzer remembered the 1930s as "Our hardest times here...during the Dirty Thirties."

Yeah, that's when I had to wet sheets and hang up to my windows to keep the winds from smothering my children to death. That dust just come through there, and you just get to coughing – oh! – wind come through that.... Then the cows, we'd lose them in the spring with lung dust fever or whatever, and that was about the toughest time we had.³⁷⁹

Ordral Alexander recalled that it was "Terrible" saying:

I remember back in, oh, I'd say, '33, I believe it was. They'd plant the wheat and then it'd just blow right out, it'd just blow it, and blow it out, you know out, clear out the ground, just see the roots standing there dangling. And then it'd create a big, wherever there was a weed patch or a fence row...the dirt would pile up as high as those weeds. And it took several years after those dust storms were over with to get those worked down to where you could work your field.³⁸⁰

The drought, dust, and depression did reduce the Nicodemus population, according to Ordral Alexander and Ora Switzer, as people moved away, many to Denver, Kansas City, and California. The population figures for

³⁷⁶ Ibid., page 5.

³⁷⁷ "Negro Leagues Baseball Museum," accessed June 22, 2012, www.coe.ksu.edu/nlbemuseum/history/teams/kcmonarchs.html.

³⁷⁸ Burden, et. al., 119-121 and 123.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Ora Switzer, 1977 or 1978, page 12.

³⁸⁰ Interview with Ordral and Alvena Alexander, ages 63 and 55, 1983, page 11, Nicodemus National Historic Site HABS Oral History Project.

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Nicodemus Township compiled by the Kansas State Board of Agriculture indicate the total population fell below 300 through the late 1930s.³⁸¹

In 1939, the federal government stepped in to help as President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired men to work in the local quarries and initiated construction of the stone Township Hall. Veryl Switzer recalled "when my father worked on WPA, which was a welfare-type program to provide work for those persons out of employment":

...I can recall, uh, going with my mother to the work site where my father was working... They were in a rock quarry digging rock and using it for construction.³⁸²

Ordral Alexander worked on the WPA Township Hall project, along with Township Board members Alex Alexander, Pearl Bates, and Ace Williams. Others he recalled working on the project included Garold Napue, Halbert Napue, Fred Switzer, Mud Bryant, and Derwood Wallis:

...I drove my father's truck and hauled rock from down to Webster... Webster rock was a more solid rock than we had right around here. ...So they went to Webster and mined the rock down there and hauled them up here and dress them and faced them and then laid them and built the Township Hall.³⁸³

Orlo Van Duvall remembered Garold Napue specifically as a mason, who squared the rock with a saw, "and the decoration he did with a mallet... on the face of it."³⁸⁴ The Township Hall served as a community center. Many informants remember roller skating in the hall – "which," recalled Ruth Dobson, "I didn't ever learn how to roller skate, except with one foot..." Dobson, who was born in 1939, also fondly recalled the dances held in Township Hall, "where the big bands would come out of Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and the little kids would be there, the parents would be there, the grandparents would be there, and that's what made it nice."³⁸⁵

Nicodemus – 1950 to the Twenty-first Century

The post-World War II population shift from rural to urban that occurred throughout the United States, also affected Graham County and Nicodemus Township. The smaller rural population spelled the end to the outlying schools, leaving just the District 1 School operating in Nicodemus.³⁸⁶ Still, even as the Nicodemus population continued to dwindle into the 1950s, community activities carried on, centered around family, church, and of course, fun. Dobson remembered dancing on Friday and Saturday nights at the Reginald Henrie service station, then located at the junction of Route 18 and old Route 24 (demolished when the new alignment of Route 24 came through), as well as attending services at the First Baptist Church:

That's where we learned how to get up in public and speak, through Sunday school and through the training there... everybody in the community was teaching us how to act, how to sit, not to chew gum in church or in public.... We sang in the choir. We started at young ages, there were at least five choirs of different ages and, lots of wonderful memories in that church.³⁸⁷

³⁸¹ As cited in Craig manuscript, "Population Changes," 254.

³⁸² Interview with Veryl Switzer, age 75, 1977 or 1978, page 3, "Nicodemus National Historic Site, HABS Oral History Project, 1977-1978," Nicodemus National Historic Site (NICO), Nicodemus, KS.

³⁸³ Interview with Ordral and Alvena Alexander, 1983, page 12.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Orlo Van Duvall, age 56, 1983, page 6, Nicodemus National Historic Site HABS Oral History Project.

³⁸⁵ Interview with Ruth Dobson, October 2011, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

³⁸⁶ "Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 93.

³⁸⁷ Interview with Ruth Dobson.

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The Emancipation Day celebration was moved to town from the Grove in 1953 – at the request of the carnival companies so their rides would not be obstructed by the trees.³⁸⁸ The continuing annual tradition was an opportunity for ex-patriots to return. Described by Gene Napue Jr. as a “spiritual” thing, the desire to return “home” brought them back every year:

Nicodemus, and not only Nicodemus, but also the people in the surrounding counties, are unusual people in an unusual location in America, and it’s like salmon swimming upstream to go back to their place of birth.³⁸⁹

Leota (Sayers) Fox recalled her family’s annual return to Nicodemus from their residence in Denver:

...we’d go down home every year. Sometime Mama would go down ahead you know, just wanting to be at home and I think about how those were some roots that was developed before we left there that made you feel strong and able to do things, you know.³⁹⁰

By the 1970s the celebration had become known as Homecoming, the name given commonly to annual events held by African American churches. The new title reflected the increasing number of Nicodemus descendants who did not live in Nicodemus, but still considered it “home.” There were the children and grandchildren of those who left during the bad times of the late 1880s or the 1930s. They included some who left more recently to attend college, join the military, or follow jobs in other parts of the country.

Changes in agricultural production through the twentieth century, especially mechanization and use of manufactured fertilizers and pesticides following World War II, reduced labor needs by increasing the amount of acreage a single farmer could cultivate. In Nicodemus, the use of tractors and combines in the 1940s and 1950s forced some to leave in search of work, while others enlarged their farms. But purchasing both machinery and land was a significant cash outlay that typically required loans secured by land that had passed through several generations. Many such loans in Nicodemus Township ended with foreclosure, and while often the farms sold at public auction were purchased by family members or other local Black farmers, others shifted to White ownership during this period of change.

Agricultural loans backed by the federal government through the USDA Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) have been a mainstay of American farming since the 1940s. However, over the years, Black farmers have complained that such loans, administered by local agents, were often discriminatory. In 1982, a Congressional inquiry into the “Decline of Black Farming” concluded that:

...these FmHA credit programs have the capability to provide immediate direct assistance to black farmers to make their farms more viable and to prevent further loss of their lands. However, FmHA has not given adequate emphasis or priority to the crisis facing black farmers; thus despite their disproportionate need, black farmers are not fully benefitting from FmHA programs. In some cases FmHA may have hindered the efforts of black small farm operators to remain a viable force in agriculture. Furthermore, as the commission has found in the past, USDA and FmHA have failed to integrate civil rights goals into program objectives and to use enforcement mechanisms to ensure that black farmers are provided equal opportunities in farm credit programs.³⁹¹

Just a few years prior to that investigation, the Bates homestead was lost to foreclosure. James (Rudolph) Bates recalled that the farm was lost “back in the seventies, and it was the government had it, it was my father, and

³⁸⁸ “Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 97.

³⁸⁹ As cited in “Bahr Vermeer Haecker, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 97.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Leota Fox, age 78, 2010, page 6, Angela Bates, interviewer, Nicodemus Historical Society, Nicodemus, KS.

³⁹¹ “The Decline of Black Farming in America,” A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, February 1982.

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two brothers and two sisters...they be done went into the government, to...borrow money to farm you know... A few years down the line the farm was gone.”³⁹² Cousin Bernard Bates protested the loss of the farm in letters to Kansas Senator Bob Dole and President Ronald Reagan in 1983, but to no avail. In 1993, a class-action lawsuit was filed by Tim Pigford on behalf of Black farmers claiming civil rights violations in USDA lending practice. Pigford contacted Bernard Bates for permission to use his letters as evidence that the practices continued even after the Commission on Civil Rights 1982 report.³⁹³

Positive federal government intervention in Nicodemus occurred in the 1970s with the construction of the Nicodemus Villa. The HUD project consisted of several one-story buildings housing apartments designed for senior citizens, many of whom were anxious to return to Nicodemus in their retirement. As Rosetta (Sayers) White pointed out, “It’s hard to move back to Nicodemus, town...there’s not enough houses here...And either you’d have to move a trailer here or whatever, to live in.”³⁹⁴ Many have put a trailer on their vacant ancestral lots, noted local historian Angela Bates pointing to one placed by her cousin who said “now we have our homestead,” and another who said, “I’ve got my piece of ‘Demus’ now!”³⁹⁵

While a number of original Black homesteads in Nicodemus Township are now White-owned, either through public sales or occasional private sales, town lots rarely leave the hands of descendant families. Nicodemus townsite was designated a National Historic Site in 1996, however, unlike many NPS sites, the town remains in private ownership. “Here’s a great example of how, the concept of the land and what that land means to people,” observed historian Bates:

The Park Service has a project where they’re trying to determine where they’re gonna build-- build a visitors center. So it’s put out there “OK, how many of you all want to play?” Well as long as they were talking about you know, leasing the land or maybe somebody building and they turn around and lease it back to the Park Service, you know you had a few people that wanted to play. And then when, it got switched up so to speak and was like “Oh no, I think we’re going to buy.” [MAKES BUZZING SOUND]

There’s not enough money. “Why isn’t it that people don’t want to sell?” Because. If you understand why the people came and their connection to this land, then you understand why they won’t--didn’t want to sell. Because to sell is like you’re losing your connection to this place. And if you bought it, there’s not enough money that can make you, sell it. Well there’s—there’s a few people that have, over the years, but generally speaking it’s their connection with this land that gave them the opportunity to experience true freedom.”³⁹⁶

The lots in the town of Nicodemus have been handed down through the generations, most with multiple owners as each generation adds another layer of grandchildren.

³⁹² Interview with James R. Bates, October 2011, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

³⁹³ Interview with Bernard Bates, November 2011, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

³⁹⁴ Interview with Rosetta White, October 2011, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

³⁹⁵ Angela Bates, personal communication with Paula Reed, October 2012.

³⁹⁶ Interview with Angela Bates, October 2011.

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Archeological Significance and Information Potential of Archeological Sites

Archeological investigations at Nicodemus have the potential to yield important information about the westward migration of African Americans, the role of African-Americans in westward expansion, and their experiences as they created communities based on traditional and emergent values. The investigations also offer the opportunity to examine the dynamics of race relations and racial identities as they were defined and negotiated in a rural context. The archeological resources of Nicodemus are further significant because descendants and contemporary residents ascribe powerful meanings to these remains, playing a significant role in the creation of identity, and defining the essential attributes and values of a shared history and cultural community. Some Black towns, like Nicodemus, have been extensively studied by historians who have established the chronological and institutional histories of these communities. Yet, we still know little of the aspirations, fears, and everyday lives of people living in these towns. Like people everywhere settlers in these communities were either too busy to write down their daily experiences or they did not consider the mundane details of everyday life significant enough to warrant attention. Archeological research thus holds great promise in revealing some of these important details and some archeologists have begun to explore these dimensions of the African American experience. Archeological investigations at Nicodemus, therefore, contribute to the body of knowledge gained at the following ante- and post-bellum period all African American communities:

- **Mound Bayou, Mississippi:** In 1998 researchers at the University of Southern Mississippi and residents of the town of Mound Bayou conducted an excavation on the site of the first City Hall. Mound Bayou, an all-Black town, was established in 1887. This project was designed primarily to elicit community involvement and interest in the past. In this case the primary importance of the archeological research came not in the tangible material results but rather was manifested in the dialogue about culture and heritage which was revived in the community.³⁹⁷

Blackdom, New Mexico: Archeological excavations carried out between 1996 and 1998 focused on a single homestead owned by Isaac W. Jones, an early settler to Blackdom. A dense artifact scatter measuring 10 meters by 15 meters marked the location of the original farmhouse. Work on the Isaac W. Jones site included controlled surface collection and excavation 358 1-meter square units. Excavations revealed a hard packed caliche floor associated with the domestic structure.

Other African American Communities (not all-Black towns but significant African American populations)

- **New Philadelphia, Illinois:** (NHL, 2009) Between 2002 to 2011, Paul Shackel of the University of Maryland undertook archeological investigations on the town of New Philadelphia, Illinois. Although not established as an all-Black community, the town of New Philadelphia is the earliest town in the U.S. to be founded and platted by African Americans (1836). Like Nicodemus, New Philadelphia experienced serious economic problems when the railroad lines routed around the town. A small multi-racial community remained in the town until the 1920s but expanding agricultural production eventually claimed the houses and buildings. The primary goals of this project were to compare the ways that

³⁹⁷ Amy L. Young and Milburn J. Crowe, "Descendant Community Involvement in African American Archaeology," paper presented at the First Annual South Central Historical Archaeology Conference (Jackson, Mississippi, 1998).

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different racial, ethnic and class groups within the community: 1) structured the use and function of their homes and house lots; 2) produced and consumed food products and 3) established themselves on the landscape of the town. The 2009 NHL nomination identifies the national significance of the site in three areas: 1) the archeological analysis reflects new trends within archeology that seek to understand how material cultural and racial identity interact; 2) The townsite presents the opportunity to address nationally significant research questions about power relationships as seen through the landscape—issues of space, race and power on the frontier can be explored through spatial relationships outside the plantation setting; and 3) material evidence aids in understanding life in multi-racial communities of the era.³⁹⁹

- **Buxton, Iowa:** From 1900 until 1920 a unique community existed in America's heartland. Originally established by the Consolidated Coal Company, Buxton was a mining community with a large African American population. A majority of Buxton's 5000 residents were African American, a highly unusual racial composition for a community in a state where over 90 percent of the population was White. Archeologists David Gradwohl and Nancy Osborn of Iowa State University conducted archeological excavations at the site of Buxton.⁴⁰⁰ Gradwohl and Osborn surveyed the old town site recording the location of specific buildings and features. Test excavations were carried out at three loci within the town boundaries including: 1) the commercial district; 2) a series of company houses; and 3) the superintendent's residence. [REDACTED]
- **Elmwood, Upper Peninsula of Michigan:** Beverly Bastian has explored the experiences of African American settlers in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰¹ The apparent victims of a land scam, the Black settlers moved to Elmwood from Chicago in 1926 to farm and cut timber on a worthless twenty-acre tract of land. By 1930 the settlers had abandoned the site and returned to Chicago. Bastian pieces together the sociopolitical climate and the sequence of events that led to the site's settlement. Local newspapers and White informants indicated that the Black settlers could not adjust to the cold climate, were destitute and resorted to producing illegal alcohol to make a living. Two former occupants of Elmwood painted a different picture—that families kept gardens, livestock, hunted and fished, had plenty of firewood to keep them warm and drank illegal alcohol but never made it. Bastian's archeological investigations found consumer culture was richly diverse, evidencing activities beyond subsistence. The investigation brought more credibility to the memories of the African American occupants than to the depictions by White informants or newspaper accounts.

³⁹⁹ Paul A. Shackel, *New Philadelphia: Race, Community and the Illinois Frontier* (Baltimore: University of Maryland, Center for Historic Resource Studies, 2006), accessed November 22, 2013, <http://heritage.umd.edu/CHRSWeb/New%20Philadelphia/2006report/1.pdf>; Paul Shackel, *New Philadelphia, An Archeology of Race in the Heartland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Kathryn O. Fay and Christopher C. Fennell, "Paradoxes in Designs for New Philadelphia National Historic Landmark," *Museums & Social Issues* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 209-226, accessed September 29, 2016, www.researchgate.net/publication/275492762; King and Seibert, 17.

⁴⁰⁰ David M. Gradwohl and Nancy M. Osborn, *Exploring Buried Buxton: Archaeology of an Abandoned Iowa Coal Mining Town with a Large Black Population*. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1984).

⁴⁰¹ Beverly E. Bastian, "Elmwood: The Archaeology of Twentieth-Century African-American Pioneers in the Great North Woods." In *I Too, Am America: Archaeological Studies of African-American Life*, ed. Theresa A. Singleton (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 283-298.

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- Arrow Rock, Missouri:** (NHL, 1963) Recognized for its associations with the beginning of the Santa Fe Trail and trade, most of the structures at Arrow Rock are included within a state park. In 1996 Timothy E. Baumann of Missouri Valley College conducted archeological and archival investigations in and near Arrow Rock, an area of Missouri is historically known as the “Little Dixie” region because of the large number of both Black and White migrants from the Upper South. Before abolition, the African Americans who lived in this region were enslaved and worked in a variety of agricultural and industrial endeavors. The investigations documented the efforts of African Americans to establish their lives and community, and to document the lives of enslaved African Americans on nearby plantations. The archeological investigations were intended to correct past interpretation biases by the community and to involve the descendant community as a collaborative effort with the local historical society and the state.⁴⁰² One of Baumann’s more extensive projects involved the African American fraternal Brown Lodge/Caldwell Potter Site which was located on a city block in Arrow Rock. At this site slaves had labored in industrial ceramic production in the antebellum period. Other research in Arrow Rock has included a home, church, school, lodge hall and two slave cabins.⁴⁰³
- Little Africa, Missouri:** Also in the “Little Dixie” region of Missouri, the site of Little Africa developed in a rugged area southwest of the town of Roanoke in Howard County, Missouri. By 1897 at least 500 adjoining acres in the county were under African American ownership. A small community known as Little Africa took shape on one of these properties. Intimately tied to tobacco production, the community thrived until the 1910s when tobacco production in the area ended. By 1920 the town was a ghost town which eventually was bulldozed and plowed under by new owners. In 1997 excavations were conducted in an attempt to more fully document the social, agricultural and material development of Little Africa. Brett Rogers of Columbia College focused most of his attention on the central neighborhood of the community although some of the individual farmsteads were also recorded. Intense surface collection yielded a significant number of artifacts, primarily ceramics dating to the period of original settlement. Collectively, Rogers argues, the artifacts show that the sites he investigated were occupied as early as the 1870s. Artifact patterning here has played a key role in identifying the location and general architectural arrangement of the settlement and the lives of African Americans living in rural communities in the late 19th and early 20th century.⁴⁰⁴

The cultural landscape of Nicodemus provides great potential to discover aspects of continuing developments and innovations in the ways African American families shaped their social environment and material culture. Researchers in many other African American archeology projects have focused on investigating connections between African descendant communities and the beliefs, traditions, and practices of particular African cultures impacted by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Such connections have been seen in forms of vernacular architecture, culinary practices, management of household landscapes, and the shaping of personal possessions. In addition one can look for forms of innovation and cultural creativity at diaspora sites as African American communities navigated the new challenges of varied social and economic environments.⁴⁰⁵ Much research has

⁴⁰² Timothy Baumann, ‘An Historical Perspective of Civic Engagement and Interpreting Cultural Diversity in Arrow Rock, Missouri.’ *Historical Archaeology* 45, no. 1 (2011):114-134.

⁴⁰³ Timothy Baumann, “The Brown Lodge/Caldwell Pottery Site, Arrow Rock, Missouri,” *African American Archaeology Newsletter of the African American Archaeology Network*. 18 (Fall 1997); Timothy Baumann, “Historical Archaeology in Arrow Rock, Missouri,” *The Missouri Archaeologist* 66 (2005): 19-39.

⁴⁰⁴ Brett Rogers, “Excavations at Little Africa: A Missouri Freedmen’s Community,” *African American Archaeology Newsletter* 4 Issue 1, Article 2 (October 1997), <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol4/iss1/2>.

⁴⁰⁵ Fennell, comments on draft Nicodemus National Historic Landmark nomination, 7. Fennell notes that the trans-Atlantic slave trade impacted approximately 40 particular ethnic groups and their cultures in West Africa, West Central Africa, and Southeast Africa.

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focused upon studies of hand-made ceramics, such as Colono Ware, smoking pipes, beads, ritual, medicinal, and burial practices.⁴⁰⁶ Researchers interested in the emergence of African American culture and the study of more recent communities have grappled with the fact that most material culture found on sites occupied by African Americans was also widely available to other groups. Laurie Wilkie and Paul Mullins have been successful in demonstrating that underneath the deceptive appearance of sameness, material culture excavated from African American sites can reveal the existence of unique culturally patterned behavior.⁴⁰⁷ Wilkie, for example, has shown how enslaved Bahamians selectively appropriated ceramic vessels that reflected their own cultural sensibilities and allowed them to construct creolized identities.⁴⁰⁸ Residents of Nicodemus undoubtedly purchased and used much of the same material culture utilized by their White neighbors. The challenge facing archeologists who work at Nicodemus will be to detect how artifact patterning may be related to the distinctive cultural values (and experiences per the Traditional Cultural Property) developed and nurtured in the community of Nicodemus.

Regarding the significance of the Nicodemus archeological sites in their own right, and their relationship to the landscape and the community's status as a Traditional Cultural Property, archeologists, cultural anthropologists, and geographers have long recognized the ways that some cultural groups link identity, meaning, and memory with the landscapes that surround them.⁴⁰⁹ They have studied the ways that ancient and modern cultures have defined themselves as a people through shared geography, genealogy, and attachment to place.⁴¹⁰ Suzanne Kuchler, for example studies Malangan peoples from Papua New Guinea and has examined how landscapes (and depictions of landscapes) are a vehicle for the act of remembrance, serving as an aide-memoire of tribal knowledge and understanding of their collective past and future.⁴¹¹ According to Kuchler, the past remembered by the Malangan is inseparably bound to land use rights and the negotiation of social relationships that are linked with land ownership. Trees and other landscape features are used as mnemonics to retrace relationships of considerable time depth which permit the maintenance of social relations in the present and projection of relationships into the future.

Researchers explore the ways in which facets of particular African cultures, such as those of the Yoruba, Igbo, Asante, BaKongo, or peoples of Madagascar, were related to continuing developments of cultural beliefs and practices at diaspora sites.

⁴⁰⁶ Matthew C. Emerson, "Decorated Clay Tobacco Pipes from the Chesapeake: An African Connection," *Historical Archaeology of the Chesapeake*, ed. Paul A. Shackel and Barbara J. Little (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press), 35-39; Jerome S. Handler and Fredrick W. Lange, *Plantation Slavery in Barbados: An Archaeological and Historical Investigation*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005; Patricia Samford, "The Archaeology of African-American Slavery and Material Culture," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 53 no. 1 (1996): 87-114.

⁴⁰⁷ Laurie A. Wilkie, "Culture Bought: Evidence of Creolization in the Consumer Goods of an Enslaved Bahamian Family," *Historical Archaeology* 34, no. 3 (2000): 10-26; Paul R. Mullins, "Race and the Genteel Consumer: Class and African-American Consumption, 1850-1930," *Historical Archaeology*, 33 no. 1 (1999): 22-38.

⁴⁰⁸ Laurie A. Wilkie, "Culture Bought: Evidence of Creolization."

⁴⁰⁹ Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Sidney: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996); Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton, and Chris Tilly, *Stone Worlds: Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007); Daniel D. Arreola, "Urban Ethnic Landscape Identity," *The Geographical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 1995); Kevin S. Blake, "Colorado Fourteeners and the Nature of Place Identity," *The Geographical Review* 92, no. 2 (April 2002).

⁴¹⁰ Paul S. C. Tacon, "Identifying Ancient Sacred Landscapes in Australia: From Physical to Social," in *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Wendy Ashmore and Bernard Knapp (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 33-57; Paul Tacon, "Socializing Landscapes: The Long-Term Implications of Signs, Symbols, and Marks on the Land, Archaeology," *Oceania* 21, no. 3 (1994): 117-129; Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T. J. Ferguson, "Memory Pieces and Footprints: Multivocality and the Meaning of Ancient Times and Ancestral Places Among the Zuni and Hopi," *American Anthropologist* 108, no.1 (2006): 148-162; Richard W. Stoffle, David B. Halmo, and Diane E. Austin, "Cultural Landscapes and Traditional Cultural Properties: A Southern Paiute View of the Grand Canyon and Colorado River," *American Indian Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 229-249.

⁴¹¹ Susanne Kuchler, "Landscape as Memory: The Mapping of Process and its Representation in a Melanesian Society," in Barbara Bender ed., *Landscapes: Politics and Perspectives* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993), 98.

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In the United States, anthropologists Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T. J. Ferguson have explored how contemporary Zuni and Hopi interpret ancestral landscapes with unique indigenous worldviews that imbue these places with deep cultural meanings to contemporary peoples.⁴¹² “Ruins are an ancestral place,” Hopi scholar Micah Loma’omvaya explained to the authors. “It signifies places we used to live—our homeland. It helps us connect to the past, the condition in which our ancestors used to live... These aren’t just old ruins—it’s the history of our migrations, and how our ancestors traveled.”⁴¹³ For Hopis ruins are not inanimate objects but instead sacred places employed in ceremonies to pray for all living things. The sacred, spiritual and religious aspects of landscape have also been an area of intense research in anthropology and archeology.⁴¹⁴ While the residents of Nicodemus and the descendant community do not ascribe sacred properties to their surrounding landscape, they do consider it an important link to their ancestors and a time of new beginnings.

Historical archeologists have a long tradition of exploring the landscape as a culturally constructed artifact embedded with meanings.⁴¹⁵ Mark Leone’s pioneering analysis of an elite eighteenth century garden landscape demonstrated how ideologically informed representations of the social order were used to create the built environment.⁴¹⁶ Following Leone’s lead historical archeologists have further demonstrated that landscape oriented analysis is an effective way to reveal material traces of race, identity, class, resistance, meaning, memory, and power.⁴¹⁷ Historical archeologist Paul A. Shackel takes this work one step farther by considering how landscapes are used by contemporary people to remember particular historical events.⁴¹⁸ Shackel argues that landscapes are one of the vehicles through which individual and collective memories are learned and communicated. According to Shackel, groups use symbols embodied in the landscape and inscribed in the built environment to create a sense of group cohesion, common heritage, and public memory. Shackel reminds us that through landscape people create memories of the past that are rooted in present day social relations. Whitney Battle-Baptiste analyzes how people shaped and are shaped by the places they occupy; at the First Hermitage Site she notes how methods employed by slaves to form semiautonomous, secure spaces where various forms of black cultural production took place.⁴¹⁹ Barbara Heath and Amber Bennett’s work at Poplar

⁴¹² Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson, 148-162.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 156.

⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth Kryder-Reid, “The Construction of Sanctity: Landscape and Ritual in a Religious Community” in Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny eds., *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 228-248; Victoria Castro and Carlos Aldunate, “Sacred Mountains in the Highlands of the South-Central Andes,” *Mountain Research and Development* 23, no. 1 (2003): 73-79; Maria Glowacka, Dorothy Washburn and Justin Richland, “Nuvatukya’ovi, San Francisco Peaks: Balancing Western Economies with Native American Spiritualities,” *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 4 (2009): 547-561; Carrasco D., ed., *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado: 1991).

⁴¹⁵ William M. Kelso, “Landscape Archaeology: A Key to Virginia’s Cultivated Past,” in Robert P. Maccubbin and Peter Martin eds., *British and American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny eds., *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

⁴¹⁶ Mark Leone, “Interpreting Ideology in Historical Archaeology: Using the Rules of Perspective in the William Paca Garden in Annapolis, Maryland,” *Ideology, Power, and Prehistory*, ed. Daniel Miller, and Christopher Tilley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 25-36.

⁴¹⁷ Paul Mullins, “Racializing the Commonplace Landscape: An Archaeology of Urban Renewal along the Color Line,” *World Archaeology* 38, no. 1, (2006): 60-71; Terrence Epperson, “Constructing Difference: The Social and Spatial Order of the Chesapeake Plantation. In Theresa Singleton, ed., *“I Too, Am America””: Archaeological Studies of African-American Life* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 159-172; James Delle, *An Archaeology of Social Space: Analyzing Coffee Plantations in Jamaica’s Blue Mountains* (New York, NY: Plenum, 1998); Linda Pulsipher, “The Landscapes and Ideational Roles of Caribbean Slave Gardens,” Naomi Miller and Kathryn Gleason eds, *The Archaeology of Garden and Field* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

⁴¹⁸ Paul Shackel, “Introduction to Archaeology, Memory, and Landscapes of Conflict,” *Historical Archaeology*, 37 no. 3 (2003): 3-13.

⁴¹⁹ Battle-Baptiste, 245.

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Forest investigated the use and cultural meanings of yard areas surrounding African American dwellings was also comparative. They presented ethnographic, historical and archeological data from pertinent landscape studies in West Africa, locations of African diaspora communities in the Caribbean, and other plantations in the American south.⁴²⁰

Anglo-American racism worked in the past to erase the heritage and cultural memories of African diaspora populations. Today's African American communities work constantly to collaborate with researchers to overcome those past campaigns of silencing. Many studies today incorporate collaborative efforts with descendant communities and broad networks of African descendants throughout the Americas who seek to understand and celebrate their proud heritage.⁴²¹

Many African American families today place great focus of commemoration and their sense of personal heritage when visiting the home sites and past farmsteads of African Americans of the 1700s through early 1900s. These visitors often are not descendants of those past households. Rather, they stand as historical witnesses and American citizens. Each such house or farmstead site represents to visitors what African American feminist Bell Hooks calls a "homeplace." The homeplace constituted a supportive haven for African-American family members. The household, managed with skill and courage by matriarchs and their life partners, provided a feeling of security against the public sphere that surrounded the home. In that public terrain, young African Americans confronted the surveillance and malice created by Anglo-American racism.⁴²² The spaces of past African American homes often represented sites of resistance against pervasive racism:

Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.⁴²³

The homeplace of African American families in Nicodemus and in communities today resonate with these aspects of heritage and memory.

⁴²⁰ Fennell to Sanford, citing Heath and Bennet.

⁴²¹ Christopher C. Fennell to Dena Sanford, citing Crane River National Heritage Commission (CRNHAC), Cane River National Heritage Area, <http://www.caneriverheritage.org>; Michael Craton, "Bay Street, Black Power and the 'Conchy Joes': Race and Class in the Colony and Commonwealth of Bahamas, 1850-2000," *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publisher, 1998); Kathleen Deagan and Darcie D. MacMahon, *Fort Mose: Colonial America's Black Fortress of Freedom*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995); Fay and Fennell; Jan Hoffman French, "Mestizaje and Making in Indigenous Identity Formation in Northeastern Brazil: 'After the Conflict Came the History,'" *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 4 (2004): 663-674; Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Laura Gates "Frankly Scarlett, We Do Give a Damn: The Making of a New National Park," *George Write Forum*, 19, no. 4 (2002): 32-43; Jay Havisier, "Truth and Reconciliation: Transforming Public Archaeology with African Descendant Voices in the Dutch Caribbean," *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, 40 no. 3 (2015): 243-259; Patrice L. Jeppson, "The Archeology of Freedom and Slavery at the President's House, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," *African Diaspora Archeology Newsletter*, June 2007, <http://www.diaspora.uicuc.edu/news0607/news0607.html#5>; Kevin Mulroy *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Technology University Press, 1993); Charles E. Orser and Pedro P. Funari, eds., *Current Perspectives on the Archaeology of African Slavery in Latin America* (New York: Springer Press, 2014); Weik, "Archeology of the African Diaspora," Weik, "Allies, Adversaries and Kin"; Rebecca Yamin, *Digging in the City of Brotherly Love: Stories from Philadelphia Archeology*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁴²² Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 41-50.

⁴²³ Hooks, 42.

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The residents of Nicodemus and the descendant community ascribe powerful meanings to the landscape and features of Nicodemus Township including archeological sites.⁴²⁴ They see Nicodemus as a place of origin or beginning (in the sense of the beginning of self-determination and opportunity); a traditional home to which many return annually; and a place where important cultural traditions took root and remain. Residents and descendants are linked to this place through land ownership and kinship; both of which are embodied in the landscape. Ownership of the land was first achieved by the ancestors who homesteaded, persevered, and created the physical and cultural community of Nicodemus.⁴²⁵ The presence of the ancestors is inscribed on the land itself and by the archeological remains of the first dugouts, later sod structures, and frame farmhouses that mark the by-gone generations. These sites link the contemporary community and ancestors in a web of kinship and shared culture that is mediated through space and place and extends from past to present.

As has been acknowledged by Cheryl LaRoche, the living memories of the descendants and relatives of the earliest settlers are “powerful informing voices” and critical assets for archeological recovery.⁴²⁶ Many Nicodemus residents can easily point out depressions and mounds on the landscape that are believed to mark the location old dugouts associated with specific early settlers and families. The decaying remains of long abandoned homes are never referred to by local people as “ruins,” but rather are identified as the farmstead of a particular family. Contemporary residents of Nicodemus will usually link specific people or families with particular archeological sites. When visiting an archeological site Nicodemus residents will often trace their relationships to these early settlers and to one another. These remains serve as a testament of the presence of individuals, families, and the community on the land. The current physical condition of a site, ruin, or standing structure does not seem to impact the perceived significance and sense of rootedness that is embodied in these places. Whether seen or unseen, archeological sites in Nicodemus Township are known and felt by Nicodemus descendants. The archeological remains link descendants to their ancestors (both general and specific), to each other, and to the land.

This intertwining of these material resources with the communities’ history and cultural traditions reinforces the national significance of Nicodemus. Through their storytelling and oral histories, the hearts and minds of the descendants of the early Black settler families actively renew community and family connection. Homecoming, the renewing of old bonds, the participation in old traditions, further define Nicodemus as a townsite, a town ship, and an extended community. The intangible cultural heritage of Nicodemus is thus integrally connected to the importance of this place, and helps hold the community together beyond the existence of the physical resources.⁴²⁷

Landscapes of Race/Power

While the existence and integrity of specific archeological sites is difficult to assess without further testing, it is possible to evaluate the information potential of the landscape itself and suggest theoretical frameworks and research domains that may draw on information generated from analysis of the landscape at Nicodemus. Evaluation of the landscape at Nicodemus would complement trends within historical archeology that seek to understand the relationships between racial categories, artifacts, landscapes and power. This analytic approach has the potential to significantly contribute to new ideas and theories within the important and long-established

⁴²⁴ The views of Nicodemus residents about archeological sites are garnered from discussions with Nicodemus residents and descendants who visited archeological excavations and fieldwork sites between 2006 and 2009. A list of site visitors is on file at Washburn University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology and the Kansas State Historical Society.

⁴²⁵ The word ancestor is used to denote any person of an earlier generation.

⁴²⁶ Dr. Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, “Response to Nicodemus Historic and Archeological District—Draft” 3.

⁴²⁷ Jackson, “Intangible Cultural Heritage and Living Communities.”

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subdiscipline of African American historical archeology. Anthropological and archeological study of the landscape at Nicodemus presents the opportunity to address nationally significant research questions regarding social relationships as seen through landscape, a major avenue of research within historical archeology. Because of the large scale of the settlement of Nicodemus archeologists can study these issues of race and power through material culture more broadly through intersite and intrasite analysis. Archeologists can also use this comparative data to understand the development of race and racial categories on the frontier by comparing the archeological record here to that of similar sites, such as Buxton in Iowa, or multiracial sites such as New Philadelphia, moving away from the focus on plantation archeology.

The pursuit of examining landscapes in archeology began almost a half century ago.⁴²⁸ Recognizing that many important questions about the full range of the economy and land use may be approached only through settlement analysis, some archeologists shifted their focus from site based analysis to landscape analysis. From economic and political perspectives, landscapes provide resources, refuge and risks that both impel and impact on human actions and situation. Joe Joseph, for example showed how documentation of ephemeral sites spread out broadly on the landscape in South Carolina, helped to facilitate an understanding of plantation economies and social relations where slave villages, cattle camps, indigo processing areas, and temporary habitations near rice fields were broadly dispersed across the piedmont.⁴²⁹ Considered individually these sites would have seemed ephemeral and insignificant. But as a system of interrelated features these sites helped to shed new light on how plantation economies and the organization of the race-based system of slavery functioned in a specific context.

Over the past three decades historical archeologists have also demonstrated that landscape oriented analysis is an effective way to reveal material traces of identity, race, class, resistance, and power.⁴³⁰ Drawing on scholars like Leferve, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Soja, archeologists have explored the inseparable connection between physical landscapes and the social relations that are constructed, reconstructed and maintained within them.⁴³¹ Landscapes, thus are not only reflections of the social order, ideology or particular ways of seeing the world, they are also vehicles that function to structure thought and action.

Recently, many archeologists have sought to explore how racial identities are constructed and maintained through space and place.⁴³² In keeping with mainstream anthropological thought, historical archeologists understand race to be a social phenomenon and not a biological reality. Racialization is the historically specific process by which categories are created to classify people based on perceived physical variations that are assumed to be real and clearly definable. Racial categories are invested with meanings which confer a suite of presumed characteristics upon entire populations.⁴³³ The construction of racial identities is not a neutral act;

⁴²⁸ Shackel, "Introduction: Archaeology, Memory, and Landscapes of Conflict," 4.

⁴²⁹ Discussed in Hardesty and Little, 33.

⁴³⁰ Charles Orser, ed., *Race and the Archaeology of Identity in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001); Wendy Ashmore and A. Bernard Knapp, ed., *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999); Paul Mullins, "Racializing the Commonplace Landscape: An Archaeology of Urban Renewal along the Color Line," *World Archaeology* (2006): 60-71; Shackel, "Introduction to Archaeology," 3-13; Delle, *An Archaeology of Social Space*; Randall McGuire, "Building Power in the Cultural landscape of Broome County, New York 1880-1940," in Randall McGuire and Robert Paynter eds., *The Archaeology of Inequality* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991).

⁴³¹ Henri Lefevre, *The Product of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans., (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1974); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York, NY: Vintage, 1979); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, (London: Verso, 1989).

⁴³² Orser, *Race and the Archaeology of Identity*.

⁴³³ Margaret C. Wood, "Mapping the Complexities of Race on the Landscape of the Colonial Caribbean, United States Virgin Islands, 1770-1917," *Historical Archaeology* 46, no. (2012): 112-134.

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rather it is one that involves the creation of a hierarchy of wealth, privilege, prestige, and power. The process of racialization thus has material outcomes that are particularly well suited to archeological analysis.⁴³⁴

Researchers working in plantation contexts have shown how arrangement of landscape has been used to create, maintain, and challenge constructed racial identities through acts of control and domination as well as resistance.⁴³⁵ Epperson, for example, draws on Foucault's discussions of Bentham's panopticon to understand how the built environment at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello served as a means for surveillance and control of enslaved people.⁴³⁶ The tendencies of power can be read in racialized plantation landscapes like Monticello where enslaved Black workers were subject to the unblinking disciplinary gaze of authorities. At the same time, pathways across the plantation and vistas visible only to White landowners strategically rendered Black bodies invisible, making them unrecognizable as the real source of elite wealth.⁴³⁷ Epperson has also explored how the process of spatial separation in the housing of White indentured servants and enslaved Black people in the seventeenth century was instrumental in creating racial categories.⁴³⁸

To a large extent, researchers interested in the African American past and the processes of racialization have tended to focus on archeological sites and landscapes associated with the experience of slavery and the period of American history predating the Civil War.⁴³⁹ One of the outcomes of the focus on plantation life in historical archeology is that African Americans of the past "are presented as always enslaved, always engaged in agricultural pursuits, always living under the shadow of the planter's residence and most importantly always separate."⁴⁴⁰ The experiences of Blacks after abolition have received far less attention from archeologists; however, this situation is swiftly changing.

Charles Orser was among the first archeologists to substantially explore the experiences of African American tenant farmers in the South in the post-Civil War period. Focusing on Millwood Plantation in South Carolina, Orser tracks continuing trends of racism and inequality through an analysis of the use of space in the post-bellum period. Margaret Wood has explored how segregated burial landscapes in the late nineteenth century Caribbean perpetuated color and class distinctions long after the end of slavery.⁴⁴¹ By identifying sites buried under parking lots on the Indiana University/Purdue University of Indianapolis campus, archeologist Paul Mullins explores the dynamics of social life in a segregated neighborhood in early twentieth century Indianapolis. Mullins also explores the role that racism played in the erasure of this thriving Black neighborhood from the city's landscape in the 1960s as it was bulldozed as part of an urban renewal project.⁴⁴²

The disappearance of a town in Illinois, has also led to new insights about the nature of race in American society. In his research on the nineteenth century community of New Philadelphia (NHL, 2009) in Illinois,

⁴³⁴ Mullins.

⁴³⁵ Paul A. Shackel, "Town Plans and Everyday Material Culture: An Archaeology of Social Relations in Colonial Maryland's Capital Cities," in Paul A. Shackel and Barbara Little eds., *Historical Archaeology of the Chesapeake*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); James A. Delle, "Race, Missionaries, and the Struggle to Free Jamaica," in Charles Orser ed., *Race and the Archaeology of Identity* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001); Jamie C. Brandon, "A North American Perspective on Race and Class in Historical Archaeology," in Teresita Majewski and David Gaimster eds., *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009): 3-16; Terrence W. Epperson, "Race and the Disciplines of the Plantation," *Historical Archaeology* 24, no.4 (1990): 29-36.

⁴³⁶ Epperson, "Race and the Discipline."

⁴³⁷ Ibid., Delle. "Race, Missionaries."

⁴³⁸ Epperson, "Race and the Discipline."

⁴³⁹ Charles E. Orser, "The Archeological Analysis of Plantation Society: Replacing Status and Caste with Economics and Power," *American Antiquity* 53, no. 4 (1988): 735-751.

⁴⁴⁰ Laurie A. Wilkie, "Considering the Future of African American Archaeology," *Historical Archaeology* 38:1 (2004).

⁴⁴¹ Wood, "Mapping the Complexities," 112-134; Christopher Fennell, "Damaging Detours: Routes, Racism and New Philadelphia," *Historical Archaeology* 44, no. 1 (2010): 138-154.

⁴⁴² Paul Mullins, "Racializing the Commonplace Landscape," 60-71.

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Christopher Fennell explores how structural racism impacted the destiny of this town.⁴⁴³ Founded by African Americans, New Philadelphia was home to a diverse community of Blacks and Whites. There were no documented incidents of conflict or racial tension in the community but racism clearly led to its demise. Railroad company officials decided to by-pass New Philadelphia when they created routes despite the fact that the community was optimally positioned. By the 1880s the town had disappeared under agricultural fields and prairie grass. There are no documents that reveal blatant racist sentiments on the part of those making decisions. Fennell characterizes what happened at New Philadelphia as an example of averse racism in which members of a dominant social group channel economic opportunities and social resources away from individuals targeted by their racial prejudices. Anthropologist Fay Harrison has argued that “even in the absence of overt race-centered prejudice, racism can be the unintended consequence of everyday discourses and practices that perpetuate and reinforce an oppressive structure of power.”⁴⁴⁴

The study of the Nicodemus landscape presents the possibility for new directions for the study of landscape and race which would build from, and add to the existing literature. The site has the potential to illustrate another lifeway of the African diaspora different from plantation or urban contexts. Nicodemus was a town founded by and for African Americans. The order, organization, and shape of the community were created by African American settlers. Given the traditional values of family, church, mutual support, and landownership that emerged here, did the residents of Nicodemus order and arrange their community in ways that reveal the importance of these traditions? Did family members claim pieces of land that were near each other and how are kinship and support networks embodied in space? Did the residents of Nicodemus use the landscape in ways that reinforced power structures, defied them, or created new ones? Some Whites lived at Nicodemus. Was the town segregated and if so how was space used to construct and define racial difference? Nicodemus presents the story of a successful free African American rural farming community. How did the residents of Nicodemus imagine new social possibilities for themselves living in a primarily Black community and how is this reflected in the landscape? The comparative study of Nicodemus with other nearby townships may reveal other interesting aspects of race as well. Preliminary studies show that land values in Nicodemus Township throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were consistently lower than four neighboring townships.⁴⁴⁵ Was this because land was less fertile or was it because the land was owned and occupied by Black people?

Nicodemus reflects the power of a community to sustain itself despite all forms of adversity. From their migration out of Kentucky, to their descendants’ reverence for the land, Nicodemus residents and landowners sought to transcend the social and political inequality inside the reality of America’s racial practices. While these same patterns of inequality followed them, residents who remained held to their belief in the promise of America. All such Black towns and municipalities have this in common. As observed by LaRoche, “the communities that early residents fought to establish in the historic period are disintegrating in the contemporary era. Because so much of the historical resources are no longer extant, archeology represents a primary avenue of investigation.”⁴⁴⁶ Additional questions which future archeological investigations at Nicodemus could inform, including the following:

⁴⁴³ Christopher Fennell, “Combating Attempts of Elision: African American Accomplishments at New Philadelphia, Illinois,” *Intangible Heritage Embodied*, ed. D. Fairchild Ruggles and Elaine Silverman, (New York, New York: Springer, 2009); Fennell, “Damaging Detours.”

⁴⁴⁴ Fay V. Harrison, “Introduction: Expanding the Discourse on Race,” *American Anthropologist*, 100, no. 3 (September 1998): 609-631.

⁴⁴⁵ Wood, “Explorations of the Struggles,” 39-45.

⁴⁴⁶ LaRoche, “Response to Nicodemus Historic and Archeological District—Draft,” 4.

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- Residents often migrated and settled as a community. How are these bonds and associations reflected in the archeological record and geographic associations? How did these interconnections reveal themselves?
- What can be learned about Nicodemus as an expression of American values and democratic principles and ideals?⁴⁴⁷

As with previous investigations, future research programs will require a critical collaboration between researchers and the local and descendent communities.

Nicodemus has and continues to serve as a place where a group of African Americans began their journey as agents empowered with the ability of self-determination. Their strength was drawn from each other and from the land. It was perpetuated over generations even as families left central Kansas. It is no wonder that this now sparsely populated place on the desolate plains has come to be so meaningful to residents, descendants and African Americans. It is a place of beginnings; a place where people defined for themselves the limits of domination; a place where people forged values and relationships. But Nicodemus is not only a footprint on the landscape marking this journey; it is a living place where the connection between people, place, values, and culture are perpetually renewed through embodied experience in the landscape.

Conclusion – Nicodemus Culture

Nicodemus was settled by several inter-related family groups and with each generation the kinship grows deeper and wider. Katherine Buckner was born in 1934 in Nicodemus Township and moved to Denver, Colorado with her husband. When asked in an interview in 2010, “What family names are you related to in Nicodemus,” she replied, “Everybody.”⁴⁴⁸ The kinship of Nicodemus stretches not just across the Township boundaries but across the United States and like homing pigeons they return each year by the hundreds for the Emancipation Day/Homecoming event.⁴⁴⁹ Ruth Dobson described the draw to Nicodemus as “Wanting to be a part of--or it's a culture that it's hard to verbalize,” citing kinship and shared memories.⁴⁵⁰

For Angela Bates, whose father moved his family from their Nicodemus homestead to Pasadena, California in the 1950s, her annual return for Homecoming, her ties to Nicodemus through kinship, the land, and the history, were a powerful cultural reinforcement through the Civil Rights era of the 1960s and 1970s: “I knew I was a descendant of Black settlers and we had our **own** town... So yeah I went through the thing of about, yeah, ‘I’m Black I’m proud,’ but I was already proud and I was already Black.” Nicodemus extends beyond its physical presence to a deeper cultural connection, according to Bates:

Well I think, the first thing that has to be done in order to really understand it is, as anyone that's...not black, you have to first pull back this layer of fog, to get past all of that and really look, and when you really look...what you will see without any judgment is you will see a group of people that are African American that are being their African American selves. And what I mean by that is, you come to Nicodemus we don't have to pretend we – we just be – we're just

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Katherine Buckner, age 76, 2010, page 4, Angela Bates, interviewer, Nicodemus Historical Society, Nicodemus, KS.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Angela Bates, October 2011; Interview with Lois Alexander – 1983 estimated 500 people returned for the annual event.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Ruth Dobson, October 2011, Nicodemus National Historic Landmark Update project, Paula S. Reed & Associates, NPS Midwest Region, Omaha, NE.

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the way we are, and we don't have to wear the mask. And the mask is something that we have to wear whenever we go out, to the white world. In Nicodemus you can just be who you are...All the things that are intact in our culture that a lot of people don't even know about, can be experienced in Nicodemus. That's where the difference is. And because we are a community of former slaves – we're an African American community, we are a product – we all are products of this – the history of this country. But because we were child of slavery – of slaves, because we did not have any control over ourselves we had no way to express our culture the way we really wanted to, in Nicodemus as time went on once people got settled people did what they do naturally as African Americans.⁴⁵¹

The buildings of Nicodemus have always been an impermanent feature on the landscape, subject to change as necessary to fit the needs of the residents. But the culture of Nicodemus – the significance of land ownership, family, storytelling, church, school, government and mutual aid, have been steadfast and remain even as the town and its outlands appear in decline. As stated by Valerie Grim, Professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana State University, “Nicodemus, Kansas is a collectively owned property that represents exceptional historical, cultural, racial, and political significance for a group of Americans who attempted to make America's promise of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ real, moving their hopes from theory to practice.”⁴⁵²

The Nicodemus Historic District represents the complex overlay many areas of significance. Its nationally significant history as an enduring community, the oldest surviving African American frontier town west of the Mississippi, is directly tied to the value and importance of connection to the land. As a Traditional Cultural Property, Nicodemus maintains and embodies the traditional values of the African American community, and the land is the critically important link to that historical search for freedom and cultural identity. Without this connection to the land and a cultural community, Nicodemus as a place may not have survived to the present day. The historical and cultural presence is inscribed on the land itself and by the archeological remains that mark the preceding generations. These sites link the contemporary community and ancestors in a web of kinship and shared culture that is mediated through space and place and extends from past to present. From a scholarly perspective, the landscape and archeological remains also have the potential to reveal how Nicodemus' African American ancestors shaped their social, political and physical world, and how this community negotiated their own racial identity.

⁴⁵¹ Interview with Angela Bates, October 2011.

⁴⁵² Grim, personal communication.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
☒ Previously Listed in the National Register.
☐ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
☒ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
☒ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #KS-49, KS-49-A through KS-49-Y
☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State Agency
☒ Federal Agency
☐ Local Government
☒ University
☐ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Approximately 21,000

UTM References:

Nicodemus Township:

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A.	14	435460	4365380
B.	14	448220	4365300
C.	14	448100	4358800
D.	14	446120	4356000
E.	14	435400	4357000

Stockton Area Dugout:

14	471017	4365057
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Kebar Area**Wild Horse Township:**

A.	14	440460	4451000
B.	14	442260	4451000
C.	14	442260	4450000
D.	14	440640	4450000

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary for the Nicodemus Kansas National Historic Landmark Amendment includes the entirety of Nicodemus Township's municipal boundary in Graham County, which contains 28 full sections and portions of eight others, and covering 32.3 square miles (approximately 20,672 acres). The town of Nicodemus is located in the northwest quarter of Section 1. The original NHL nomination included only the town of Nicodemus and its 160 acres.

In addition to Nicodemus Township, the NHL Amendment includes the four eastern-most sections of Hill City Township that is adjacent to Nicodemus Township, and a small discontinuous area in Wild Horse Township, south of Bogue in Graham County, KS. The discontinuous land is located in portions of sections 4, 5 and 33, along 360th Road, at its intersection with M Road, just north of the Morlan Township line. It encompasses the Samuels Cemetery, one of three related to Nicodemus, and two homestead sites belonging to the Napue family. The boundary follows the fenced enclosure of Samuels Cemetery along its west, north and east boundaries in section 33, then crosses M Road to enclose the north, east and south borders of the northwest quarter of section 5, and continuing with the south border across 360th Road to enclose the south, west and north boundaries of the northeast quarter of section 4 to include approximately 325 acres.

The Stockton Area Dugout is less than an acre and is located approximately 3 miles west of Stockton, immediately north of U.S. Highway 24, in the northwest quarter of Section 21, Stockton Quadrangle.

Boundary Justification:

The NHL boundaries are expanded from the original 1976 documentation to capture a more comprehensive collection of Nicodemus settlement and its historical and physical character. Much of the African American settlement and occupation associated with Nicodemus occurred with homesteads established on the lands surrounding the townsite. In fact, this impact extended beyond Nicodemus Township into Wild Horse Township to the south, Hill City and its surrounding township to the west and Rooks County to the east. However, the greatest concentration of direct association with Nicodemus is Nicodemus Township and the area of Kebar in neighboring Wild Horse Township. Therefore, the Nicodemus Township in its entirety, four square miles of Hill City Township, and the smaller acreage around Kebar with the Samuels Cemetery and the two adjoining Napue properties that remain in the family that settled the land are included in this expanded boundary. The intervening landscape between Kebar and Nicodemus Township is not associated with African American settlement or ownership and therefore not contributing to the significance of the Nicodemus National Historic Landmark district. The Stockton Area Dugout was included in the original NHL nomination, and because of its significance and relation to the history of Nicodemus, continues to be included in this amendment.

Other African American communities were established in Kansas that pre-and post-date the establishment of Nicodemus (Singleton's Colony, Dunlop Colony, Morton City, Rattlebone Hollow, Mississippi Town, Hoggstown, Wabusee Colony, Summit Township, Daniel Votaw Colony, Little Coney Colony, Mt. Pleasant, Speed and Ellis). None retain both the story of Black migration and settlement and a commensurate level of integrity as does Nicodemus as an autonomous, identifiable community that has survived to the present.

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February 10, 2017