

CULTURES OF DISSENT: COMPARING POPULISM IN KANSAS AND TEXAS,

1854-1890

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1892, People's Party candidate James Weaver won more than a million votes and four states in his bid for the presidency. Despite finishing third, the fledgling party's promising start worried Democrats and Republicans alike. Although Populists demonstrated strength across the South and in the West, Kansas and Texas stood at the movement's center.

Populism grew outward from areas first settled by whites in the 1850s. Farmers in both states initially struggled with new climates, crops, and soils, and they turned to neighbors for help in facing challenges great and small. The culture of mutual aid that developed enabled survival while forging a sense of community—and responsibility for the common weal—that endured through century's end. In addition to impediments erected by Mother Nature, early homesteaders faced the obstacle of settling in contested places. Anxieties surrounding Bleeding Kansas ensnared even those who cared little about slavery, just as fear of “Indian depredations” consumed Texans. In both circumstances many believed that federal authorities at best ignored—and at worst added to—their problems.

Kansans and Texans walked divergent paths following the Civil War. The Sunflower State reaped the benefits of fighting for the victors and flourished socially through the early 1870s, as a multitude of fraternal, educational, and recreational organizations took root. Texas staggered through Reconstruction, but Republicans finally provided citizens in northern counties long-sought answers to “the Indian

question,” loosening the Democratic Party’s grip on the region. By the 1880s, disaffected farmers in both states drew on cultures that prized mutual aid and voluntary association and encouraged skepticism of traditional party politics. Disparate paths converged by 1890, when rural Kansans and Texans arrived at the same solution to the economic problems that plagued them both: formation of a third party solely beholden to their interests.

For Dad

When I was younger, you helped me see wonder in the world. Now that I am older, you help me see humor in it.

I could not have hoped for more.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the presidential election of 1892, more than one million Americans cast their votes for People's Party candidate James Weaver. The fledgling third party captured fewer than ten percent of the votes cast in that contest, but supporters considered the effort promising. As the election of 1896 neared, however, Populists lost gains made since 1890 when factionalism tore the party in two. The election proved ruinous, and the organization quickly lost both membership and stature. By the election of 1900, Populists no longer posed a challenge to the two-party system.

Though short-lived, the People's Party sporadically overshadowed Democratic and Republican rivals. In addition to providing Weaver electoral victories in four states, Populists won governorships in nine states and local offices in six more between 1891 and 1897. Populist sentiment fueled victories in the Pacific Northwest, across the Plains, and into the South, although support concentrated in certain areas. In particular, Kansas and northern Texas provided considerable ideological vitality, organizational experience, and electoral support for the People's Party. Farmers in those states faced significant economic challenges, but they fared no worse than their brethren in Nebraska or Mississippi. Why, then, did the Populist message resonate so powerfully with Kansans and Texans? The answer lies not in the economic hardships that plagued farmers in the 1890s or even the 1880s, but rather in the unique experiences of the men and women who populated those areas in the decade prior to the Civil War.

In the past eighty years, scores of historians have examined various aspects of the People's Party. John Hicks published the foundational work on the topic in 1931, examining the role of economic forces in inspiring the Populist movement. Following the strong contemporary influence of Frederick Jackson Turner, Hicks linked Populism with the closing of the frontier. He argued that Populism appeared naturally as economic opportunity vanished, a thesis that set the course for decades of subsequent scholarship. Twenty years later, C. Vann Woodward located Populism's origins in the post-Reconstruction South. He contended that the People's Party rose in opposition to Redeemer Democrats who promoted industry at the expense of public services. Although he differed from Hicks in the details, Woodward fundamentally supported the proposition that Populists reacted rationally to their political and economic circumstances. Richard Hofstadter took a dimmer view of those who became Populists, finding in their ideology "much that was retrograde and delusive, a little that was vicious, and a good deal that was comic." Because Populism found strength in the South, he believed that the movement grew not from the closing frontier but from "status anxiety" among late nineteenth-century farmers. Reared in a Jeffersonian tradition that held their work as sacred, many farmers took offense at an emergent industrial order that seemed to hurt rural people more than it helped. Ultimately, according to Hofstadter, Populists naively yearned for an idealized past that never actually took root while haplessly struggling to find their footing in the new economy.¹

¹ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), p. 11 (quote).

Historians of the 1960s and 1970s took exception with Hofstadter's findings and looked to rehabilitate the party and the movement. Norman Pollack examined Midwestern Populism and found little evidence of Hofstadter's caricatured farmer. Instead, he argued that Populists formulated a thoughtful philosophy of moral economy that guided policy recommendations such as public ownership of railroads. Their critique of capitalism bred an agenda that looked forward rather than backward, Pollock claimed, and portended substantial reforms in the early twentieth century. Lawrence Goodwyn's landmark 1976 treatment similarly cast Populists in a favorable light. He focused on the People's Party's organizational progenitors and concluded that a movement culture favoring individual opportunity over corporate rights animated the party's evolution. In addition, Goodwyn argued even more forcefully than Woodward for Populism's southern-ness and linked genuine Populists with the crop-lien system.²

Building on Goodwyn's work, later historians seized on the notion of a "movement culture" at Populism's center. Robert McMath focused on the myriad ways in which farmers formed communities in arguing that cooperation and a commitment to an ideology of "producerism" accounted for the movement as much as economic hardship. More recently, Charles Postel has examined the place of the Farmers Alliance in fostering the movement culture. Unlike Goodwyn, Postel argued that farmers in the final quarter of the nineteenth century represented an intellectually dynamic community

² Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

bent on shaping American capitalism to their liking rather than the last, futile expression of preindustrial democracy.³

Four characteristics have dominated the historiography of Populism and provide openings for new scholarship. First, historians have almost universally sought to understand the Populist movement by examining events that occurred between 1873 and the presidential election of 1896.⁴ That starting date coincides with the “crime of ’73”—a euphemism for legislation that removed silver-backed dollars from the American money supply—which figures prominently in several accounts of the movement. More often, historians have discounted the “crime” altogether and initiated their studies with the formal end of Reconstruction in 1877. Irrespective of the specific starting point, few have linked the Civil War and Reconstruction with the “agrarian revolt” of the late 1880s and 1890s. How, then, does inclusion of the Civil War and its aftermath change the traditional Populist narrative? Although most voters after 1890 had few personal memories of the 1850s, the conflict left an indelible mark on the nation. Moreover, wartime experiences varied greatly; race, gender, occupation, and location differentiated people’s ordeals. Kansans and Texans made significant contributions during the war, but their place on the periphery of white settlement distinguished their experiences and informed their political philosophies. This examination of the decades leading up to

³ Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴ Of the few works on Populism that start before the Civil War, the most notable is Steven Hahn’s *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Works that carry the Populist narrative into the twentieth century include C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1938).

formation of the People's Party in 1890 yields insight into the movement that has eluded scholars focused on post-Reconstruction America.

Beyond temporality, historians examining the Populist movement have generally limited their discussions to political and economic aspects of the late nineteenth century. Common topics of analysis include the crop-lien system, falling cotton prices, economic depressions in the 1870s and 1890s, efforts at cooperative farming, and the financial consequences of decisions made by Democratic and Republican politicians looking to appease America's business community.⁵ Without question, these and related topics have produced a better understanding of the circumstances farmers faced. Nevertheless, the historiography of Populism has suffered from that overemphasis on politics and economics. Those studies tend to conceptualize political and economic events as discrete and independent chains of cause-and-effect, largely immune to and separate from other influences such as religion, family, and popular culture. That skewed view has encouraged scholars to see those who joined the People's Party as one-dimensional historical actors motivated by political and economic philosophy rather than fully-developed people inhabiting complex cultures. A deep understanding of those cultures sheds light on the motivations of farmers who took the Populist detour from the parties of their fathers. Political and economic notions certainly suggest widely held values, but no more so than folk philosophies surrounding religion, family, education, or art. For

⁵ Some of the more notable histories of Populism in this vein are Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*; Woodward, *Tom Watson*; Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America*; Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*; Bruce Palmer, *Man Over Money: The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

this reason, this study analyzes Populism by considering the worldview of farmers aggregately rather than in strictly political or economic terms.

The third and fourth characteristics common to Populist historiography are more closely related than the first two. To begin, studies of Populism have generally been organizational histories. Most concentrate on the People's Party, its forerunners (particularly the Farmers Alliance), and other organizations that interacted with the People's Party. Along those lines, the Knights of Labor, the Grange, the Greenbacker Party, and various socialist groups make frequent appearances in Populist narratives. In addition to that focus on institutional history, most scholars of Populism view the movement from the perspective of its leadership. Some place emphasis on the politicians who ran under the People's Party banner, most notably James Weaver, Tom Watson, and Ignatius Donnelly. Others train their focus on party organizers and lecturers, such as Jeremiah "Sockless Jerry" Simpson, Mary Elizabeth Lease, and James "Cyclone Jim" Davis. Instead of concentrating on the people who led the movement and the organizations they created, this work will focus on those who filled the ranks of the People's Party. Although work remains to be done on those leaders (indeed, surprisingly few biographies of Populist leaders have been penned), the lives of the men and women who cast their lots with the new party remain even more heavily shrouded. Working from the belief that every human action both informs and is informed by culture, this dissertation examines the daily lives of common folks to shed light on the evolution of rural culture that ultimately allowed for the possibility of the People's Party.

The aim of achieving a deep cultural understanding of the world inhabited by the men and women who wrestled with the decision to become Populists shapes the parameters of this study. That aim requires taking a wide view of a small geographic area, in contrast to the narrow view of a large area—often the entire United States—offered by many of the landmark works in Populist historiography. North central Texas harbored considerable Populist sentiment by 1889, although Democrats won more counties there than the People’s Party in the 1892 presidential election. Kansas gave birth to an even more potent form of Populism that propelled candidates to victory at every level of the government and serves as a point of comparison for the Texas experience. Comparative history will allow a better understanding of factors necessary for the Populist movement by identifying features common to Kansas and Texas as well as points of contrast.

In the 1850s, white settlers entered Kansas and northern Texas in significant numbers for the first time. Hardships abounded on the journey west and often multiplied as farmers established homesteads beyond the limits of extant towns and infrastructure. Difficult times encouraged a neighborliness that evolved into mutual aid as homesteaders relied on each other for food, shelter, and protection in times of need. The prevalence of that mutual aid profoundly shaped western culture; farmers grew accustomed to working cooperatively and considering the welfare of the neighborhood. Kansas and Texas held no monopoly on mutual aid, however, and a communal ethos alone would not have propelled the states into the forefront of Populism. Instead, unique experiences with federal authorities in the 1850s and 1860s sculpted rural thinking about

the relationship shared between those authorities and common folks. The refusal of Democrats in Washington to accept the popular will in Kansas resulted not only in civil unrest but also in a deep-seated mistrust of distant federal power. In Texas, conflict with Native Americans persisted into the 1870s and gave homesteaders reason to question the priorities and capabilities of elected leaders. Nevertheless, social and economic development accelerated after the mid-1870s, when railroads thoroughly linked areas that constituted the western edge of white settlement in the 1850s with the rest of the nation. By 1890, farmers in Kansas and northern Texas had reason to expect a quality of life commensurate with that enjoyed by other Americans. When they instead felt their position in society slipping, they drew solutions from the cultures they had developed.

Concern for neighbors, a legacy of cooperative work, and distrust of established political parties pushed farmers toward Populism. The movement constituted a response to shifting economic realities wrought by industrialization, but the form of that response—a new political party—followed from the particular culture that evolved on the plains for much of the nineteenth century, starting in the decade before the Civil War.

CHAPTER II

WESTWARD JOURNEYS

“At all times,” according to one emigrant from the U.S. to the Republic of Texas, “there are great numbers of men who, by just arriving at maturity and commencing life for themselves, or from some of the thousand other causes which induce changes of abode, desire to remove from their former residence and choose a new home.” Writing in the wake of the Panic of 1837, the author found it “exceedingly interesting to learn of a new country where, with comparatively little capital, men may enter upon business, may purchase farms, and lay secure foundations for future competency and prosperity.” Although the republic remained young, the urge to migrate, as the unnamed author points out, seemed ancient.⁶

Fewer than a thousand Americans lived in the place later known as Kansas prior to 1854. Only missionaries, traders, and a handful of soldiers charged with protecting stretches of the Santa Fe Road and Oregon Trail offered glimpses of the society to come. In contemporary Texas, the state’s “Indian frontier” began along a line running south-by-southwest from the Red River through Fort Worth and Fort Croghan and terminating at the Colorado River. By 1860, a parallel line of forts roughly one hundred miles to the west outlined the farthest reaches of American civilization in Texas. Although the Kansas and Texas shared many geographic and climatic similarities, Indian Territory

⁶ *A History of Texas, or the Emigrant’s Guide to the New Republic, by a Resident Emigrant, Late from the United States* (New York: Nafis & Cornish, 1844), p. xviii (quotes).

acted as a buffer zone—more than two hundred miles in breadth— that effectively segregated them until the turn of the twentieth century.

Understanding the motivations, expectations, and migration experiences of homesteaders in the West provides insight into the people who eventually fueled the Populist movement. Many settlers undoubtedly acted for financial reasons, but other factors also played significant roles. Potential migrants could have moved to most parts of the U.S. more easily than they could have reached Kansas or Texas. In fact, many did. Furthermore, the West did not necessarily represent the most financially lucrative option for many. Land could be had inexpensively, but it constituted only one expense related to farming. The combined costs of clothing, shelter, fuel, livestock, tools and implements, household goods and furnishings, and enough food to survive until first harvest could easily surpass the cost of a claim. Even with sufficient funding, starting farms from scratch in new climates and new soils promised backbreaking toil without guarantee of success. A dearth of money in circulation should have similarly dissuaded those who worked for cash, including craftsmen, lawyers, day laborers, merchants, and doctors. Nevertheless, settlers representing all those trades and more journeyed westward, suggesting the region represented something grander in the minds of settlers than simply better economic prospects.

Homesteaders went west for many reasons, held a wide range of expectations about their new homes, and experienced varying degrees of difficulty on their journeys. Information about Kansas Territory and northern Texas could be vague or inaccurate, but it nonetheless shaped expectations and figured into decisions to make new starts.

After making those decisions, migrants employed every mode of conveyance available in their travels. Better-financed settlers used steam power; those of more modest means used animal power. Many even covered the distance, at least in part, on foot.

Irrespective of their reasons for or means of migrating, settlers encountered a range of hardships during the course of their westward treks. Those hardships presented opportunities for community building, however, as the hospitality of strangers—particularly in areas lacking businesses that catered to travelers—set the tone for social relations. In later decades, the culture of neighborliness established in the late antebellum era propelled cooperative efforts and eventually the Populist movement.

* * *

Motivations for relocating in the West varied by individual. Some sought financial reward, but many made the trek for more personal reasons. Bankruptcy, the loss of a loved one, or the desire to build something from nothing convinced others to go. Myriad reasons convinced Americans that the West offered a fresh start. Consequently, places first settled by whites in the 1850s attracted those seeking to shape the societies they lived in.

For some, homesteading constituted a calling. Compelled by forces over which they exercised little control, this breed of settler considered westward migration an imperative. Some, including Texan Belle Rogers, claimed to come from “a race of pioneers.” Strong evidence corroborates her assertion, as earlier generations of her kin settled in Ohio and Alabama during the first half of the nineteenth century. Rogers arrived in Cooke County, Texas, as a child around 1855 and suspected divine inspiration

played a role in her father's decision to leave their home. "When Pa went out," she explained, "he went as did Abraham—not knowing whither he went." She speculated that "the urge to 'go west' which seemed to possess Pa [came] from the same wise source" that had guided the religious leader. Biology, rather than religion, called others west. Such seemed to be the case with a man referred to as "Old Collin" who lived in McKinney, Texas. "Nearly 91 years old," according to a local millwright, Collin had "been a frontier man all his life. Came from Virginia to Kentucky in 1778 or 9 and was well acquainted with Daniel Boone." For Collin, Stephens, and countless others, moving west fulfilled emotional needs.⁷

Texas held no monopoly as a destination for those with homesteading in their blood, however. The family of N. S. Goss resided in New Hampshire when, in the autumn of 1836, he traveled to Wisconsin Territory in search of a new home for his family. The following year he returned home and brought his family to Wisconsin, where they lived for the next twenty years. Following the death of his wife in 1857, Goss again sought out a fresh start, this time in Kansas Territory. Along with his business partner, Goss "settled on the Neosho River . . . taking up land and laying out a town site, naming it Neosho Falls." The men took advantage of the river by establishing a mill. By the end of the Civil War, Goss had moved his family from Wisconsin to Neosho Falls, where their decades-long search for greener pastures ended.⁸

⁷ Sarah Isabella Stephens Rogers, "Memoirs, 1850-1937," unpublished, (1937), pp. 1 (first quote) and 23 (second quote), Belle Rogers Collection, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT); Charles B. Moore, diary, entry for 22 January 1857, Moore Family Papers, UNT.

⁸ Harriet Naomi Clark, unpublished reminiscences, pp. 2 and 15 (quote), Sarah Goss Clark Papers, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter KSRL).

Like Goss, many looking to migrate west in the second half of the nineteenth century considered the plains their best option for a new beginning. Some had lost their fortunes and sought a new “Promised Land.” After being swindled, one Mississippian “was left almost penniless, and in bad health.” In a bold move, he “took his three negroes, all he had left, and started to Texas.” Others had yet to earn their fortunes and looked instead to follow popular advice, moving west and growing up with the country. One Massachusetts native recalled a young laborer who worked on her family’s farm in Douglas County, Kansas Territory, in 1855. At the age of “19 with the world before him,” the young settler considered himself fortunate “to be in a country where . . . a man was a man if he had not a dollar in his pocket.” Indeed, the West initially muted social stratification, creating a sense of equality many did not feel in the places they left.⁹

The first whites to settle in Indian lands directly west of Missouri arrived decades before establishment of a place called Kansas. They built missions on several reservations, including those belonging to the Osage, Shawnee, and Sac and Fox tribes. When those lands became Kansas Territory in 1854, a new generation of missionaries ventured west, following settlers beyond Missouri’s western edge. This time, however, saving souls took second place to ensuring “that Kansas . . . be free!” L. T. Goodnow migrated under the auspices of the New England Emigrant Aid Company (NEEAC) as a “lover of Freedom with a strong will & . . . ability” who pledged to use his “talent, money & influence . . . heartily for Liberty!” Similarly, the New York-based American

⁹ DeWitt Clinton Thomas, Sr., unpublished reminiscences, p. 1 (first quote), Thomas (DeWitt Clinton, Sr) Reminiscences, 1836 – 1912, ca 1964, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (hereafter CAH); Thankful Sophia Mayo, unpublished journal, p. 50 (second quote), Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL.

Missionary Association (AMA) sent preachers into the territory to lead the charge against slavery. AMA missionary Samuel Adair left for Kansas Territory in late 1854. “I can but feel that the hand of the Lord is visibly in it,” he expressed just before leaving Albany. “Duty appears plain.” For Adair and thousands of others who arrived in the territory for moral reasons, establishing thriving farms and communities meant more than personal survival. The tenacity and organizational prowess they demonstrated in ultimately making Kansas a free state set the tone for social development following the war.¹⁰

The NEEAC and likeminded organizations constituted one of the great differences between Texas and Kansas Territory. According to a travel guide published by the NEEAC, settlers traveling under their umbrella enjoyed reduced rail rates, advice provided by agents who had visited the territory, and “the opportunity of forming communities at once, and thus, early enjoying, all the benefits resulting from association.” Employing that strategy would prevent homesteaders from “locating . . . at wide-spread distances, and in consequence generations passing by, before any of the benefits and privileges of settlements can be realized.” Although the most well-known, the NEEAC comprised only one of many organizations that provided resources to free staters willing to settle in Kansas for the sake of liberty. The National Kansas Committee (NKC) focused on support—usually food or clothing—for the indigent rather than aid to those waiting to migrate. Unlike the NEEAC, which looked to promote

¹⁰ L.T. Goodnow to Stephen French Jr., 16 December 1854 (first and second quotes), Isaac Goodnow Collection, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KHS); Samuel Adair, diary, entry for 10 September 1854 (third quote), Samuel & Florella Adair Collection, KHS.

community formation, organizations such as the NKC offered critical relief when natural or manmade calamities afflicted Kansans. Texans, while occasionally able to rely on the charity of neighbors, did not enjoy the advantages of organizational and charitable support from outside the state.¹¹

On occasion, tragedy could provide the impetus for migration. Such tragedy struck the family of Ohioan Elizabeth Simpson Cooper when, in the autumn of 1854, her mother fell ill with typhoid fever. In the weeks that followed, “all the family was taken down with the same sickness,” as a heartbreaking drama slowly unfolded. Baby Susanna succumbed the first week of October 1854, and nine-year-old Rebecca expired a week later after an evening of song and dance. Hours later, sister Sarah met the same fate. Cooper’s mother died last, four days later. The quick succession of deaths jolted surviving family members. “Life never seemed the same after these dear ones were all gone, the merry children and good mother,” Cooper recalled. “We could only feel the sad loneliness and realized our great loss as we grew better, after . . . weeks of sickness. . . . It was a lonely home, no one knows, only those who have passed through the same.” To escape the confines of so many terrible memories, Cooper’s father took the surviving children to Kansas Territory.¹²

The Steffens family, like the Coopers, hoped to escape unwelcoming environs. Hailing from Rethern, Germany, they had little economic motivation to leave their home. Instead, a familial dispute sparked their desire to leave. Born to a wealthy family

¹¹ Thomas H. Webb, *Information for Kansas Immigrants* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1855), p. 3 (quote).

¹² Elizabeth Simpson Cooper, “Memories of My Life,” unpublished reminiscences, (1931), pp. 8 and 9-10 (quote), UNT.

steeped in military heritage, wife Minna disappointed her family when she accepted less socially prominent Louis Steffens's proposal of marriage. Tensions intensified when Louis's "father-in-law, Col. Von Moeller . . . let his desires be known that he wants his grandsons in military school." Eventually the two men reached an impasse, and Louis, "after much praying to God and conferring with Minna," came to believe that only leaving would ensure his sons never witnessed the horrors of combat. "Many generations of men in my family have given their lives to the Fatherland," he reasoned, "and I can see another war on the horizon." To protect their sons, the Steffenses departed for Texas in March 1860.¹³

Expectations that the West would provide the industrious and wise with prosperity and happiness characterized the immigrant mindset. In part those expectations stemmed from first-hand accounts. Word of mouth often carried the best—or only—information available about certain areas, although written accounts by earlier settlers and (often unreliable) guidebook authors existed as well. Perhaps nothing had greater influence over expectations than descriptions provided by family members who had already moved west. Because experiences are often measured in terms of reality versus expectation, understanding settlers' expectations assists in understanding how they experienced their new homes.

Those traveling to northern Texas in the 1850s often relied on the accounts of men who had passed through the area during the Mexican-American War, where they "got a good view of the vast expanse of Texas." Veterans spoke of the state in exotic

¹³ Louis Steffens, "A Voyage to America on the Sailing Ship 'Georg' March 18, 1860 to June 6, 1860," diary, entry for 20 May 1860 (all quotes), Steffans (Louis) Diary, 1860-1863, CAH.

terms, as a hinterland characterized by wild varieties of animals and even wilder varieties of men. In addition to first-hand experience with Texas, Mexican War veterans tended to be capable horsemen and competent soldiers who “liked excitement and trouble.” Those factors, along with their high tolerance for harsh conditions, made veterans particularly suited for homesteading. Jack Cureton typified those veterans. After serving in Texas during the war with Mexico, Cureton returned home to Arkansas, married, and started a family. He tried his luck in the California gold rush in 1852, but quickly returned home. Then, in 1854, Cureton “loaded all into one four horse and one two horse wagon and struck out for the land of Indians and buffaloes,” leaving “all other kindred and friends at Ozark, on the bank of the Arkansas River.” One of the earliest settlers in Palo Pinto County, Cureton would become a prominent citizen of the area through his time as a captain in the state’s Frontier Regiment during the Civil War and as sheriff of Bosque County during the late 1870s.¹⁴

Many settlers gauged their expectations of the plains on the accounts of family members writing home. Methodist circuit rider James Griffing looked to excite, or perhaps reassure, his spouse with his description of Kansas Territory. “You cannot long live out in that delightful country,” he told his wife, still in New York, “sniff the ever blowing breezes, become acquainted with the country, its people, without thinking it among the best places of earth.” Writing to friends back in Michigan, one Denton County settler similarly proclaimed Texas “superlative or contradictory, - or marvelous.”

¹⁴ W. E. Cureton, “Personal Recollections of WE Cureton Texas Frontiersman: 1848-1925,” unpublished reminiscences, (1922), p. 3 (first and third quotes), Cureton (WE) Recollections, ca 1848-1922, CAH; Walter C. Cochran, “Story of the Early Days Indian Troubles and Cattle Business of Palo Pinto and Adjoining Counties,” unpublished reminiscences, (1930), p. 11 (second quote), Cochran (Walter C) Reminiscences, CAH.

He explained that the region offered “the hardest country to live in, and . . . the most to live on, . . . the most rivers, and the least waters, . . . a poor country for farming, and yet the most productive.” Such examples of grass-roots boosterism painted a portrait of the plains against which later arrivals would measure reality.¹⁵

In addition to private accounts of the plains, some prospective settlers had access to published travel guides. Guides to Texas proved most popular between 1836 and 1845, when Texans worked desperately to increase the flow of American immigrants into their fledgling republic. After annexation, anxieties subsided, and the state took fewer proactive measures to encourage immigration. The counties that would sit along the state’s “Indian frontier” in the 1850s had not yet been organized when Texas entered the Union. Consequently, guides did not include information on the lands that would later constitute those counties. One guide published in 1845, for example, gave no description of the lands west of Fort Worth, nor did it list that community, Palo Pinto, Stephenville, or Weatherford among towns and cities. While Houston and San Antonio warranted paragraph-length descriptions, the full description of Dallas, in contrast, read: “Fannin co., 190 miles NNW. Austin, situate on the head branches of Trinity r.” Consequently, many who arrived in northern Texas in the 1850s had little idea what to expect in their new homes.¹⁶

Settlers aimed toward the territory, conversely, could read a great deal about their prospective destination. Guides written specifically for “the tide of emigration . . .

¹⁵ James [Griffing] to My Dear Augusta [J. Augusta Goodrich], 29 August 1855 (first quote), James Sayer Griffing Collection, KHS; M. J. Mathis to O. H. Eastman, 3 September 1859 (second quote), Mathis Family Papers, 1849-1878, CAH.

¹⁶ Richard S. Hunt and Jesse F. Randel, *A New Guide to Texas* (New York: Sherman & Smith, 1845), pp. 54-60.

comencing . . . to flow into Kansas” sought to provide settlers “all the information concerning the country to which they are making a Pilgrimage.” By 1861, a cottage industry had emerged around Kansas guidebook publication in New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. The guides offered prospective settlers a wealth of information on natural and social conditions in the territory.¹⁷

Although generally striving for accuracy, most guidebooks portrayed Kansas in optimistic terms. Most acknowledged a dearth of trees in Kansas relative to the East, for example, but at the same time they suggested “vast coal deposits” could be mined to provide fuel for heating and cooking. Platitudes, such as the proclamation that “no State or Territory . . . is so desirable . . . for a home as Kansas,” became common, as did more specific praises. Some noted “the abundance of lime and clay,” while others commented on the discovery of “iron ore and lead.” The territory’s fertile soil drew similar praise. According to the author of one guidebook, the portion of Kansas “watered by the Wakarusa, Osage, and Neosho rivers“ contained “ample supplies of water and . . . some of the finest land in the world.” He believed there was “little or no land . . . unfit for cultivation” in the region, which was “destined to be the Garden of the Territory.” For those traveling to the territory, prosperity seemed within reach.¹⁸

Despite generally favorable assessments, travel guide authors tempered their glowing praise with a few caveats. The NEEAC, among others, discouraged those who

¹⁷ Robert Atkins Tovey, “A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory Written by an Actual Settler,” unpublished essay, (ca. 1856), p. 1 (all quotes), *A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory Written by an Actual Settler*, KSRL.

¹⁸ Webb, *Information for Kansas Immigrants*, p. 9 (first and third quotes); O. B. Gunn, *New Map and Hand-Book of Kansas & the Gold Mines...* (Pittsburgh: W. S. Haven, 1859), pp. 10 (second quote) and 14 (fourth and fifth quotes).

would or could not work. The company's 1855 travel guide encouraged men to think carefully before setting off with families in tow. "If . . . the woman . . . is in truth a helpmate, and can cheerfully submit to roughing it for a while," the travel guide advised, and "if the children be of an age and character suited to prove serviceable, let them be taken along." The best lands in and around company-founded Lawrence had already been claimed by 1855, but the author assured prospective settlers that the burgeoning town could be replicated. "To effect this," the author suggested, "requires neither magic nor supernatural power; New England energy, industry, and perseverance . . . brought the one, and can bring others into existence." Most traveling with the company took that advice to heart, as evidenced by the vigor with which they developed a new society.¹⁹

Settlers indeed found hard work indispensable, but not even the NEEAC believed Yankee ingenuity would suffice in Kansas. In short, settlers needed cash. The company advised "no one, entirely destitute of means, to go out, at this early period" in its 1855 publication. Furthermore, the guide suggested that settlers travel light, bringing money west in lieu of draft animals, farm implements, or household goods. "Most articles . . . had better not be purchased prior to reaching St. Louis or Kansas City," where, the author promised, "necessities for house-keeping, also agricultural implements, &c. can be obtained on reasonable terms." Acknowledging that "people will vary in their estimate . . . of what constitutes comfort," the author ultimately advised emigrants to have at least one hundred dollars "wherewith to commence territorial life." With such a sum, "a person of good moral habits, and reasonable and moderate desires, should be

¹⁹ Webb, *Information for Kansas Immigrants*, pp. 9 (second quote) and 15 (first quote).

able always to keep above want, whatever pursuit or avocation he may follow . . . provided he is blessed with ordinary health.” In contrast, greater distance to markets meant migrants to Texas had fewer opportunities to purchase goods and had to bring more essential goods with them west.²⁰

Though the West promised the industrious and lucky financial reward, men and women migrated to the plains in the 1850s for many reasons. Most sought new beginnings of one sort or another, but those starts could have been had in already established places. Homesteaders who headed west looked for a particular kind of opportunity; they wanted to create something from scratch. That experience gave the men and women who crafted societies on the plains ownership of and pride in their new homes. Those feelings factored largely in shaping responses to hard times in later decades.

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Once men and women east of the Mississippi River committed themselves to homesteading, they faced arduous voyages into the West. Preparations for migration taxed settlers emotionally, and primitive living conditions and hot days while traveling similarly exhausted them physically. Many underestimated the toll migration would take on their families and upon reaching the plains found themselves in need. Most benefitted from the generosity of neighbors, who also shared an interest in seeing their communities grow. That mutual aid immediately set the tone for social relations in the West and created strong bonds between neighbors.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 7 (second quote), 8 (third quote), and 16 (first quote).

Irrespective of a settler's destination, the decision to start a home in a far away land rarely came easily and constituted only the first of many difficulties. Final farewells, for example, could set emotionally charged scenes. "At times I live over the past," wrote Elisha Mayo. "The hour of parting I shall never forget. When we walked to the depot that day," he admitted, "I was reminded of a man going to execution. It seems to me I could not have felt much worse." Mayo's wife experienced similar feelings at their parting. "Just before the cars started," she recalled, the traveling party "sang some versus composed for the occasion The chorus was something in this wise, 'Ha, brothers Ha brothers come along with me, We'll sing upon the Kansas plains the song of liberty.' The merry strains seemed to my sad heart a mockery indeed."²¹

Jonathan Baker's departure from his native Virginia evoked the same response. "Amidst the tears and farewells of tenderhearted parents and friends, probably never to see them again," he remembered, "I left home, the place of my birth . . . and all my youthful associations." Mary Gordon expressed a similar sentiment as she recalled bidding "farewell to weeping friends and relatives, who were sad at our departure." Upon learning her father intended to move the family west, Elizabeth Simpson Cooper wondered "what was there . . . for us?" She felt anxious upon leaving "beloved home, our schools, our churches, and our dear friends and kindred and the scenes of our childhood home." Some, such as Walter South, confessed grief to their diaries to cope with their sadness. "Oh! Sad and painful separation!" he exclaimed, "I have bid a final

²¹ [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 13 June 1855 (first quote), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL; [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], September 1855 (second quote), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL.

adieu! To all my brother's & sister's and all the friends of my youth," he continued, "with little or no hope of meeting any of them again on this side the grave." On the other hand, memories of leaving left Anna Randolph of Ohio speechless. "I will not say any thing of parting with our friends," she wrote in her diary. "It is hard enough to think of." Those who left their homes in search of better prospects often did so with heavy hearts, a testament to their desire for better opportunities.²²

Once the goodbyes ended, the strenuous work of moving began. Men and women looking to stake claims in Texas faced particularly difficult journeys. The Lower South lacked an analogue to the Ohio and Missouri Rivers, which conveniently transported thousands in the Midwest and Upper South hundreds of miles to Kansas City, at the eastern edge of Kansas Territory. Nor did the South have canals and lakes to rival those that brought New Yorkers and New Englanders as far west as Detroit. Even those with the means and the will to reach northern Texas by water only delayed the inevitable. As of the 1850s, the Red River remained difficult to navigate and fraught with peril. The Great Raft, a 700-year-old logjam of unparalleled length, blocked all but the smallest boats from traveling the Red River west of Shreveport, Louisiana. By 1850, the Army Corps of Engineers had made great headway in clearing 165 miles of trees choking the river, but riverboats of the sort sailing the Missouri River remained impossible. Moreover, Texas remained nearly devoid of railroad development. No rail

²² Jonathan Hamilton Baker, "Diary 1858-1918," entry for 1 May 1858 (first quote), Baker (Jonathan Hamilton) Papers, CAH; Mary Bouhanan Gordon, "The Story of the Life of Mary Bouhanan Gordon," unpublished reminiscences, (1932), p. 2 (second quote), Gordon (Mary Bouhanan) Reminiscences, 1848-1932, CAH; Walter S. South, "Diary, 1860-1866," entry for 6 November 1861 (third quote), South (Walter S) Diaries, 1860-, CAH; Anna Margaret Watson Randolph, diary, entry for 17 August 1858 (fourth quote), Anna Margaret Watson Randolph Collection, KHS.

lines crossed the state's borders on the eve of the Civil War, and the nearest interstate railroads terminated in Memphis and New Orleans.²³

Jonathan Baker's odyssey from Grayson County, Virginia, to Palo Pinto County, Texas, illustrated the hardships awaiting those bound for the Lone Star State. Baker's travails are instructive not because he failed to prepare or encountered misfortune; rather, the well-funded Virginian, employed the most comfortable and fastest means of transport available and reached his destination relatively unimpeded. Nevertheless, his journey lasted more than twice as long as the typical migration to Kansas Territory.

Baker left his Virginia home on March 1, 1858. He covered the first twenty-five miles of his journey—the distance from his home to the nearest rail depot in Marion—on foot. Using a patchwork of regional railroads, Baker covered more than 600 miles during the first week at a cost of \$25. From the end of the line at Memphis, Baker embarked a steamship. Although less physically demanding than travel over land, the Mississippi River presented its own challenges. “To a person unaccustomed to travel by water,” Baker lamented, “the ringing of bells, the blowing of whistles, the loud cursing of the captains and mates, and the jarring motion of the boat . . . create sensations that are anything but pleasant.” Fear multiplied the unpleasantness on the crowded waterway, as Baker anxiously wondered “how soon our boat may come into collision with another boat and both sink.” After two weeks on the Mississippi and Red Rivers,

²³ Diana J. Kleiner, "Red River," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/rnr01>) accessed February 06, 2014.

Baker considered it “a great luxury to be on land again, and breathe free air once more, even tho we have to take it afoot.”²⁴

Baker sailed the Red River as far west as possible, disembarking at Jefferson in East Texas. He then started the final leg of his trip along “very bad and muddy” roads. A few miles outside of town, his party’s wagon became “stuck in the mud . . . we had to pry, whip, and hallo with a vengeance, but to no avail.” The settlers “stayed until a cotton wagon came along and the driver took part of his team and pulled” the wagon from the mud. At that point, Baker sat more than 180 miles from Fort Worth, on the western edge of white settlement. In sum, Baker took more than a month to reach Palo Pinto despite taking full advantage of the quickest modes of conveyance available in the South.²⁵

Settlers bound for Kansas Territory, in contrast, more frequently traveled by water or railroad. Two routes, merging in St. Louis, served as primary arteries for northerners flowing into Kansas. The northern route—used mostly by New Englanders and New Yorkers—originated in New York City, where migrants could sail up the Hudson River to the Erie Canal. From the canal, travelers would cross Lake Erie, arriving in Detroit. At Detroit migrants caught trains bound for Alton, Illinois, by way of Chicago. The Port of Alton gave settlers access to the Mississippi River 25 miles upstream of St. Louis. The simpler southern route consisted primarily of the Ohio River and found favor among homesteaders in the Midwest and Upper South headed for Kansas. The river conveniently flowed west from Pittsburgh to its confluence with the

²⁴ Baker, “Diary,” 1-6 March 1858, 11 March 1858 (first quote) and 20 March 1858 (second quote).

²⁵ Ibid., 20 March 1858 (all quotes).

Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois, 150 miles downstream of St. Louis. With planning, cash, and a little luck, migrants as far away as Boston could traverse the distance to St. Louis in a week.²⁶

Upon reaching the Gateway to the West, travelers could procure a spot on one of the many steamboats plying the waters of the Missouri River toward Kansas City. From there settlers gathered information about prospective claims, purchased housewares, tools, and farm equipment, and easily accessed the two most substantial towns in the territory, Atchison and Lawrence. Many considered the Missouri River the most comfortable leg of the relay west. Twenty-four year old Rhode Island native Thomas Wells, writing to his mother, claimed to be “living finely on board the boat. The table is set nearly the whole length of the cabin, and at dinner time is loaded with almost everything in the eatable sort, Beef, pork, ham, veal, turkey, chicken, duck, fish etc cooked in every style, pies of apple, peach, plums, prunes, blackberries, cranberries, etc, various kinds of pudding tarts, fruits, nuts etc.” Thankful Mayo agreed in describing the “large and splendid” vessel that brought her up the Missouri. “The table,” she wrote, was “the best that ever I was seated to. There were French dishes, a great display of ornamental pastry, jellies, fruit, peanuts, raisins.” In addition to being perhaps the most opulent segment of the migration, travel on the Missouri River likely influenced how

²⁶ George Walter, “History of Kansas also, Information Regarding Routes, Laws, &c., &c.,” unpublished essay, (1855), p. 13, KSRL.

settlers viewed the plains' potential. If such fine living could be had in Missouri, after all, why not in Kansas?²⁷

For many, sailing down the Missouri River on a steamboat proved a novel experience. Neither steamboat travel nor the intrinsic characteristics of the river struck northerners as foreign; native southerners, however, seemed a breed apart. Most northern migrants—including those traveling with the NEEAC—witnessed slavery firsthand for the first time upon entering Missouri. Thankful Mayo, for instance, caught her initial glimpse of bondage during her “first experience of boating on the Western Rivers.” She noted “quite a number of tall, stately, dignified looking Southerners,” on her trip up the river, as well as “ladies with their infants and servants.” That evening, “a whole army of colored waiters, very attentive and respectful,” served dinner. Despite journeying to Kansas Territory in explicit support of the free state cause, Mayo enjoyed her company. “Evenings we had dancing,” she explained, “and one young lady impressed me as the most graceful dancer I ever saw! She played too sweetly on the guitar.” Tension between free state and proslavery factions in the territory would soon make travel on the Missouri perilous for northerners, but in the earliest days of white migration into Kansas amicable relations prevailed.²⁸

Others made less flattering assessments of southern culture. G. W. Paddock of New York, for example, had little praise for his shipmates. “Profanity is prevalent,” the Methodist preacher complained. “The car is incessantly pained by oaths, that interlard

²⁷ T. [Thomas] C. Wells to Mother [Sarah Elizabeth Clarke], 3 April 1856 (first quote), James Sayer Griffing Collection, KHS; Thankful Sophia Mayo, journal, entry for 16 September 1855 (second quote), Thankful Sophia Mayo Journal, KSRL.

²⁸ Mayo, journal, 16 September 1855 (all quotes).

conversation as though it were a necessity.” Once Paddock became a Kansan, he—like many others in the free state camp—continued to characterize southerners in general, and Missourians specifically, as fundamentally immoral. On his first trip up the Missouri, even the captain and crew failed to escape Paddock’s judgment. He observed them one night with “other respectable Gent . . . gaming at cards. . . . Absurd folly. Why do they not pass the hour in profitable conversation or the reading of good books? These waters,” he concluded, constituted “vast runing streams of moral pestilence & death, sinks, cesspools of iniquity too dark for inspection.”²⁹

Paddock’s vivid metaphor suggested two objective truths about the river: it was dirty, and it was dangerous. As the preacher and his party of more than one hundred moved farther west, concerns over cleanliness found their way into his diary. By the time he reached the Mississippi River, long the symbolic dividing line between the East and the West, he observed waters as “muddy as sand can make them.” One of Paddock’s companions, Brother Reed, “declared he was not going to wash in that mud,” to which Brother Henry—hoping to make light of an unwelcome situation—replied, “you’ll drink of that soon.” Soon, as it happened, came almost immediately. Paddock lamented the dirtiness of “the only water we have in which to wash & from which our coffee and tea is made.” He recalled “the first night . . . on board we went into our wash room, let out water from dish supposing that 50 dirty men at least had used it.” Dishearteningly, when the men “obtained more of the same, the truth flashed upon our minds,” Paddock admitted. “We are at the west & this is western water.” The

²⁹ G. W. Paddock, diary, entry for 23 May 1857 (all quotes), G. W. Paddock Diary Transcript, 1857-1861, KSRL.

preacher's linking of geography and cleanliness spoke volumes. The West would test the fortitude of settlers, and each struggle invested them more deeply in their new homes.³⁰

While heavy rains in the vast Missouri River watershed contributed to the river's muddiness, lack of rainfall could be worse. Summers with subpar rainfall presented passengers the most danger. As the water level in the river fell, currents slowed. Waterborne diseases, including cholera, thrived in the relatively stagnant environment and could prove disastrous. Elisha Mayo had discouraged his wife's trip west due to timing. "I wish you were coming now," he wrote her in June 1855, "as it is very healthy on the rivers." When she finally arrived on that "weird, lonesome, dreary river" the following fall, incidences of illness had increased, and her husband had asked her to remain in Massachusetts until replenishing spring rains fell. The soon-to-be (in)famous John Brown received similar advice from his son, who had settled in Kansas Territory in 1854. "It would be much cheaper and healthier for you to come in the way you propose, with a 'covered lumber Buggy and one Horse or Mule,' especially from St. Louis," he wrote his father in the summer of 1855. "The navigation of the Missouri River . . . is a horrid business in a low stage of water," he warned, "which is a considerable portion of the year."³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 6 April 1857.

³¹ [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 17 June 1855 (first quote), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, *Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909*, KSRL; [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 16 September 1855 (second quote), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, *Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909*, KSRL; [John Brown, Jr.] to Dear Father [John Brown, Sr.], 22 June 1855 (third quote), John Brown Collection, KHS.

As indicated by the younger Brown, overland travel comprised the least expensive method of reaching Kansas Territory in the mid-nineteenth. With a wagon and the help of a draft animal or two, resourceful homesteaders could cross several states before arriving at their destination having spent only a few dollars. The family of DeWitt Clinton Thomas, Sr., made a trip in this fashion late in 1844, just as Texas prepared to join the Union. The Thomases left Itawamba County, Mississippi, and headed toward Texas with only “six ponies, an old wagon and hack, a few dollars in money, . . . a tent, some bedding, a few articles of clothing, and a skillet and lid, besides a coffee pot and fry pan.” On Christmas day, the family crossed the Sabine River and that night “camped in TEXAS.” Two decades later, the Barclay family of Randolph County, Georgia, made a similar passage. They left home at the beginning of May 1868, “driving a yoke of oxen, that were drawing an old tobacco wagon” for which they “had paid \$300.” In addition, the family had a second wagon “loaded with the family and a lot of fixtures” piloted by “Robert 13 years old driving a mule team.” Although often cumbersome, overland travel provided an affordable means of covering great distances.³²

The Barclays experienced many of the hardships awaiting most migrants to Texas. The going, for instance, proved slow. As late as 1868, infrastructure in much of the South had not recovered from the Civil War. Consequently, the Barclays “traveled through a country . . . that the armies had over-ran. . . . The roads were awful, water in many places scarce.” In patriarch H. W. Barclay’s estimation, his party “made an

³² Thomas, *reminiscences*, p. 2 (first quote); H. W. Barclay, “*Reminiscences*,” unpublished, p. 43 (second quote), Barclay (H. W.) *Reminiscences*, undated, CAH.

average of about 12 miles a day and paid high for everything.” Indeed, as migrants to Texas moved beyond the Mississippi River, they became farther removed from markets than their territorial counterparts. The resulting lack of supply sustained high prices. In turn, Texas-bound settlers found it necessary to carry the household goods they would need—cookware, dishware, clothing, spinning wheels, guns, and furniture—with them from their points of origin. While that style of migration obviated the need for cash, it made for tedious travel. In 1859, for example, Belle Rogers’s family made a relatively short move from East Texas to the Denton County “in three wagons drawn by oxen, four to each wagon.” According to Rogers, “the move was very slow,” largely because the family transported finished lumber with them.³³

Adding to their difficulties, settlers traveling in summertime proved particularly vulnerable in the face of water shortages, and heat exhaustion took its toll on human and beast alike. By the time the Barclays arrived in Holly Springs, Mississippi, “the oldest oxen had given out.” A replacement could not be acquired locally, so the family continued at an even slower pace. Near Memphis, a Confederate veteran from Texas advised them that the journey would only get more difficult. He suggested they “sell out and take a boat to Shreveport,” which could then take them down the Red River. That option, while undoubtedly attractive, proved unfeasible, as “Sister Ad, who was afraid of water, would not agree.” With no good alternatives, the Barclays continued toward Texas.³⁴

³³ Barclay, “Reminiscences,” p. 43 (first and second quotes); Rogers, “Memoirs,” p. 23 (third quote).

³⁴ Barclay, “Reminiscences,” pp. 43 (first quote) and 44 (second and third quotes).

Lengthy migrations meant that life on the road typically involved a great deal of patience and routine. James Griffing's Kansas-bound party adopted a common routine. "The routine of the day is something like the following," he told his wife from the road. "Arise at 4 oclock, feed the horses, water & curry them, roll up the bed clothes, tie them. Make preparations for breakfast," he continued, "eat heartily, then take down our tent. Stow away all our things and journey on." Ordinarily, Griffing's party would "stop under some refreshing shade to wait for dinner" if the opportunity allowed. According to the minister, he and his companions rarely stopped at houses, opting instead to camp "near some convenient place for wood and water." In the evenings the group would "build a large fire, take care of our horses, whilst the ladies are preparing . . . supper. After family evening prayer," he continued, the travelers would "gather around . . . and with appetites sharpened by the exercise of the day eat with a relish that a King might covet." The migrants repeated that routine daily for weeks until reaching their destination.³⁵

Griffing's description of a typical day in the life of his traveling party offers insight about the migration experience. A form of everyday ritual, the daily routine—particularly for those traveling over land—aided in identity formation. Settlers symbolically left homes behind each day as the group took down tents and prepared to move. Trivial matters fell by the wayside as the homesteader mindset took hold; settlers became preoccupied with ensuring access to vital resources, such as fuel and water, and

³⁵ [James Griffing] to [J. Augusta Goodrich], 25 October 1854 (first quote), James Sayer Griffing Collection, KHS; [James Griffing] to [J. Augusta Goodrich], 15 October 1854 (second quote), James Sayer Griffing Collection, KHS.

the well-being of their draft animals. They gathered around a large fire in the evenings to pray and enjoy the meal that punctuated each day. The exclusion of those outside the traveling party reinforced the ritual nature of the migration and drew ever-sharper distinctions between homesteaders and others. After weeks of travel, settlers may have scarcely noticed their gradual transformations. Nonetheless, repeated participation in the everyday rituals of migration gave men and women traveling west membership in an “imagined community” before even reaching the plains.³⁶

Northerners bound for Texas, though less common, experienced migrations similar to those of southern travelers. Charles Moore, a native of Illinois, trekked from the Midwest to Texas in 1856. Along with two friends, Moore rode a horse-pulled buggy to his destination. By the time the men reached Arkansas, the roads varied in quality, and even the slightest shower made the worst of them impassible. High rivers proved similarly unfordable, and the men relied on ferries to cross anything larger than a stream. Nonetheless, Moore and his associates had company while trudging westward. In late October 1856, he noted that his party “passed lots of movers today going to Texas, as we have done most every day since we started.” Although southerners migrating to Texas in the late antebellum period outpaced northerners, the latter group arrived in significant numbers, particularly in the northern part of the state.³⁷

International migrants joined the domestic variety in moving west. The allure of inexpensive land and seemingly unbounded opportunity drew many Europeans to the

³⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 1991); Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

³⁷ Moore, diary, 8 October 1856 and 21 October 1856 (quote).

plains. Englishman John Jackson, for example, sought emigration to Texas with his family in 1848. Working through the Texas Emigration & Land Company, Jackson purchased 320 acres for a mere £2, an unthinkable proposition in his native land.³⁸

Crossing an ocean, however, added another layer of difficulty to western journeys. Like many other nineteenth century immigrants from Europe, the family of Louis and Minna Steffens reached America by sailboat. Their vessel, the *Georg*, extended 180 feet from bow to stern, had a crew of 27, and carried 500 passengers across the Atlantic Ocean. The relatively wealthy Steffenses could afford first class accommodations and the associated perks, such as better quarters and larger rations of food. No amount of money, however, could entirely insulate them from the voyage's difficulties. Their first day at sea, Louis noted that "towards evening the wind grew stronger and the ship vibrated more. The much feared sea-sickness took hold . . . and we could hear sighing and moaning from every corner." The second day offered no respite, and "was for all . . . a gruesome day. . . . All asked for tea and medicine, but nothing helped. . . . No one cared for one another. All lay . . . on the deck or in the cabin and would have returned right away for the Father Land if they could." Several days later, Minna similarly recorded that she had felt "very ill with seasickness. It is a misery that cannot be described." The same debilitating symptoms overwhelmed the family matriarch, as she "felt so bad as never in my life. I could not think of anything, my

³⁸ Wm. S. Peters to Henry Oliver Hedgcoxe, 22 March 1848, Mathis Family Papers, 1849-1878, CAH.

senses were like dead. I believe if the waves had swallowed us we would have taken our fate without any feeling.”³⁹

Indeed, the emotional toll taken by migration could be multifaceted and severe. In addition to battling fear, many struggled with homesickness. The extended duration of the Steffens family’s journey allowed a great deal of idle time to think about the lives they had left behind. Soon after setting sail, Louis remarked on “another sad day” as his “thoughts flew back to the Fatherland . . . to loved ones, to the quiet beautiful places in the Black Forest.” Minna harbored similar sentiments, confessing she had “enjoyed much happiness and pleasure” in her native land. Particular milestones made homesickness nearly unavoidable. Good Friday stirred memories of home, as did “the first day of the wonderful spring month,” which sparked images of “the German woods and fields like a fairyland.” Memories of home also came from unexpected corners, such as the evening when Louis “watched the beautiful sky. The constellation, ‘the big bear,’ . . . also the north star and more are old friends . . . from the old country.” For Minna, few things evoked memory quite like fragrance. Passing by “the beautiful Island of Domingo” toward the end of the voyage, she noted that the “aromatic island brought back to me lilac, laburum and acacia, and with that, I remember my beloved people at home.”⁴⁰

Further aggravating frayed nerves and low spirits, passengers on the *Georg* endured a torturously slow pace. They waited ten days before the ship even left port,

³⁹ Louis Steffens, “Voyage to America,” 31 March 1860 (first quote) and 1 April 1860 (second quote); Minna Von Moeller Steffens, diary, entry for 4 April 1860 (third quote), Steffans (Louis) Diary, 1860-1863, CAH.

⁴⁰ Louis Steffens, “Voyage to America,” 2 April 1860 (first quote), 6 April 1860 (third quote), and 22 May 1860 (fifth quote); Minna Steffens, diary, 31 March 1860 (second quote) and 31 May 1860 (fifth quote).

and the men, women, and children aboard could only wait for “favorable wind” that would allow them to set sail for New Orleans. Once underway, the wind remained unreliable; the *Georg* lingered in the North Sea after a week of sailing. Weeks later, Louis observed that “the Captain seems to be in a sad mood. We are about six weeks on the ship and according to calculations, we should be at our place of destination.” Instead of closing in on New Orleans, however, the ship continued to trudge across the Atlantic in what Louis fairly described as “a tedious affair.” A month later, the ship had still not entered the Gulf of Mexico. “We have had . . . unfavorable winds and the trip is taking much longer than expected,” Minna complained. “We . . . are longing to be on land.” Louis concurred, likening their situation to a “prison” from which they saw “nothing but sky and water.” The Steffens’s trial of endurance came to an end on June 5, 1860, as they reached New Orleans after 79 days at sea.⁴¹

Irrespective of how travelers reached the West, nearly all relied on the hospitality of strangers. Many finished their journeys in dire straits: out of food, out of money, and in poor health. Particularly when populations remained very small, hospitality served the important purpose of quickly integrating new people into the community. Hillary Bedford recalled that in 1850 his family’s “hearts were gladdened by the kind and hospitable reception accorded” by the citizens of Dallas, “among whom we expected to make our future home.” As a result, the Bedford clan “soon felt at home in this new land, notwithstanding its wild appearance.”⁴²

⁴¹ Louis Steffens, “Voyage to America,” 4 April 1860 (first quote), 26 April 1860 (second quote), and 20 May 1860 (fourth quote); Minna Steffens, diary, 18 May 1860 (third quote).

⁴² Hillory G. Bedford, unpublished reminiscences, (1905), p. 1 (all quotes), Bedford (Hillory G.) Reminiscences, undated, CAH.

At times hospitality served more important functions than raising spirits. It could save lives. By the time H. W. Barclay and family reached Red River County, Texas, they were “all sick . . . out of money,” and prepared “to give it up.” In desperation, Barclay approached a small cabin occupied by a lone woman. According to the traveler, she “was surprised, but she took in the situation, and having a heart within, went to work to make us as comfortable as possible.” Soon thereafter, the kind woman’s husband helped with the Barclays’s mules and wagons then “went for the Doctor.” In Barclay’s estimation, the couple’s kindness came at some personal cost but proved typical. “These were only poor tenants,” he explained, “and from these kind, the poor all along the way, we were never denied a favor, or was one rendered us grudgingly.”⁴³

Many viewed hospitality as a civic duty. Years after the frontier had bypassed Cooke County, Belle Rogers remembered her mother wondering how the family had managed such generosity in their one-room “cabin with a dirt floor.” As a child, Belle often found the chores associated with providing hospitality mentally and physically taxing. “I was so crowded by work and by people that I scarcely knew what to do. When the burden got too heavy, I often went over the high bank near the house, sat on a tree root, and prayed for patience,” she explained. “No task was thought too difficult for me to accomplish, and usually I succeeded after a fashion.” Relief came as neighbors achieved solid footing. “As the country settled up,” Rogers explained, “people did not expect so much of us. There were others to help take care of the moving traffic.” That traffic, however, did not subside completely until well after the Civil War. “In 1874

⁴³ Barclay, “Reminiscences,” p. 45 (all quotes).

people would still come and go,” according to Rogers, who claimed the family “still kept an open house” at that late date.⁴⁴

Neither Texas nor the South, for that matter, had cornered the market on hospitality during the late antebellum period. Northern travelers availed themselves of northern hospitality that differed little from that offered in southern households. If anything, a more dynamic economy tempered hospitality in the North. Northern migrants carried cash more often than their southern counterparts, and northern towns—particularly those with commercial ports and railroad stations—typically offered hotels, restaurants, and taverns. As northerners moved west, however, the number and quality of commercial accommodations decreased, and virtually none existed in the territory outside of Lawrence and Atchison prior to 1856.

Once in Kansas, new settlers—particularly those unaffiliated with emigration companies—frequently relied on the generosity of those who came before them. As late as 1857, the territory had “no regular places for accommodating travellers,” forcing settlers “to lay in a heavy dinner where ever . . . we could get some.” Elizabeth Simpson Cooper recalled her family’s voyage from Steubenville, Ohio, to Kansas in the spring of 1857 and their reliance on the hospitality of strangers. During their journey to Manhattan, they found lodging with farmers who Cooper described as “kind and good. They had prepared themselves to lodge the travelers,” she explained, a fortuitous development given that “the prairies were bleak and cold.” In general, the Coopers “were fortunate in getting lodging. People gave us good meals.” That hospitality

⁴⁴ Rogers, “Memoirs,” pp. 27 (first quote), 114 (second quote), 115 (third quotes), and 124 (fourth quote).

became a trademark of life on the plains and launched a culture of mutual aid that came to characterize both Kansas and Texas.⁴⁵

Westward journeys proved arduous for most, even under the best of circumstances. Reaching the plains from east of the Mississippi River required patience, stamina, and help. Most benefitted from hospitality along the way and after arriving at their new homes. That hospitality allowed thousands to migrate successfully, but as importantly it laid the foundation for the societies that would emerge in Kansas and northern Texas. Those societies emphasized mutual aid and cooperation, and they encouraged homesteaders to see themselves as a single group with a common interest.

* * *

The motivations and expectations of settlers reveal a great deal about the men and women who settled on the plains of Kansas Territory and Texas in the latter half of the 1850s. Both those seeking fresh starts and those seeking financial gain need not have settled in the West; indeed, homesteaders may have constituted a minority of those who changed residence in the final years of antebellum America. This trend suggests that those who homesteaded had high tolerances for hard work, adversity, and risk. Although a range of people went west, the great majority hoped to farm. They harbored no illusions about the risk and hard work involved with sculpting farms from virgin soil. At the same time, they remained optimistic that sacrifices made at the onset would prove worthwhile in time. Despite sometimes incomplete or incorrect information about the plains, those who went believed they could meet both known and unknown challenges.

⁴⁵ [Joseph H. Trego] to My Dear Wife [Alice], 16 October 1857 (first quote), Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; Cooper, "My Life," March 1857 (second quote).

Importantly, hard times would not be faced alone. When calamity struck, settlers expected they would be able to count on neighbors for support. In turn, they realized obligations to help in kind.

The migration experience made considerably shaped homesteader identities. Although several methods of reaching Kansas Territory and Texas existed, thousands shared experiences that fostered a sense of nationhood. Many traveled the same poor roads, slept on the same hard ground, and overcame, as best they could, the same confusions produced by their new surroundings. By the time they reached their destinations, homesteaders knew something of the work ethic, determination, and tolerance for risk their neighbors had brought from the East. The difficulty and cost of migrating west, moreover, discouraged the faint of heart and the poor, filtering out those with the least commitment and fewest resources.

Perhaps more importantly, men and women en route to Kansas Territory and Texas in the 1850s received object lessons in the perils of self-reliance. As their homes receded ever farther beyond the eastern horizon, settlers increasingly relied on the good will of strangers. That good will took many shapes, including warm meals, shelter from the elements, and information about terrain not yet covered. Such assistance fostered trust between relative strangers, a characteristic of western culture that likely accelerated social development. That trust manifested in mutual aid. Reciprocated kindness and fair dealings among neighbors characterized both Kansas Territory and Texas and help explain the communal ethos of those who later seized the Populist banner.

CHAPTER III

NEW PLACES

When migrants reached the plains in the late antebellum era, much seemed unfamiliar. The West produced a more heterogeneous population than other regions of the US. According to one new Texan, settlers “were cosmopolitan in that they were from every where and every one bringing the customs and habits of the people from where they came.” Although migrants tended to settle nearest those who seemed most familiar, they inevitably conducted business, attended church, and became neighborly with people from different backgrounds. Areas untouched by white settlement, furthermore, offered natural resources in abundance. New varieties of flora and fauna greeted settlers in both regions, and fertile prairies nourished most varieties of crops farmers and horticulturalists transplanted from their native lands.⁴⁶

Settlers encountered formidable obstacles to success as well. Weather patterns in northern Texas and Kansas Territory differed from those in much of the East and South. Most homesteaders immediately recognized the plains as an arid region, which raised concerns about its long-term prospects. Despite the importance of precipitation, other aspects of the climate challenged settlers as well. Even in wet years, temperatures on the plains regularly exceeded 100° F, making life uncomfortable at best. Winters could be worse, as snow and ice blanketed the countryside, and strong winds amplified the effects

⁴⁶ Hillory G. Bedford, “Bring Up the Past and Enjoy It at the Present,” unpublished reminiscences, (ca. 1912), p. 2 (first quote), Bedford (Hillory G.) Reminiscences, undated, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (hereafter CAH).

of cold temperatures. The climates of both regions produced blizzards, thundershowers, hail, and other fierce storms, and when disaster struck, settlers turned to their neighbors for help. Indeed, hardships created by a challenging climate and widespread scarcity fostered a strong sense of community. Settlers came to see neighbors as hard-working, reliable, and fundamentally good people who could be trusted in an emergency and who deserved the same trust in return. By the 1880s, trust built over generations facilitated cooperative efforts between farmers seeking to improve their lots.

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People traveled to Kansas Territory and Texas from across the eastern U.S. and many parts of Europe. Migrants ranged considerably in terms of class, occupation, and disposition. As one observer noted in St. Louis in 1857, “Here all classes mingle. Ladies bloming in beauty, gaudy & sweeping in jewelry & hoops. The hardy emigrant with anxious look. Wealthy planters & servants. Ministers, infidels, vicious, virtuous, rude & gentle.” Most often, however, homesteaders emigrated from states between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. Kansans typically came from the midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Non-slaveholding southerners—primarily Missourians, Kentuckians, and Tennesseans—settled in the territory with equal fervor. Few arrived from the Lower South, in contrast, for one simple reason: the fate of slavery remained uncertain in the territory through 1860. Slaveholders loathed the prospect of relocating their human property to a region full of abolitionists, particularly given the volatile strain of abolitionist drawn there. William Lloyd Garrison and his

newspaper, after all, remained in Boston throughout the late antebellum period. John Brown and his broadsword went to Kansas.⁴⁷

Although New Englanders played significant roles in the territory's early history, their enthusiasm for Kansas waned after 1858. That year witnessed the final deaths in the ordeal of Bleeding Kansas and the adoption of a free-state constitution. By 1865, New Englanders constituted less than five percent of the state's population. In contrast, foreign-born settlers comprised more than ten percent of the state's population by that date. Other regions and states contributed more to the Kansas's population than popular memory might suggest. Missouri, for example, produced almost twice as many Kansans (20,817) as second place Ohio (11,217). Those numbers undermine simplistic depictions of Missourians. Rather than migrating to Kansas for political reasons, many sought the new homes there for the same reasons as settlers from other states. Missouri provided the territory a quasi in-state population that accelerated early settlement.⁴⁸

As in Kansas Territory, migrants to northern Texas tell a complex story. The Upper South contributed significantly to the region. Missourians composed the single largest group in the region, followed by Tennesseans. The Midwest contributed significant numbers, as well. In Dallas County, for example, more settlers hailed from Illinois than any other state in 1850. Some cross-sectional settlers left the state upon the secession vote in 1861, but most remained in their new homes, casting their lots with the Confederacy. Fewer arrived from the Atlantic seaboard, and migrants from the Lower

⁴⁷ G. W. Paddock, diary, entry for 4 April 1857 (first quote), G. W. Paddock Diary Transcript, 1857-1861, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter KSRL); James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 10.

⁴⁸ Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains*, pp. 10-1.

South generally settled in more familiar East Texas. Western counties also drew from the in-state population. Whites began moving into Texas in substantial numbers in the 1820s, and thirty years later a younger generation of Texans sought out new opportunities on the state's vast line of settlement. By 1850, about fifteen percent of those living in northern Texas hailed from the state.⁴⁹

The physically demanding nature of homesteading—combined with middle class sensibilities distinguishing “men’s work” from “women’s work”—skewed demographics in the West. Gender imbalance proved common in both states before the Civil War. As of 1860, males constituted about 54 percent of the population in both northern Texas and Kansas Territory. Put another way, for every 100 males, there were only 85 females. In contrast, males made up only 51 percent of the national population, creating a ratio of 96 females per 100 males. A more detailed look at census figures reveals differing degrees of gender imbalance among age groups. Children and teenagers, for example, demonstrated the least imbalance, with boys constituting an identical percentage (50.82) in both states. A greater disparity appeared among young adults. Men made up nearly 59 percent of the 20-39 age group, meaning for every 100 young men there were only 70 young women. Further exacerbating the problem, populations skewed toward the young. Men in their twenties represented the largest age group and became twice as plentiful as all people over the age of 50, who comprised less than five percent of the population.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Terry G. Jordan, “Population Origins in Texas, 1850,” *Geographical Review* 59 (January 1969): 83-103.

⁵⁰ Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp 158-61 and 472-80.

Settlers recognized the gender imbalance that characterized the West. Many worked to rectify the problem, hoping to reduce the number of single young men carousing around towns by increasing the number of single young women. G. W. Paddock of Burlingame, Kansas Territory, observed “the young gentlemen here are very attentive to the wants of the young ladies who are ‘rara avis’ in this region.” Having come west with the NEEAC, Paddock considered suggesting “to Br Shurtleff the propriety of escorting a company of ladies westward in his next move in securing immigration.” Many women needed little convincing to make that move. Anna Randolph noted “quite a widowed set on board” the steamboat she took down the Ohio River in 1858. “Out of 14 Lady passengers,” she explained, “we have 7 widows. Most of them are going west, (to hunt husbands I suppose).” Kansan Elisha Mayo came to believe that midwestern women might be better suited to western life than their eastern sisters. “This country can’t help but grow if people keep coming from Iowa & Ill like they do now,” he wrote his wife from Douglas County. “The women from Ill, Ia, Mo are coarse enough I can tell you,” he explained, as “they go barefoot, milk the cows, and suckle calves.” In addition to their sturdiness, he deemed the “very fruitful” women from Iowa and Illinois prolific child bearers. “There is a family living on a claim adjoining ours,” he told his wife, “that have twelve girls and three boys, and I think it a fair sample.” Once children born in Kansas and northern Texas outnumbered immigrants to those areas gender ratios even out, but until then imbalances created a surplus of bachelors.⁵¹

⁵¹ Paddock, diary, 22 April 1857 (first quote); Anna Margaret Watson Randolph, diary, entry for 22

Women brought different cultural elements west than did men. Just as men living in a near vacuum of judicial authority sometimes believed it necessary to dispense vigilante justice, so too did women living in near vacuums of spiritual and educational authorities believe it necessary to provide moral clarity, particularly for children. Belle Rogers recalled her mother dispensing a wide range of advice and opinion from their Cooke County homestead. “Mother always spoke of father as ‘Mr. Stevens,’” Rogers remembered. “I can’t remember of ever hearing Ma speak to Pa in any other way.” Rogers further explained that “he, too, addressed Ma as ‘Mrs. Stevens’ in speaking to her.” That respect for elders and formalized hierarchy extended beyond child-parent interactions. Rogers’s mother insisted that the children “rise and stand until the guests were seated” for dinner and “when receiving an introduction, always rise and bow.” The matriarch, moreover, “thought that gentlemen should wear coats at dinner.” Rogers witnessed her “Mother send more than one man a coat before he took a seat with us at our table.” One anecdote illustrates the influences of both gender and age inside the home. After Belle married Newt Rogers, her mother moved in with the newlyweds. One morning Newt “sat down to breakfast” even though “he had not even put his top shirt on.” Belle remembered he “had on a knit undershirt,” to which her mother replied “in that very emphatic tone she sometimes used: ‘Newt, please put your clothes on before eating breakfast with your wife and daughters.’” Although Newt acquiesced, Belle recalled, once “Mother’s word was spoken.” Newt’s unacceptable behavior “was

August 1858 (second quote), Anna Margaret Watson Randolph Collection, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KHS); [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 28 May 1855 (quotes three, four, and five), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL.

never repeated while Mother was in our house.” In short, women enforced a gentility on the plains that eluded many men.⁵²

A small number of women moved west for reasons wholly unrelated to husbands and children, however. Some found opportunities that may not have existed in older states. Kansas proved particularly ripe territory for women seeking influence outside the home. Although abolitionists constituted a small percent of the population, their conspicuous presence attracted those who—in the mold of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott—traveled in the interlocking circles of abolition, temperance, and women’s rights. Elisha Mayo, in addition to meeting women intent on filling the territory with their progeny, met women seeking a vocal role in the nascent society. While sailing up the Missouri, he attended a lecture on women’s rights delivered by fellow traveler and noted activist Clarina Nichols. “She is now taking her husband to Kansas to locate on a farm,” he told his wife. “This is her second trip to Ks. Her first trip was made to explore the country,” he continued, “and she liked so well that she came home for her husband.” Nichols particularly impressed Mayo when he “saw her name among the list of emigrants: it was appropriately written ‘Mrs Nichols, husband and two sons.’” Nichols and similar women who settled in Kansas paved the way for other notable reformers who called the state home later in the century, including

⁵² Sarah Isabella Stephens Rogers, “Memoirs, 1850-1937,” unpublished, (1937), pp. 89-90 (all quotes), Belle Rogers Collection, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT).

the hatchet-wielding Carrie Nation and Populist lecturer Mary Elizabeth Lease. Those activists animated a vibrant culture of reform that characterized the state by 1890.⁵³

While people migrated west from all points east of the Mississippi River, distinct patterns emerged. Historians and other scholars examining immigrants to the U. S. have described the phenomenon of “chain migration,” defined as a “movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants.” Chain migration occurred along a continuum in Kansas Territory and northern Texas during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Settlers who travelled to the plains alone occupied one end of the continuum. Those intrepid souls relied heavily on luck and the good faith of strangers both while traveling to and starting a life on the plains. Settlers who traveled with institutional support, such as the NEEAC, occupied the opposite end of the continuum. Lawrence and Topeka, for example, grew to prominence due to the organized chain migration the company facilitated.⁵⁴

Good neighbors could be a settler’s greatest resource, and many settled near familiar faces, family when possible. According to church documents in Comanche County, Texas, the first white families arrived in 1855. By the end of that year, thirty-five families resided in Comanche County, nearly all from Mississippi and Georgia. Similarly, Belle Rogers noted that, by 1872, Cooke County, Texas, “was building up”

⁵³ [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], March 1855 (quotes), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, *Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909*, KSRL.

⁵⁴ John S. MacDonald and Leatrice D. MacDonald, “Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation, and Social Networks,” *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 42 (January 1964): p. 82.

with migrants “coming from North Carolina and Georgia. I often wondered if every family in North Carolina was kin to my man from North Carolina,” she remembered. “It seemed so.” In the absence of family, settlers forged kin-like relationships with neighbors. Settlers commonly referred to senior members of the community by the honorifics “uncle” or “auntie” irrespective of actual blood relation, demonstrating the importance settlers placed on being able to think of and rely on their neighbors as they would their families. Terms of kinship also suggest strong emotional bonds among settlers. Years after the frontier had passed by Texas and closed altogether, one man who had gone west as a child fondly recalled “the old frontiersmen and hunters” of the 1850s. He commented that “they were the kindest and most hospitable people in the world, ready to stand by their friends to the death,” suggesting the importance placed on cooperation and loyalty in Texas.⁵⁵

Strong bonds between neighbors notwithstanding, certain characteristics of the West encouraged antisocial behavior. Communities in the territory and in northern Texas, for instance, usually developed incrementally. Many waited years for schools, churches, courts, and other vestiges of American civilization to arrive in their neighborhoods. Without the full range of moderating influences in operation, young single men frequently gave in to their baser desires. According to Palo Pinto resident Jonathan Baker, for example, “the boys in town . . . gathered in groups engaged in

⁵⁵ Davis D. Hutchison, “A Short History of Comanche Co. Texas,” unpublished essay, (1884), p. 2, Comanche County Baptist Association Records, CAH; Rogers, “Memoirs,” p. 113 (first quote); Walter C. Cochran, “Story of the Early Days Indian Troubles and Cattle Business of Palo Pinto and Adjoining Counties,” unpublished reminiscences, (1930), p. 4, Cochran (Walter C) Reminiscences, CAH; Walter S. South, “Diary, 1860-1866,” entry for 31 January 1862, South (Walter S) Diaries, 1860-, CAH; Bedford, “The Past,” p. 51 (second quote).

various kinds of amusements, . . . left almost entirely to themselves, to grow up as abandoned as they may wish to become.” The ways in which young men debased themselves seemed endless to Baker, who found it deeply troubling. “A crowd was loafing about the streets,” he observed, “using profane language, throwing up ‘heads or tails’, for a dime a throw, and using such expressions as ‘I just got it by the jumping Jesus’ etc, etc.”⁵⁶

Paradoxically, the same lack of formal institutions that encouraged young men to gamble, swear, and disregard the Sabbath fostered tightly knit communities as well. Without the full complement of formal authorities—such as ministers, teachers, and law officers—in place, citizens often enforced informal codes of conduct. Those who failed to abide by the community’s social norms faced various degrees of censure, including expulsion. One such man named Gallup wore out his welcome in Palo Pinto, Texas, in early 1859. Just hours after being convicted for striking one man, Gallup started a fight with a second man. Some Palo Pinto residents “feared that serious injury would be done” if Gallup remained in town, and they enlisted the vigilance committee’s help. Two days later, they “succeeded in running out of the community an undesirable man.” Undesirables who did not present an imminent physical threat still faced expulsion, although on more favorable terms. I. W. Cox, for instance, threatened no one in Palo Pinto with violence but stood “accused of various cases of thieving and dishonesty.” In his case, area settlers gave the offender one month to leave the county. As with Gallup,

⁵⁶ Jonathan Hamilton Baker, “Diary 1858-1918,” entries for 10 May 1860 (first quote) and 3 September 1860 (second quote), Baker (Jonathan Hamilton) Papers, CAH.

people in the community united—in this case signing a petition—to remove unwanted influences.⁵⁷

Residents of Cooke County, Texas, similarly disciplined their own in an episode that detailed the administration of informal justice. Colin Ryburn, it seems, drank himself into a stupor one March night in 1858 and failed to navigate the crossing at Elm Creek on his way home. The following morning, his “body was found on the bank . . . having been drowned in trying to cross . . . when drunk.” Ryburn’s corpse arrived in town, where a third, apparently sober, man caught the “drunken fool” Baily Bolen disturbing it. In the ensuing confrontation, the men drew “guns and knives on each other.” The marshal intervened and, upon searching Bolen, “found Ryburns knife, spectacles, & desk key.” An arrest followed, but a dearth of judges in the West meant Bolen would not stand trial for weeks or months. Consequently, “Bolen was taken out of jail . . . by the mob & whipped severely & told to leave” the county. Authorities thwarted mob justice, however, when they again apprehended and incarcerated Bolen. Two months later, district court convened in Cooke County, and Bolen stood trial “for robbing Ryburns corps.” According to one settler, “many of the whippers left town” until the court adjourned, hoping to avoid retribution for their extralegal actions.⁵⁸

Another class of miscreants wreaked havoc on the plains professionally rather than recreationally. Confidence men found myriad ways to swindle newcomers who most relied on the kindness of strangers. A common scam involved claiming false

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 January 1859 (first quote), 21 January 1859 (second quote), and 19 February 1862 (third quote).

⁵⁸ Charles B. Moore, diary, entries for 17 March 1858 (first quote), 18 March 1858 (second quote), and 5 October 1858 (third quote), Moore Family Papers, UNT.

ownership of livestock and offering to “sell” it to unsuspecting settlers. More daring scoundrels fabricated more grandiose ruses. Robert Tovey, who traveled to Kansas Territory with a few dozen other men independently of the NEEAC, witnessed one daring man’s work in person. Unfortunately for the more naïve in the group, one of the party disingenuously claimed to be well connected, boasting personal relationships with the territorial governor, prominent businessmen in Kansas and New York City, federal Indian agents, and even a handful of Native American leaders. The grifter offered to start a company for the purpose of establishing a town, using his connections to ensure a favorable location and grease governmental wheels. Several in the traveling party literally bought into the endeavor only to realize months later that they had placed their trust in an untrustworthy man. By that time little could be done, and theirs became one of numerous cautionary tales warning settlers of manmade dangers in the West.⁵⁹

In the earliest days of white settlement on the plains, migrants from disparate locations and backgrounds worked to build new communities from scratch. Men significantly outnumbered women, a fact reflected in those nascent societies. Young men proved particularly prone to orneriness, and a lack of formal authority in sparsely settled areas left homesteaders to regulate poor behavior. While perhaps inconvenient, that situation promoted community formation. Citizens collectively determined which behaviors lay beyond the pale and how they would be punished. Vigilante justice

⁵⁹ Robert Atkins Tovey, “A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory Written by an Actual Settler,” unpublished essay, (ca. 1856), pp. 18-34, *A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory Written by an Actual Settler*, KSRL.

subsided as courts and lawmen became more common, but it facilitated the cooperative thinking that became endemic to Kansas and Texas by the 1880s.

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Kentucky millwright Charles Moore passed through East Texas in October 1856 on his way to Fort Worth. The number of “lumber wagons . . . going . . . to the Westron counties” caught Moore’s attention. “We are told,” he explained, “there is no more pine west of here.” The dramatic change in scenery struck most southerners. Shortleaf pine dominated much of the southern landscape in a belt stretching from northern Virginia through East Texas, where forests suddenly gave way to open plains and offered an unmistakable visual cue. Settlers had entered a different world. Plains landscapes often seemed as foreign to homesteaders as their new neighbors. The soil seemed promising, as it nourished endless acres of lush grassland. On the other hand, trees proved scarce; the first settlers wondered if the lack of timber would ultimately limit migration. Weather often played an unexpectedly adversarial role, as well. Extreme temperatures, violent storms, and erratic weather patterns made farming a tenuous endeavor. Yet hard times also created substantial opportunities for community building. Natural disasters forged close bonds and created patterns of reciprocity between neighbors.⁶⁰

Settlers coming from points east of the Mississippi River proved unaccustomed to the prairies they found in Kansas Territory and Texas. At first glance, tall grasses and gently rolling landscapes suggested a promising environment. A lack of trees meant a scarcity of lumber, but it also minimized the effort needed to clear fields, a welcome

⁶⁰ Moore, diary, 27 October 1856.

change for those arriving from the East. “We have a fine country here,” Moses Sessions wrote from Linn County, Kansas Territory, in 1858. “The perary is Smooth and ritch rather roaling with frequent revenes.” G. W. Paddock, who “travelled all day over beautiful rolling prairies” in April 1857, agreed, calling them “the finest I have ever beheld.” Offering a similar assessment of Young County in northern Texas, Jonathan Baker described the land as “generally undulating and covered with fine mesquite grass. The lands are good,” he proclaimed, “and the country is bound to be populous and productive, when its resources are properly developed.” Hillory Bedford put it more succinctly, believing “that the ‘promised land’ could hardly have surpassed this new country.”⁶¹

The great majority of settlers in both states farmed, and they understood their fortunes hinged largely on the weather. For that reason, many, such as Kansan Noah Cameron, considered the plains’ climate ideal for agriculture. “I have been here since Oct/54,” he wrote a friend in his native New York. “I know a little of the country and climate and acknowledge that there can be fault found with both. . . . But to speek the truth,” he continued, “both country and climate is much preferable to New York. I could not be induced to exchange my claim here,” he concluded, “for any farm that could be purchased for three thousand dollars in New York.” Many men and women, however, cast their dice against a geographic barrier known as the 20”-rainfall line. Running roughly along the 98th meridian, the line signaled entry to the Great Plains. More than

⁶¹ Moses C. Sessions to Dear Sir, 1 October 1858 (first quote), Frank Walker, Miscellaneous, Collection, KHS; Paddock, diary, 15 April 1857 (second quote); Baker, “Diary,” 9 December 1860 (third quote); Hillory G. Bedford, unpublished reminiscences, (1905), p. 3 (fourth quote), Bedford (Hillory G.) Reminiscences, undated, CAH.

twenty inches of rain fell annually on lands east of the line, making them suitable for agriculture without the aid of modern irrigation. West of the line, rainfall averaged less than twenty inches per year. While that scant amount sustained grasses and wildlife that had evolved on the plains, crops and livestock domesticated by farmers in the East simply needed more water to survive. In good years, the right amount of rain fell at the right times, and bumper crops followed. In bad years, small rainfall totals or excessive rainfall at the wrong time limited yields to subsistence levels. In the worst years, no rain fell at all.⁶²

Settlers bound for Kansas Territory or northern Texas generally traveled in the spring, which gave them time to prepare homes and food stores before winter. Summer followed soon after their arrivals, and high temperatures often alarmed newcomers. In the midst of 1860's severe drought, Kansan G. W. Paddock once recorded a temperature of 104° F in Wyandotte—at nine o'clock in the evening. July and August temperatures in the territory regularly reached triple digits, but while the dog days of summer could be oppressively hot, many migrants willingly traded midwestern and northeastern winters for Kansan summers. Paddock reported "emigration . . . very brisk" to the area surrounding Burlingame in 1857. "Teams are pouring in from Iowa," he continued, explaining that people were "hasting away from the long & very severe winters of the climate, choosing the risks of a free or slave state for the sake of a milder climate."

⁶² Noah Cameron to Bradford R. Wood, 30 April 1856, William Barnes Collection, KHS.

Harriet Clark, albeit from Wisconsin, similarly enjoyed leaving midwestern winters behind, and “her letters glowed with her descriptions of the climate” in Kansas.⁶³

Texas’s more subtropical weather offered longer, slightly warmer summers than those in Kansas. Even homesteaders acclimated to southern summers could find themselves consistently overwhelmed. “Hot weather,” Jonathan Baker noted on July 6, 1858. “The hottest I ever experienced.” The following day he again complained to his diary, “hot, hotter, hottest. Enough to cook eggs in the sand in a few minutes. Were it not for the breezes that stir,” he believed, “suffocation would be inevitable.” Two weeks later, the heat had not relented and had become “very oppressive.” Baker found August no more comfortable than July. “It was almost unbearably hot today,” he lamented in mid-month. “Indeed, I never in my life suffered from it as I did today.” For homesteaders unaccustomed to extreme temperatures, summers proved uncomfortable and dangerous.⁶⁴

Winter on the plains could be as harsh as summer and even more deadly. Many new Kansans proved unprepared for the worst that plains winters could muster, as Mother Nature played a cruel joke on the first settlers in the territory. Expecting milder winters at lower latitudes, many mistook the unseasonably warm winter of 1854-5 as typical. One travel guide author suggested—based on that single year of settlement—that winters were “short, commencing usually about the month of November . . . and ending in February; . . . although at times, the weather is severely cold, it seldom

⁶³ Paddock, diary, 2 August 1860 and 15 May 1857 (first quote); Harriet Naomi Clark, unpublished reminiscences, p. 18 (second quote), Sarah Goss Clark Papers, KSRL.

⁶⁴ Baker, “Diary,” 6 July 1858 (first quote), 7 July 1858 (second quote), 21 July 1858 (third quote), and 22 August 1858 (fourth quote).

continues so more than two days at any one period. . . . Snow seldom falls to a depth of three inches; and it is very soon melted by the sun.” The following winter made liars of the ignorant. By the spring of 1856, no one doubted the Kansas winter’s capacity to project misery. Samuel Adair of Osawatomie offered a bleak account of the winter’s fury. “The past winter has been one of the severest ever known in this region,” he reported. “Mercury at different times fell here to 28 degrees below zero.”

Compounding difficulties, the drop in temperature surprised settlers. “The suddenness & severity of the cold,” he explained, “made it very hard on man & beast. Animals, tame & wild, in some instances froze to death.” He concluded with examples of “a crow, a blue jay, & some other birds . . . frozen fast on limbs of trees.” Elisha Mayo provided an equally dreary account of the winter’s fury in a letter to his wife, still in Massachusetts. “I have never suffered half as much from cold before,” he told her, as he insisted she “must come into the heart of the country, far away from salt water . . . to see old winter in all his glory.”⁶⁵

Rudimentary houses, moreover, offered only nominal protection from the elements. Falling temperatures forced humidity from the air, consequently shrinking lumber used to build homes. “Such apologies for houses!” Elisha Mayo exclaimed. “Think of living in such weather in a shake board house, a perfect sieve without underpinning.” He described one particular night when he experienced “a cold wind

⁶⁵ George Walter, *History of Kansas, also Information Regarding Routes, Laws, &c.* (New York: New York Kansas League, 1855), p. 5 (first quote); Samuel Adair to Free Mission Sewing Society of the First Congregational Church in South Brookfield Massachusetts, 1856, Samuel and Florella Adair Collection, KHS (second quote); [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 19 January 1856 (third quote), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL.

from the North followed in the night by a snow storm.” The next morning he and his roommate “found the bed covered with a thin layer of snow. . . . The bed would have been a snow bank if I had not hung up sheets about it.” In the two weeks that followed, the men suffered “intensely cold weather. The mercury is said to have fallen to 27 below zero,” he told his wife, but it seemed “it might have been 50 below.” Beyond temperature, Mayo provided vivid examples of the misery. “Water froze within a foot of the stove,” he related, “and we are kept constantly employed replenishing the fire.” Even a constant fire could not warm the home, however. After partitioning the cabin with quilts hung from the rafters and stuffing rags into gaps in the walls, Mayo still suffered “frozen . . . heels while trying to warm my toes at the stove.” The weather also influenced his diet. “It is no use trying to rise yeast bread,” he glumly offered, “it just freezes under the stove, so I make unbolted wheat cakes & hasty pudding and we have frozen beef.” All of this he could relate to his wife because the weather had warmed slightly, thawing the ink in his pen for the first time in days.⁶⁶

The temperatures in northern Texas seldom registered below zero, but winters there could also prove stern. “I thought in coming to Texas to escape severe winters,” Jonathan Baker wrote in December 1858. Contrary to his liking, however, winter set in “as cold as it ever was in Virginia.” Belle Rogers’s family faced similar difficulties. “Our first winter was almost unbearable,” she recalled, “one of Texas’ worst.” She believed “it seemed more trouble” for her clan, as they “were not used to the open

⁶⁶ [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 9 January 1856 (all quotes), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL.

prairie. Cattle drifted—many were never recovered, including one pair of Pa’s fine ox teams. Cold continued so long,” according to Rogers, “the bread supply ran short.” The Gordon family’s ill-fated migration to Texas failed due to similarly severe weather. In the mid-1850s, Mary Gordon remembered, her father explored unorganized lands north of Waco for favorable homestead locations. Wearing only “blankets with a hole cut in the center to put their heads through, . . . woolen leggings around their legs and boots, and heavy underwear,” the elder Gordon and his party paid dearly for underestimating the potential for bad weather. “A blizzard struck them,” Mary recalled. “There were no houses to lodge in, so they traveled forty miles in the sleet and rain to get home.” The weather took a severe toll on Mr. Gordon’s health, and local doctors could do little. Seeing no alternatives, Gordon’s father “sold his land and went back to Alabama.” He never fully recovered from his bout with the Texas winter and died six months later.⁶⁷

Unfortunate or unprepared settlers faced equally dire outcomes on the Kansas plains. Franklin Crane entered the territory two day before spring in 1855 searching for a claim to purchase. “When we got into the open Prairie,” he related, “the cold seemed to increase, & steady strong wind with the snow made it exceedingly uncomfortable.” As night fell, one man in the group “cried, thinking his feet were frozen, but worst of all was the prospect of being obliged to camp out at night, for we had taken the wrong road and were in a measure lost.” The trio fortunately received unexpected assistance from a passing Native American, who offered them shelter in his small cabin. G. W. Paddock

⁶⁷ Baker, “Diary,” 8 December 1858 (first quote); Rogers, “Memoirs,” p. 34 (second quote); Mary Bouhanan Gordon, “The Story of the Life of Mary Bouhanan Gordon,” unpublished reminiscences, (1932), p. 4 (third quote), Gordon (Mary Bouhanan) Reminiscences, 1848-1932, CAH.

similarly detailed the travails of a scouting party he traveled with in April 1857. An early spring cold front caught the men unprepared, as they were “overtaken by a drizzling rain hurled furiously . . . by the fierce onset of old Boreas, who seems to come fresh from his frosty mountain home.” The travelers slept on the ground that night and awoke blanketed in ice. The expedition burned through its firewood well before sunrise, leaving little choice but to resume their journey with “ice jeweled grass crackling beneath our tread and the fierce blasts chilling the very marrow of our creaking bones.”⁶⁸

Exacerbating extreme temperatures in summer and winter, strong winds also plagued homesteaders. The open plains terrain, largely devoid of trees or other natural barriers, allowed winds to blow unencumbered for hundreds of miles before reaching the line of white settlement. Average wind speeds on the plains surpassed those found in most parts of the South and East. On a daily basis, this meant farmers had to solve new problems, such as how to properly shelter vulnerable bodies, protect personal property, or maintain even a veneer of cleanliness. John Brown, writing his wife and children from Osawatomie, complained that for “nearly Six Weeks . . . the Snow has been almost constantly driven (like dry Sand) by the fierce Winds of Kansas.” High winds, moreover, plagued homesteaders year round. “It is strange about the wind,” German expatriate Minna Steffens noted from her Texas home. “In summer, we have a strong wind from the south,” she explained, “and at times, the wind is very fierce. Only yesterday it uprooted the corn and carried it as high in the air as a bird can fly.” Even when not damaging property, the wind could be a nuisance. “We are pushed with a

⁶⁸ Franklin Loomis Crane, “Diary, Franklin Loomis Crane,” entry for 19 March 1855 (first quote), Franklin Loomis Crane Collection, KHS; Paddock, diary, 17 April 1857 (second quote).

tremendous south wind, perhaps the most severe we have yet experienced,” G. W. Paddock noted in May 1857. “Dirtier men are seldom seen than were we after our days work was done,” he opined, “the dust flying at a terribly blinding rate.”⁶⁹

The wind periodically generated greater concern, particularly in conjunction with storms that could ravage homesteads. While “plowing garden” one mid-spring day in 1857, Paddock experienced “the wind blowing a perfect hurricane . . . raising the dust till our eyes & nose are absolutely clogged.” He described the rain “whirling against us, for storms here do not come down but come wheeling against one horizontally.” Elisha Mayo described similar weather to his wife. “I never saw it rain as it does here,” he explained. “We don’t have such long storms as at the East, but the rain falls in showers accompanied by heavy thunder and sharp lightening.” Even close proximity to shelter could prove unsatisfactory, as few western homes proved weather-tight.⁷⁰

When homesteaders reached the plains, they encountered a climate that differed from any found in the East. Extreme temperatures and powerful, persistent winds generated unforeseen hardships. Common misery proved fertile ground for new friendships, and neighbors worked together to overcome obstacles. By the 1880s, farmers could build formidable organizations that relied on cooperation largely because of the culture of mutual aid established during the late antebellum era.

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⁶⁹ John Brown [Sr.] to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] & Children every one, 1 February 1856, John Brown Collection, KHS (first quote); Minna Von Moeller Steffens, diary, entry for 21 July 1862, Steffans (Louis) Diary, 1860-1863, CAH (second quote); Paddock, diary, 7 May 1857 (third quote).

⁷⁰ Paddock, diary, 25 April 1857 (first quote); [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 28 May 1855 (second quote), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Journal of (Thankful) Sophia Cobb Mayo, 1855-1909, KSRL.

In addition to general climatic conditions that often caught settlers unprepared, the plains sometimes conjured severe weather unlike that typically found east of the Mississippi River. Those weather events could destroy crops and homes in an instant, placing great stress on fledgling settlements. At the same time, they also provided opportunities to cement relations between neighbors. Homesteaders commonly offered unlucky neighbors aid without hesitation. That assistance fostered a sense of community that came to characterize Kansas and Texas.

Violent weather frequently threatened settlers on the plains. Damaged homes and personal property, while inconvenient and sometimes costly, could be repaired or replaced. Damaged crops, in contrast, constituted serious losses. The area surrounding the village of Dallas, for example, suffered “one of Pharaohs plagues” in May 1847, according to an early settler. “There fell a verry destructive hail with a verry heavy rain,” he recalled, that “broke down about one third of the wheet.” Indeed, hailstorms needed only a few minutes to decimate crops over an extended area. Widespread destruction tested settlers’ resourcefulness. Most offered any help they could, with the expectation that their charity would be returned if circumstances warranted. Such a situation played out in 1868, when the northern Texas “was visited by a terrific hailstorm.” Among other victims, DeWitt Thomas’s “crop was laid low, and seemed to be entirely ruined. Fences were blown down,” he recalled, “the rails scattered, and the

country flooded with water. It required some time to put up fences,” the farmer wrote, “and the neighbors assisted the more unfortunate.”⁷¹

Tornados constituted the most extreme weddings of wind and rain. Capable of producing winds in excess of three hundred miles per hour, tornados could destroy farms and frighten settlers in equal measure. “At sunset there were clouds stretching from the south around east and to W. of N attended with a great deal of lightning,” wrote Joseph Trego in the summer of 1858. “By nine o’clock,” he continued, “it came on from some unknown direction, a very severe blow followed by rain. We expected that the house would be capsized.” Although the Trego home survived intact, the following day revealed the extent of he storm’s destruction. “On looking around this morning,” he explained, “we discovered that things had been blown about considerably. Some frames were moved on their foundations,” he continued, “fences thrown down and we also heard of a new house in Moneka being blown to pieces.”⁷²

While tornadoes and thunderstorms dazzled settlers with their intensity, heavy rainfall often produced more widespread difficulties. Kansan John Ingalls lodged more specific complaints on the matter to his father. “The worst feature is the mud,” he wrote in 1858. “Kansas mud is incomparable. In the mud line it is a perfect triumph: slippery as lard, adhesive as tar, cumulative as a misers gold and treacherous as hope, it forms a

⁷¹ Isaac B. Webb, diary, entry for 15 May 1847 (first quote), Early Dallas Church and Lodge Records and the Diary of an Early Settler, Special Collections, Dallas Public Library (hereafter DPL); DeWitt Clinton Thomas, Sr., unpublished reminiscences, (1878), p. 53 (second quote), Thomas (DeWitt Clinton, Sr) Reminiscences, 1836 – 1912, ca 1964, CAH.

⁷² Joseph Harrington Trego, diary, entries for 9 July 1858 (first quote) and 10 July 1858 (second quote), Joseph Trego Collection, KHS.

compound unique and peculiar that defies description.”⁷³ Mud undoubtedly frustrated homesteaders, making roads impassable, fields unworkable, and homes filthy. Flash floods, however, proved both frustrating and hazardous. Danger stemmed largely from the rapidity with which water inundated the countryside. In August 1860, Jonathan Baker recorded a flash flood in Palo Pinto County. “Just before sunset a heavy cloud came up and a tremendous rain fell,” he reported. By 8 o’clock that evening, rainfall had “raised all the creeks and covered the whole earth with water.” Flash floods receded quickly, but they could leave considerable destruction in their wake, leaving settlers vulnerable to starvation and exposure.⁷⁴

The Wakarusa River, a tributary of the Kansas River partly located in Douglas County, seemed especially prone to flooding during the territorial period. At least two floods during that time resulted in property damage. In May 1855, Elisha Mayo told his wife the river had risen considerably. “A company of men were building a bridge across it,” he explained, “but a heavy rain . . . washed it away.” Three years later and just miles away, Joel Grover also experienced an overflow of the Wakarusa. “Bottom covered with water,” he wrote on July 17, after a night of intense rain. The flooding caused damage to his farm, where he found broken fences and a flooded cellar. Flooding occasionally afflicted Texans, as well. One Lampasas merchant remembered a “great overflow” in which his “house, goods, and books were all lost.” The disaster left him “well nigh without a dollar in the world,” but with his life intact. “I remained in the

⁷³ J. J. I. [John J. Ingalls] to Dear Father [Elias T. Ingalls], 24 October 1858, John James Ingalls Collection, KHS.

⁷⁴ Baker, “Diary,” 31 August 1860 (quote).

store until the water was in the house,” he recalled. “My own escape was almost a miracle.”⁷⁵

Conversely, a lack of rainfall could devastate a farmer’s prospects with equal vigor. As settlers neared the 20”-rainfall line, the likelihood of drought increased. One history of Anderson County, Kansas, recorded seven years between 1854 and 1875 in which dry weather diminished yields. The latter half of the 1850s generally saw good rainfall totals in the territory, so much so that many homesteaders mistook lands west of the 20”-rainfall line as suited for traditional irrigation. In Texas, the decade proved less prosperous for farmers; Dallas County resident Hillory Bedford remembered 1851 as a particularly harsh year. “In the second year of our settlement in Mountain Creek Valley we had a drought that was almost appalling,” he recalled. “We had no rain in six months.” The final years of the antebellum period proved no more charitable. According to John Chrisman, McLennan County experienced a multi-year drought that began in 1856 and lasted through the end of the decade. By 1859, he explained, people “could walk across the Brasos River at Waco dry footed.”⁷⁶

Droughts posed manifold problems. Jonathan Baker suggested a few in a March 1859 diary entry. “A general drouth has prevailed over this part of the state since last fall,” he noted, “and still no appearance of rain. Consequently, grass is not good, wheat is dying, corn poor and gardens almost ruined.” Widespread crop failures sent the price

⁷⁵ Joel Grover, “The Grover Diary, 1857-1858,” entry for 17 July 1858 (first quote), Joel Grover Diary, KSRL; Thomas, “Reminiscences,” p. 66 (second quote).

⁷⁶ James Y. Campbell, *First History of Anderson County, From the Earliest Period of Settlement of the County to the Centennial Year of 1876* (Garnett, KS: Garnet Weekly Journal, 1877), pp. 37-8; Bedford, *Reminiscences*, p. 4 (first quote); John H. Chrisman, “Reminiscences, 1854-1865,” unpublished, (1915), p. 23 (second quote), Chrisman (John H) *Reminiscences*, CAH.

of “breadstuffs . . . advancing,” he continued. “Many people anticipate hard times.” Livestock also suffered during prolonged dry spells, when both water and grass dried up simultaneously. During one drought, a Jack County rancher feared losing his cattle for lack of feed. Like most settlers, he refused to passively accept that outcome. Instead, he “gathered about one thousand head. They were in poor condition to move,” he contended, but soon after leaving his ranch the herd “struck good grass, and by traveling slow . . . could improve.” Indeed, erratic and extreme weather increased farmers’ workloads, increasing reliance on friends and neighbors for support.⁷⁷

While lack of feed presented farmers and ranchers considerable logistical hurdles, lack of water forced many to take extreme measures. Minna Steffens described the backbreaking work undertaken by her husband in hopes of salvaging their livestock in 1862. “Louis walks eight miles every day to the Red River with the team of horses and wagon,” she explained in mid-July, “to get two barrels of water to save our stock from dying of thirst.” Regrettably, Louis had carried out that routine for more than a month, as no rain had fallen in fourteen weeks. The situation turned dire, and Minna anticipated grim days ahead. “We need water,” she desperately wrote her diary. “I have no words to explain what this means; we have had such a drought that the wheat in the fields, which was our hope for this year, is all dry for lack of rain. This has destroyed our expectations and we go into a sad winter,” she lamented.⁷⁸

An extraordinary example of drought afflicted southeastern Kansas Territory between June 1859 and November 1860. That eighteen-month period—known as the

⁷⁷ Baker, “Diary,” 31 March 1859 (first quote); Bedford, *reminiscences*, p. 87 (second quote).

⁷⁸ Minna Steffens, diary, 21 July 1860 (all quotes).

“great famine year”—witnessed unprecedented hardship. “This section is an entire failure,” one report proclaimed in 1860. “There is not enough corn in the country to do these people,” the report continued, as “one shower only fell in 9 months.” By the time rains returned, according to Douglas County farmer E. B. Whitman, the region’s farmers had endured “an entire failure of their crop for a whole year.” Moreover, he regretfully informed a friend, he had harvested “not a green vegetable of any description from my garden nor a pound of cultivated food of any description from the entire farm.” Luckily for Whitman, he and his neighbors managed to pool resources and travelled more than 200 miles in a wagon train to purchase corn and other foodstuffs in Iowa. Others enjoyed less fortune. According to Methodist circuit minister Henry Moys, Madison County constituted a disaster. He encountered one “family whose crop had failed and who has not the means to get away,” and he reported that many others lost “their cattle by Texas Fever. Some have lost all the cattle they have,” he continued, and he knew “of but one or two persons who have corn in the bounds of his circuit.”⁷⁹

By the summer of 1860, the drought had made conditions in some parts of Kansas nearly intolerable. As G. W. Paddock explained one “very warm” day in early June, “a very severe drouth is upon us, there having been very little rain for at least six months. Crops of all kinds must fail if be not rain soon,” he concluded drearily. Nearly three months later, the great famine year continued to linger. Reminders abounded. “Came home this forenoon,” Paddock noted in his diary. “The dust for the last ten miles

⁷⁹ “Miscellaneous Accounts of Conditions Resulting from Drought,” unpublished report, (1860), Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS (first quote); E. B. Whitman to Friend [Franklin B.] Sanborn, 15 November 1860 (second quote), John Brown Collection, KHS.

I think was worse than any I ever suffered,” he estimated, as he blamed the “late drought.” The entire landscape reminded settlers of life’s precariousness along the 20”-rainfall line.⁸⁰

As the drought continued, many questioned their decisions to move west. One resident of Greenwood County offered his point of view on the impact of the great famine year. “I lived on the Little Arkansas,” he explained. “There was a number of families there, but now for the extent of 15 square miles not a white settler remains.” The area was not entirely deserted, however, as a single black homesteader remained in the Osage lands west of Butler County. The man, named Buckner, had “about 50 head of cattle, some horses, and . . . 20 acres under cultivation and was doing well till the drought came on.” Once relatively prosperous, Buckner had “hardly anything so far as crops are concerned,” and according to the report remained “the only person who has not deserted that neighborhood.” Butler County proper fared no better than the Osage lands in the mind of John L. Pratt of Chelsea. “No crops in this County,” he informed authors of the report, “not a cucumber even. . . . There is not a grain of old corn on hand on Walnut Creek an extent of 65 miles,” he continued, “except what has been hauled from Cottonwood a distance of 50 miles.” Furthermore, as in Greenwood County, many had abandoned their homes. “Many persons were compelled to mortgage their claims,” Pratt detailed, “and others gave up entirely and left the country.” During the brutal summer of 1860s, many settlers’ dreams of success in the West shriveled and died along side their

⁸⁰ Paddock, diary, 4 June 1860 (first quote) and 28 August 1860 (second quote).

crops.⁸¹ Precipitation returned to normal levels over the winter of 1860-1, and farmers' fortunes took a positive turn. It would not be the last drought Kansas farmers would encounter, but the drought of 1860 would be the worst many areas would experience until the 1930s.⁸²

Extreme weather events such as tornados, floods, and droughts regularly threatened to undermine success on the plains. Farmers had no control over those events, but they did determine how they would respond. Most banded together during the worst times to maximize their chances of survival. In some respects that mutual aid reflected selflessness, but in time neighbors came to expect assistance from neighbors in times of need. Those expectations became embedded in the culture of mutual aid that developed on the plains, and migrants arriving after the Civil War entered societies in Kansas and Texas that demanded cooperative mindsets.

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Northern Texas and Kansas Territory attracted men and women from varied backgrounds, but settlers in both regions shared much in common. To begin, the young comprised a disproportionate segment of the population 1860. While fewer than two-thirds of all Americans were under thirty years of age, that group constituted more than three-quarters of the western population. Males arrived on the plains in similarly overwhelming numbers, particularly men in their twenties. Those men, often fueled by alcohol, regularly found trouble. If a man developed a reputation for endangering or

⁸¹ "Conditions Resulting from Drought," (all quotes).

⁸² James C. Malin, "Dust Storms: Part One, 1850-1860," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 14 (May 1946): pp. 132-44.

harassing the community, he faced expulsion. Such exile did not result from legal decree; rather, the decision to expel a man rested directly on the will of the citizenry. The intermittent nature of courts in the West compelled settlers to devise such extra-governmental solutions to their problems. The desire to maintain law and order, therefore, often catalyzed cooperative action.

Perhaps the most meaningful difference between the populations in northern Texas and Kansas Territory involved migrants from New England. Eager to see Kansas admitted to the Union as a free state, men and women from the region promoted, settled in, and sent aid to the territory. Always a minority in Kansas, Yankees nonetheless brought energy, organization, and resources that lent them more weight than mere numbers suggest. They also introduced a spirit of reform in territorial culture. That reform-oriented culture—passed down through the generations—allowed advocates of women’s rights, temperance, and later the People’s Party to enjoy greater success in Kansas than they did in Texas.

CHAPTER IV

MUTUAL AID IN THE ANTEBELLUM WEST

As Manifest Destiny gripped American imaginations, potential settlers turned to the federal government to ease the financial burden of moving west. They wanted public lands sold to individual settlers at reasonable prices, and they wanted preferential treatment over speculators. Designed to curb speculation, the Preemption Act (1841) allowed settlers in Kansas Territory to claim 160 acres of public land at \$1.25 per acre. Although the Preemption Act met the conditions many placed on settling in the territory, it quickly declined in popularity among settlers after passage of the Homestead Act (1862) established a pathway to obtain free land from the public domain.⁸³

Settlers bound for antebellum Texas, in contrast, could not take advantage of federal law to claim land. Under the terms of annexation, the state retained possession of all lands held by the Republic of Texas, making federal preemption law inapplicable. After the Texas Revolution, the republic used colonization laws—a vestige of Mexican rule—to spur immigration. By the early 1850s, most Texans wanted to replace colonization laws with a preemption law modeled on the American statute and designed

⁸³ Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), p. 110; Richard Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854-1865,” in *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives* ed. Rita Napier (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003), pp. 157-8.

to lure rugged, enterprising families toward unsettled areas. The resulting Texas Homestead Act (1854) remained in effect for the next thirty-five years.⁸⁴

Claiming land composed, of course, the easiest part of relocating in the West. Poor access to markets meant inhabiting roughhewn homes, eating monotonous diets, and wearing homespun clothes. At the same time, the pervasiveness of crude living conditions precluded social stratification. Settlers tackled the Herculean tasks of establishing and protecting homesteads communally, and in the process they invested in the success of their neighborhoods. The isolation inherent to farming in newly settled areas also contributed to a sense of community, as homesteaders removed from family and friends relied on those nearest them for emotional support. Friendships formed in the antebellum era often remained strong for decades, and trust amassed between settlers in the 1850s translated into grand cooperative efforts in the century's final decades. The success of grassroots political organizing in the 1880s and 1890s hinged on good faith between neighbors rooted in previous generations.

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Westward bound migrants in the mid-nineteenth century understood that living in sparsely populated areas dictated some degree of physical hardship. Perhaps nothing symbolized that hardship more than cabins. Necessary for survival, yet barely adequate, first homes rarely afforded comfort but played key roles in fostering a sense of community. Pooled labor and resources bound settlers together through reciprocal

⁸⁴ Reuben McKittrick, "The Public Land System of Texas, 1823-1910," *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin* 9 (1918): pp. 44-8.

obligation. Moreover, simple accommodations preserved feelings of equality between neighbors.

After selecting claims, homesteaders focused on obtaining shelter. Even rudimentary dwellings could not be erected single-handedly, so new arrivals relied on assistance from neighbors in building homes. Customarily, when word spread that a farmer intended to “raise” a cabin, the community expected all available men to lend a hand. Most could depend on assistance from at least five or six men, and raisings sometimes attracted more than a dozen. Newcomers received such help free of charge, an act of kindness equally pragmatic and charitable. Indeed, established settlers held vested interests in attracting migrants, and the prospect of free housing eased decisions to move west. Moreover, cabin raisings established a tone of mutual aid by providing an object lesson in community expectations.⁸⁵

In some instances, bad luck drove the need for help constructing homes. When an 1858 fire consumed the Shaffer family’s cabin, neighbors leapt to replace it. Fire also played a role in the misfortunes of Charles Dewey’s clan, who arrived in Kansas Territory in April 1855. The family’s ordeal began in June, when claim jumpers harassed the Deweys and other Ohioans settled along the South Fork of Pottawatomie Creek. In late summer, Charles fell ill and relied on friends to maintain his farm. As his

⁸⁵ National Kansas Committee, “Testimony of Capt. Thomas Bickerton,” 12 December 1856, Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, Kansas Historical Society (hereafter KHS), Topeka; Joseph Trego, diary, entry for 8 October 1857, Joseph Trego Collection, KHS, Topeka; Robert Atkins Tovey, “A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory by an Actual Settler,” unpublished essay, (ca. 1856), pp. 75-6, A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory Written by an Actual Settler, Kansas Collection, Kenneth Spencer Research Library (hereafter KSRL), University of Kansas, Lawrence; George Walter, *History of Kansas, also, Information Regarding Routes, Laws, &c.* (New York: New York Kansas League, 1855), p. 16; Walter South, “Diary, 1860-1866,” entry for 7 February 1862, South (Walter S.) Diaries, 1860-, Center for American History (hereafter CAH), University of Texas, Austin.

health improved that October, a massive prairie fire threatened the settlement. Exhaustion from fire fighting laid Dewey low for a week; in the meantime, a neighbor's cattle wandered past the charred remains of his fence and ate the family's turnips and potatoes. By Thanksgiving, the notorious winter of 1855-6 had set in, and the homesteaders sat in a "deplorable & comfortless 'pen'" awaiting their fate. Fortunately for the family, good neighbors—many of whom suffered similar trials in the territory—recognized the Deweys' plight and raised them a more substantial cabin.⁸⁶

Beyond providing opportunities for mutual aid, the physical characteristics of cabins fostered a culture of socializing and a sense of equality. Most measured no larger than fourteen by eighteen feet (252 square feet) and housed a single room. Tight quarters meant family members spent most of their indoor time together. More importantly for community building, entire families received visitors, encouraging relationships between children and adults and between men and women. A dearth of towns compelled antebellum farmers to conduct business in private residences, often in full view of the family. If nineteenth-century men and women inhabited "separate spheres," those in Kansas Territory or Texas did not.⁸⁷

Uniformity also characterized cabins. Irrespective of building materials, claim geography, or type of farm, few could afford to spend time or money personalizing their

⁸⁶ Chestina Bowker Allen, "Journey from Massachusetts to Kansas," journal, 25 March 1858, History of Pottawatomie County Chestina Allen Sketches and Journal, KHS; National Kansas Committee, "Kansas Experiences of Charles E. Dewey," 24 December 1856 (quote), Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS.

⁸⁷ Anna Margaret Watson Randolph, diary, entry for 18 December 1858, Anna Margaret Watson Randolph Collection, KHS; Hillory G. Bedford, *reminiscences*, (1905), p. 10, Bedford (Hillory G.) *Reminiscences*, undated, CAH; Sarah Isabella Stephens Rogers, "Memoirs, 1850-1937," unpublished, (1937), p. 27, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas (hereafter UNT); [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 13 June 1855, transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, KSRL.

homes. Designed for function over form, the modest dwellings had a leveling effect on western society that erased (or at least camouflaged) social distinctions. The simplicity of settlers' homes contributed to that effect. Cabins commonly lacked windows, and many featured dirt floors and doorways covered with quilts or hides. By midcentury, Americans near markets increasingly used balloon frame construction—a quick, easy, and inexpensive method of homebuilding—but the innovation remained unavailable to homesteaders in Texas and Kansas Territory through the Civil War. Removed from finished lumber, iron nails, and specialized tools, settlers relied on ingenuity and older techniques to transform crudely milled logs into homes. Dallas County resident Hillary Bedford lived in a typical cabin. Logs harvested from nearby woods formed “the body of the house,” and the inevitable gaps left between them “were chinked with timber, split of the purpose, and daubed with mud, or later pointed up with lime.” Ropes, rawhide straps, and wooden pegs affixed the roof to the walls in place of nails, and Settlers constructed chimneys from rocks mortared in place with mud. Those circumstances encouraged settlers to see themselves as part of a single class and created solidarity among neighbors.⁸⁸

Skilled carpenters capable of transforming timber into weather tight homes came at a premium as well. Cabins proved correspondingly drafty, to say the least. One Kansan lamented his shoddy craftsmanship in relating an ability to place his “hand out of doors at twenty places along the walls,” and another described an unwelcome

⁸⁸ William Cronin, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), p. 179; Bedford, reminiscences, p. 8; William E. Cureton, “Personal Recollections of W. E. Cureton, Texas Frontiersman: 1848-1922,” unpublished, (1922), p. 8, Cureton (W. E.) Recollections, ca. 1848-1922, CAH; Rogers, “Memoirs,” pp. 23-4.

opportunity to “study astronomy through the roof.” Similarly crude construction plagued Minna Steffans in the winter of 1863, when she woke up to “snow on my bed as high as my hand is wide.” Cracks in walls and roofs could be filled with materials ranging from mud to scraps of timber to lime produced on-site by settlers, but none of those solutions lasted. Maintenance never ceased. The quality of homes increased with the availability of finished materials and skilled labor, but some homesteaders in Kansas and Texas occupied small, rudely constructed cabins well into the 1880s.⁸⁹

Farmers initially furnished homes exclusively with items they carried west. Certain goods remained scarce until the arrival of railroads reduced shipping costs, including stoves, tables, chairs, cabinets, cookware, buckets, tubs, dishes, tableware, and other “articles of furniture” deemed inessential in “western climes.” Settlers waited for towns to develop and merchants to see the potential of untapped markets before those commodities could be purchased locally. In that respect, Kansas Territory held an advantage over Texas. Acting as the primary point of entry to the territory, Kansas City, Missouri, had attracted more than two thousand residents by 1860. Furthermore, the Missouri River transported goods to the city as efficiently as it transported people. In contrast, neither Dallas nor Fort Worth even registered in the 1860 federal census, being overshadowed by nearby Hillsboro (population 199) and Stephenville (population 120).

⁸⁹ [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 15 April 1855, transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, KSLR (first quote); H. W. Barclay, “Reminiscences,” unpublished, p. 49 (second quote), Barclay (H. W.) Reminiscences, Undated, CAH; Minna Von Moeller Steffens, diary, entry for 10 April 1863 (third quote), Steffans (Louis) Diary, 1860-1863, CAH; Jonathan Hamilton Baker, “Diary, 1858-1918,” entry for 10 October 1858, 30 September 1860, and 7 November 1860, Baker (Jonathan Hamilton) Papers, CAH; South, “Diary,” 28 March 1863; Alzina Hayden Jerome to Dear Mother Sister & All, 26 March 1882, Hayden-Jerome Family Papers, 1880-2001, KHS.

The same factors that retarded migration into the state—namely, the inability to take advantage of steam power—also inhibited the flow of household goods.⁹⁰

As with cabins, homesteaders utilized easily accessible materials in furnishing their homes. Beds, items most people had and few brought with them, illustrate the quality and simplicity of homemade furniture. Typically, straw-filled mattresses sat atop a grid of rope or rawhide strips stretched within a wooden frame. Before finishing beds, settlers slept on the ground, an uncomfortable and dangerous practice. Rattlesnakes roamed the prairies and combatted cold weather by curling up near sources of warmth. One of the territory's first settlers encountered such an intruder. "She was bit on the lip," neighbor Elisha Mayo explained. "They say her head is swollen as big as a water pail." Lesson learned, Mayo promised his wife to raise his bed that day.⁹¹

While settlers in both Kansas Territory and northern Texas suffered for lack of manufactured beds, another household item aids in comparing relative degrees of market penetration through 1865. Bed shortages related to the costs involved with shipping heavy items over long distances. Cloth, on the other hand, proved lightweight and profitable. As with other manufactured goods, Kansans enjoyed better access to cloth than Texans. Through the Civil War, Texans rarely purchased cloth, and spinning wheels constituted prized possessions. Indeed, while forting up at George Bragg's home

⁹⁰ G. W. Paddock, diary, entry for 29 April 1857, G. W. Paddock Diary Transcript, 1857-1861, KSRL (first quote); Department of the Interior, Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. 292 and 486-7.

⁹¹ Paddock, diary, 25 April 1857; T. U. Taylor, "A Frontier Home," unpublished reminiscences, (ca. 1925), pp. 110-13, Atkinson (George F.) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, CAH; South, "Diary," 28 January 1862 and 3 February 1862; Rogers, "Memoirs," pp. 6-7; Mayo to Mayo, 15 April 1855 and 15 June 1855 (quote).

during a notable Comanche attack in October 1864, “old man Hamby” cleared Mrs. Bragg’s spinning wheel from the center of the room and looked to pitch it from the cabin. Through a hail of bullets, she “sprang from under the bed and gave him a piece of her mind.” The spinning wheel stayed. More regular access to finished cloth arrived with the cattle drives of the late 1860s, when cowboys returned from Kansas with substantial quantities.⁹²

While sharing dissimilar access to markets, settlers in both regions experienced similar setbacks and successes while establishing homesteads. More importantly, they counted on neighbors to nurse them through failures and fight for their prosperity. Newcomers received all manner of assistance free of charge, but the help came with a cost. Accepting mutual aid initiated settlers into the community and indebted them to their neighbors. Shared want further cemented communal ties. Uniformly constructed and furnished homes allowed settlers to envision their membership in a single class—a class of small farmers, land rich and cash poor. That solidarity would encourage the establishment of organizations designed to promote their social, economic, and political interests, including Grange chapters, the farmers’ alliances, and eventually the People’s Party.

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Inexpensive land formed the chief draw in Kansas Territory and northern Texas, and most immigrants intended to farm. Relying on past experience and received

⁹² W. M. Green, “The Great Indian Raid in Young Co.,” unpublished essay, (1914), p. 278, Atkinson (George F.) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, CAH (quote); Taylor, “Frontier Home,” pp. 112-3 and 118.

wisdom, aspiring farmers grew familiar crops and used proven techniques, but they also experimented to see what the plains' soils would bear. To minimize costs, farmers routinely pooled scarce resources, including tools, equipment, and labor. They also gathered to combat natural threats to their crops and overcome their losses. In time, such cooperative work evolved into shared efforts to market the spoils of their labor.

After selecting claims and raising cabins, farmers looked to work their land. They coveted land along creek bottoms that resisted drought and nurtured trees and other native vegetation. Those near the 20"-rainfall line often cleared that land first, making room for fields of corn and wheat and harvesting the raw materials for fences, corrals, stables, barns, silos, smokehouses, chicken coops, and other outbuildings. Farmers from southern states tended to grow more corn, and those from northern states leaned toward wheat production. Grains provided critical calories during winter months, when vegetable gardens and wild sources of food became unviable. Moreover, grains offered quick returns on small investments. Wheat and corn produced good yields in only a few months' time, and farmers had a great deal of experience with both crops, which formed staples of eastern diets. Settlers swore off perishable luxuries in the course of moving west, including lemons, codfish, and cheese, but they depended on breadstuffs for survival.⁹³

In the earliest years of settlement, the population in some areas grew more quickly than the number of acres under cultivation. Farmers working with small

⁹³ Alinza Hayden Jerome to Loved Ones in Michigan, 23 July 1883, Hayden-Jerome Family Papers, 1880-2001, KHS; James [Griffing] to [J. Augusta Goodrich Griffing], 28 July 1859, James Sayre Griffing Collection, KHS; [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 22 April 1855, transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Thankful Sophia Mayo Journal, KSRL.

margins for error sometimes failed to produce adequate amounts of food. Compounding the problem, farmers preceded millwrights west, by several years in some areas.

Without gristmills, farmers fell back on less efficient methods of obtaining meal and flour. Many traveled to neighboring counties for the opportunity to utilize archaic hand mills. Through the Civil War, many farmers lived under regular threat of famine.⁹⁴

After sowing grains, most families planted gardens. Family plots complimented cereal crops and provided an important buffer against starvation. Grasshoppers and fires took lesser tolls on underground crops than on fields of corn and wheat, and potatoes and turnips often withstood drought more effectively. Many farmers introduced sweet potatoes, peas, tomatoes, melons, squash, and strawberries, as well. They also experimented with crops they hoped could bring profit and alleviate dietary doldrums. One transplanted Yankee gave detailed shipping instructions for currant, blackberry, and gooseberry cuttings arriving from Massachusetts, in addition to plum, cherry, and peach seeds. Many Kansans hailed from apple-growing parts of the North and showed an interest in bringing the fruit to the territory. Apple growers achieved less success in the warmer Texas climate, but peach trees thrived on the lone star prairies. At least one farmer attempted to grow sugar cane in Palo Pinto County, an experiment that teetered on the brink of failure until one herd of hogs with a sweet tooth pushed it over the edge.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ John Brown [Sr.] to Dear Wife [Mary Brown] & Children Every One, 2 November 1855, John Brown Collection, KHS; James Emerson Hawkins, "For My Children," unpublished reminiscences, (1907), p. 4, Scoggin Family Papers, 1860-1944, CAH; Minna Steffans, diary, February 1861.

⁹⁵ South, "Diary," 12 September 1862; John S. [Stillman] Brown to Dear Son William, 21 June 1857, John Stillman Brown Collection, KHS; James [Griffing] to My Dear [J. Augusta Goodrich Griffing], 9 August 1859, James Sayre Griffing Collection, KHS; Joel Grover, diary, entry for 9 April 1858, Joel Grover

In addition to crops and livestock brought west, settlers harvested nature's local bounties. A hunter's paradise, the plains offered an assortment of delicacies for those skilled enough to seize them. Large game included wild hogs, deer, antelope, bears, and bison. The fates of the latter two species attest to the speed of white expansion on the plains; both ceased to exist in those regions by 1890. Squirrels, rabbits, and turtles presented less dangerous targets, as did the many species of fowl, including wild turkeys, quail, pheasants, prairie chickens, ducks, and geese. Although living far from coastal waters, patient anglers secured fish topping 50 pounds. Farmers also supplemented their diets with foraged plants, such as "mustang grapes . . . plums, prickly pears, and mesquite beans." The most intrepid gatherers harvested wild honey, perhaps the most valued local delicacy.⁹⁶

Nature provided abundantly, but only for those possessing the required skills. Despite popular notions to the contrary, many homesteaders made poor hunters. Lack of expertise in tracking and stalking impeded the inexperienced. Inaccurate firearms formed even greater barriers between hunters and prey. The Sharps rifle and similarly accurate weapons existed, but they remained expensive and scarce, particularly in Texas. The Civil War ushered in an era innovation resulting in iconic weapons such as the Colt Model 1873 revolver ("the peacemaker") and the Winchester Model 1873 rifle ("the gun that won the west"), the latter capable of killing at ranges up to a quarter mile. In the late antebellum period, however, most settlers relied on smooth bore muskets that forced

Diary, 1857-1858, KSRL; Elizabeth Simpson Cooper, "Memories of My Life," unpublished reminiscences, (1931), p. 2, Elizabeth Simpson Cooper Collection, UNT; Rogers, "Memoirs," p. 45.

⁹⁶ Cureton, "Recollections," p. 4 (quote), 8; Taylor, and 118; Bedford, reminiscences, p. 76, Hawkins, "For My Children," p. 4; South, "Diary," 25 August 1860; Minna Steffans, diary, February 1861.

a hunter to gain close proximity—often less than 50 yards—to his prey. Consequently, only the most talented could reliably survive on wild game until after the Civil War. The majority depended on their abilities as farmers.⁹⁷

Homesteaders worked communally to maximize harvests and minimize hazards. To expedite planting throughout a neighborhood, families assisted one another; they shared farm implements and the draft animals that powered them. As with raising cabins, farmers charged neighbors nothing for communal labor. They also borrowed liberally from one another. Most willingly shared food, tools, household goods, and even, on occasion, “a chunk of fire.” That neighborliness bound farmers closely together by encouraging them to see each other as invaluable sources of support.⁹⁸

As with cabins, the simplicity of settlers’ diets contributed to a common identity. Myriad aspects of culture distinguish “insiders” from “outsiders,” including dietary norms. The visceral reaction most people have to food that is normatively taboo (such as dog or horse meat for twenty-first century Americans) reinforces the notion that those who share cuisine view themselves as similar.⁹⁹ Similar environments in Texas and Kansas Territory yielded common staples, including pork, chicken, root vegetables and breadstuffs. Common beverages included coffee, buttermilk, and a concoction consisting of liquid rendered from boiling greens combined with salt or pork known as

⁹⁷ South, “Diary,” 25 August 1860.

⁹⁸ Thomas H. Webb, *Information for Kansas Immigrants* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1855), p. 18; Rogers, “Memoirs,” p. 89 (quote); Grover, “Diary,” 23 January 1858 and 1 September 1858; South, “Diary,” 15 February 1862 and 11 February 1863.

⁹⁹ Victor Benno Meyer-Rochow, “Food Taboos: Their Origins and Purposes,” *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 5 (2009): 18-27; Henri Tajfel, “Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination,” *Scientific American* 223 (1970): 96-102.

“pot likker.” Limited access to food east of the Mississippi River combined with shared staples to allow settlers in both regions to more easily conceive of shared identities.¹⁰⁰

Circumstances encouraging cooperative work ranged beyond the everyday grind of farming. Although violent weather fostered anxiety, perhaps nothing in Mother Nature’s arsenal inspired awe quite like the Rocky Mountain locust. Responsible for the “grasshopper year” of 1875, locusts swarmed by the billions, blotting out the sun and, according to one settler, “literally covering and devouring all vegetation.” Adapted to the hot, dry plains climate, locusts overwhelmed hapless farmers who could only stand by as “legions of hoppers” blanketed the countryside. Less common than other natural disasters, locust swarms nonetheless ruined crops in wide swaths and forced the least fortunate to seek help. Obliging neighbors answered the call more often than not, further strengthening personal relationships.¹⁰¹

Settlers also forged communal bonds in wildfires that thrived on the plains. Reaching speeds of fourteen miles per hour and temperatures in excess of 1,400° F, wildfires destroyed homesteads in minutes, leaving nothing but embers and stunned farmers in their wakes. One Kansan spent twelve hours repelling a blaze as “maddened elements” rushed past him “like a furious War Stud laping cleanly every vestage of combustible in its track,” a testament to the drama fires could produce. Unlike their other natural enemies—such as flooding, grasshoppers, or hail—farmers combatted fires

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, “Frontier Home,” p. 111.

¹⁰¹ Cureton, “Recollections,” p. 13 (first quote); James Findley Harrison, diary, entry for 1 October 1866, James Findley Harrison Diaries, KSRL; J. Reverchon, “Observations on the Migratory Grasshoppers or Western Locust,” unpublished notes, entry for 15 October 1867 (second quote), Santerre and Cretien Families Collection, Dallas Public Library (hereafter DPL).

with coordinated, diligent effort. Smoke in the distance drew attention for miles around, and farmers typically hastened to the scene. Sometimes that valor went unrewarded. Such luck befell Alex Bishop, who spent one spring day in 1875 helping neighbor George Atkinson save his Texas ranch. Upon returning home, Bishop found that the fire had worked behind him during the fight and burned his home to the ground. Mutual aid accelerated the recovery of farmers like Bishop and reinforced ties between neighbors willing to face danger communally.¹⁰²

A range of hardships afflicted settlers, and at some point nearly all engaged in cooperative endeavors. Communal work surrounding the primary business of farming—namely, producing food—fell into that category, but it remained distinct from cooperative efforts to raise cabins, dig wells, or care for the ill. Whereas the latter forms of mutual aid aimed at alleviating immediate suffering or consisted of one-time projects, cooperatively clearing land and sharing equipment and labor portended sustained efforts, such as those made by the Farmers’ Alliance in the 1880s, to market crops. Rather than seeing themselves in competition with one another, farmers in the 1850s believed they shared more commonalities than differences. That mindset later played a key role in forming the People’s Party.

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¹⁰² Baker, “Diary,” 4 March 1862; National Kansas Committee, “Experiences of Charles Dewey,” n.p. (quote); Mayo, journal, p. 52; Allen, “Journey to Kansas,” 3 April 1858; George F. Atkinson(?), “The Civilization of the Indians in about 1874,” unpublished essay, (1874), p. 225, Atkinson (George F.) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, CAH; Rogers, “Memoirs,” pp. 127-8; Julie Courtwright, *Prairie Fire: A Great Plains History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), “Introduction.”

The frequency and necessity of cooperative work on the plains suggest strong bonds between homesteaders, but the strength of those bonds belies two other fundamental facts of western life: much of it occurred in isolation, and the emotional toll could be great. So-called “neighbors” often lived miles away, and many went days or weeks without meaningful contact with other people. Studies highlighting the deleterious effects of seclusion tend to focus on women settlers, but men also suffered from loneliness, homesickness, and isolation.¹⁰³ Mutual aid, therefore, not only helped settlers overcome lost property or crops; it provided an invaluable reservoir of emotional support for disheartened men and women coping with a physically grinding existence. The extent to which those settlers relied on one another for emotional well-being helps explain the depth of commitment Populists later felt both toward their cause and each other.

The earliest homesteaders clustered in geographically advantageous locations, typically along creeks and rivers. That pattern resulted in islands of settlement scattered across an ocean of plains. Most conceptions of “the neighborhood” included any cabin within a day’s horseback ride, and farmers traveled up to thirty miles “to visit and mix and mingle.” In densely settled areas, homes usually remained at least a quarter mile apart, a grueling distance when covered repeatedly to haul water or check on the ill. Settlers worried about disengaged neighbors and tried to be inclusive. One Texan who actually valued solitude “was not long permitted to be a hermit . . . and in short time was

¹⁰³ Adrienne Caughfield, *True Women and Westward Expansion* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981); Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988).

acquainted with almost every person for five miles around.” Indeed, etiquette demanded neighborliness, and those who declined to participate seemed “unusually selfish.” Tightly knit communities absorbed later settlers, inculcating them in this and other aspects of western culture.¹⁰⁴

Isolation produced manifold emotions in settlers. Men became lonely without the companionship of wives and families left behind. Moreover, if any doubted the value of women’s labor before arriving on the plains, few did thereafter. Forced into cooking, keeping house, and washing clothes, many lamented the absence of their partners. At the same time, men faced a dilemma. While lonely and desperate for help, husbands felt duty required establishing a modicum of comfort before their spouses arrived. Wives often concurred. Women understood the sacrifices inherent to moving west. Specifically, they knew following their husbands meant leaving family and friends, leaving material comfort, and leaving “civilization” for places devoid of the institutions that nourished their social lives. Understandably, many delayed their journeys, and husbands, in turn, expressed frustration and disappointment. Occasionally, men even abandoned homesteads to keep their families intact.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Tovey, “Twelve Months in Kansas,” p. 75; William S. Ikard, “W. S. Ikard Tells of Experiences of Early Days in the Cattle Business,” unpublished essay, (ca. 1927), p. 1, Ikard (W. S.) Papers, 1847-1935, CAH; Atkinson, “Civilization of the Indians,” p. 55 (first quote); DeWitt Clinton Thomas, Sr., unpublished reminiscences, p. 52 (second quote), Thomas (DeWitt Clinton, Sr.) Reminiscences, 1836-1912, ca. 1964, CAH; Baker, “Diary,” 27 January 1861 (third quote).

¹⁰⁵ A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Huntoon to Dear Lizzie [Huntoon], 12 May 1861, Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS; Your Devoted Husband [Joseph Trego] to Dear Little Wife [Alice Trego], 11 December 1857, Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; [Joseph Trego] to My Dear Wife [Alice Trego], 16 October 1857, Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; J. [Joseph Trego] to My Dear Wife, 25 October 1857, Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; Your Loving Husband [Joseph Trego] to My Dear Wife [Alice Trego], 11 February 1858, Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; Wm. [William] E. Goodnow to My Dear Wife [Harriet Goodnow], 10 June 1855, Isaac Goodnow Collection, KHS; [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 20 May 1855 and 8 July 1855, transcribed in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo

Sporadic and unreliable mail service added anxiety to feelings of loneliness. When mail failed to arrive as scheduled, as often the case, imaginations could run wild. Settlers had no way of knowing whether “the fault must . . . rest with Uncle Sam” or with remiss family and friends. Some feared the affections of loved ones had grown cold, and that they would face the challenges of homesteading alone. Others fretted upon traveling “beyond the limits of communication” and finding the nearest post office more than a day away. With only tenuous lines of communication connecting them to distant friends and family, men sometimes became euphoric when receiving letters from home.¹⁰⁶

Loneliness frequently spawned homesickness, particularly in difficult moments. Some wanted nothing more than reunions with loved ones, while others keenly missed familiar environs. Farming unbroken prairie required enormous energy but left time for minds to wander. Days in the fields gave farmers ample opportunity to meditate on people and places left behind. Nights proved worse, as farmers enjoyed few preoccupations. Homesickness often yielded to doubt, and homesteading could become unbearable for farmers who questioned leaving relative comfort in favor of “a ten thousand acre prairie with no living soul in sight.” Settlers who remained, however,

in her journal dated 1868, Thankful Sophia Mayo Journal, KSRL; William T. Horne(?) to Dear Mother [Elizabeth Horne], 16 July 1860, Horne (William T.) Papers, 1844-1899, 1922, 1943, CAH.

¹⁰⁶ Paddock, diary, 14 May 1857 (first quote); John H. Chrisman, “Reminiscences, 1854-1865,” unpublished, p. 5, Chrisman (John H.) Reminiscences, CAH (second quote); [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 6 May 1855, transcribed in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Thankful Sophia Mayo Journal, KSRL; A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Huntoon to Dear Lizzie [Huntoon], 26 April 1861, Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS; Baker, “Diary,” 4 May 1858.

formed friendships that assuaged emotions. Those friendships aided in building trust and encouraged neighborliness.¹⁰⁷

Strong friendships begat communities where settlers committed to mutual prosperity. The practice of “batching it” testified to close ties between men, as well as their psychological need for companionship. Facing difficulties inherent to homesteading, men sometimes shared housing to improve their odds of success. Typically, two men agreed to claim adjoining parcels of land, build a cabin and break ground on one of the claims, and spend the year working and living together on that claim. They constructed a second cabin on the second claim the following year and repeated the process. Batching it allowed men to focus on making homesteads operational while investing minimum time in finding food and shelter. The strategy proved effective, although men regularly suffered from discreditable domestic skills. Cold meals, dirty clothes, and filthy homes did little to quash the longing many felt for their wives, but batching it promoted familiarity between men as few other arrangements could.¹⁰⁸

Disbursed settlements and sparse populations encouraged settlers to value their neighbors. Most “didn’t meet people often enough to get tired of them,” and relationships generally remained amicable. Congeniality resulted from deeds carrying

¹⁰⁷ Paddock, diary, 4 April 1857 and 29 April 1857 (quote); Wirt [William Wirt Blake] to Dear Brother & Sister, 18 March 1860, William Wirt Blake Collection, KHS; O. E. L. [Oscar E. Learnard] to My Dear Parents and Sister, 6 April 1856, Oscar E. Learnard Collection, KHS; Your Devoted Husband [Joseph Trego] to My Dear Wife [Alice Trego], 24 January 1858, Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; J. F. [Joseph F.] Smith to Dear Brother & Sister, 23 December 1860, Joseph F. Smith Letters, KSRL; Mayo to Mayo, 15 April 1855; Baker, “Diary,” 7 August 1858.

¹⁰⁸ Elisha Mayo, journal, April 1855, transcribed by the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Thankful Sophia Mayo Journal, KSRL.

more weight than beliefs. Communities accepted the religious and profane alike, so long as they “would stand firmly by . . . friends and . . . could be relied upon in time of trouble.” Misfortune assumed various guises, ranging from lost children to runaway horses to the death of a breadwinner. Those who offered assistance enjoyed full membership in the neighborhood irrespective of creed or party affiliation. If necessity is indeed the mother of invention, it also gave birth to tolerance and cooperation through the end of the antebellum era.¹⁰⁹

The earliest settlers in northern Texas and Kansas Territory claimed land that afforded the greatest opportunities for individual success. That tendency spread homesteads thinly across relatively large areas. Consequently, cooperative labor proved no mean feat; farmers worked diligently and communally to improve their neighborhoods. Isolation also encouraged settlers to place great value on friendships. Slow and unreliable communication weakened links with their home states, and most realized the importance of neighbors for physical and emotional health. By 1890, those who settled before the Civil War no longer outnumbered by those who came after, but their influence endured. Antebellum homesteaders established community standards that emphasized mutual aid as a mechanism for pooling risk and promoting social stability.

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¹⁰⁹ Bedford, reminiscences, pp. 11-2; Husband [Joseph Trego] to My Dear Wife [Alice Trego], 28 February 1858, Joseph Harrington Trego Collection, KHS; Baker, “Diary,” 7 August 1859; Walter C. Cochran, “Story of the Early Days Indian Troubles and Cattle Business of Palo Pinto and Adjoining Counties,” unpublished reminiscences, (1930), p. 26, Cochran (Walter C.) Reminiscences, CAH; B. F. Gholson, “Recollections of B. F. Gholson,” unpublished, (1928) p. 18, Gholson (B. F.) Reminiscences, 1832-1860, CAH; South, “Diary,” 14 February 1861.

Unsettled areas of Texas and Kansas Territory presented settlers with significant challenges in the mid-nineteenth century. Building cabins and breaking ground constituted grueling work, and those activities only hinted at the sustained effort required to make a farm successful. Cooperation played key roles in building shelter and producing crops. Without the help of neighbors, few would have survived. Neighborliness abounded, however, as settlers established a culture that prized mutual aid.

Unlike charity, mutual aid imposed obligations on beneficiaries. Burgeoning communities welcomed new arrivals, and in accepting free help settlers committed themselves to reciprocal relationships. Those relationships proved invaluable when transforming prairies into homesteads, and they often sparked enduring friendships. Indeed, neighbors treasured friends who aided in combatting loneliness. As the region “settled up,” early settlers enforced social compacts that set the tone for nascent societies. Social norms compelled men and women who arrived in Texas and Kansas after the Civil War to become active in their communities and care for neighbors as they would their families.

The spirit of equality facilitated an identity centered on owning land, producing commodities, and contributing to the community’s general welfare. As financial panics and falling crop prices chipped away at that identity through the 1880s, farmers parlayed a communal ethos into cooperative efforts designed to maintain egalitarian societies. By then, however, Texans and Kansans had entered into Faustian bargains with long-coveted markets. As railroads and telegraph lines granted unencumbered access to the

national economy, farmers forfeited command of their neighborhoods to market forces. Regaining control hinged on the ability of small landowners to master those forces. And that, many came to believe, meant taking charge of the federal government.

CHAPTER V

CONFLICT AND DISCONTENT IN TEXAS

During the late 1830s and early 1840s, the Republic of Texas shared complicated relationships with Native American groups. President Sam Houston, who had lived among Cherokees as a teenager, established friendships with several Native American bands during his first administration. Legally prohibited from serving consecutive presidential terms, Houston could do little as his successor, Mirabeau Lamar, reversed Indian policy. Lamar first targeted Native Americans living among whites in East Texas, and by 1840 he had driven all but a few select groups from the region.¹¹⁰ Displacing Native Americans in northern Texas proved considerably more difficult. Unlike agrarian Cherokees, Shawnees, and Kickapoos who had settled in East Texas, the plains Indians who lived in northern Texas relied heavily on bison for survival. Comanches and Kiowas, in particular, earned reputations as skilled horsemen and fearless hunters. Techniques mastered during the hunt translated into battlefield prowess. US Army officers frequently marveled at the bravado with which Native American warriors fought and the ease with which they outpaced cavalymen. Moreover, roaming herds of bison necessitated a nomadic lifestyle that prepared every member of the band for privation. Women, children, and the elderly could leave their homes at a moment's notice and travel for days with little food or sleep. Despite facing numerical and

¹¹⁰ Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 166-77.

technological disadvantages, determined bands of plains Indians fiercely contested the westward expansion of white settlers well into the post-bellum period.¹¹¹

Indian “depredations” terrified white settlers, who responded in several ways. Many established alarms—usually a series of mounted volunteers—designed to alert the neighborhood of an impending raid. Some went further, fortifying predestinated homesteads where families could gather for self-defense. In other communities, men formed militias capable of counterattacking and pursuing raiding parties. Despite their efforts, settlers in many communities felt overwhelmed by and helpless against their adversaries, and plains Indians momentarily rolled back the tide of white immigration. Many settlers abandoned their homesteads and, in some instances, entire neighborhoods. Responding to their plight, the state government raised companies of Texas Rangers to patrol and protect farmers. Rangers, with notable exceptions, found fewer fights than they wanted, but their presence soothed white anxieties. Federal troops and officials in northern Texas produced the opposite effect. Angry settlers blamed Native Americans living under federal protection for committing, or at least abetting, depredations, and they resented Indian agents who seemingly sided with the enemy. Tensions escalated until federal officials deemed the situation untenable and relocated the families under their care to Indian Territory.¹¹²

During the 1850s, anxiety surrounding Native Americans compelled settlers in northern Texas to form strong attitudes about the federal government’s obligations to American citizens. They wanted safe access to land in the region, and they held the

¹¹¹ Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 284-9.

¹¹² Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 203.

federal government responsible for their safety. Furthermore, they believed the federal government should ensure all citizens had equitable access to economic opportunity. In that respect, the size of the government's failure varied proportionally with the threat of depredations. Unlike those voting for secession in most parts of Texas, secessionists in northern Texas feared too little federal involvement in society. That concern foreshadowed the arguments of Texans who later articulated the Populist message.

* * *

American immigrants to Mexican Texas came into almost immediate conflict with Native Americans in the state, and for the remainder of the century anxiety undergirded most interactions between the two groups. Mutual distrust ran deep and for good reason. The Republic of Texas's schizophrenic Indian policy fostered confusion and indignation among settlers and Native Americans alike. In a sensational episode dubbed the Council House Fight, several dozen Comanches met with Texas officials in March 1840 to discuss a possible treaty. Tempers flared when Texans at the meeting (mistakenly) determined the Comanches had not returned all of the white captives in their possession, as promised. Fighting ensued as the Texans took the Comanche chiefs hostage, and more than thirty Comanches died in the ensuing battle. Five months later, more than a thousand Comanches retaliated in the largest Indian assault in Texas history. They burned homes and crops, killed livestock, and sacked Linnville before retreating with stolen horses and personal property. That raid stoked the emotions of Texans, who later took revenge and perpetuated a cycle of retaliation that lasted decades.¹¹³

¹¹³ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 171-2.

When Sam Houston returned to office in late 1841, he attempted to reconcile with skeptical Native Americans. By the end of 1844, the republic had signed peace and trade agreements with most groups, including some bands of Comanches. White settlers, secure in their safety, migrated toward northern Texas and enjoyed generally peaceful relations with Native Americans through the middle 1850s. Even in Palo Pinto County—an area later targeted by Comanches and Kiowas—harmony endured through 1856. One county resident recalled that, as a boy, Native Americans once visited while his father traveled outside the county. As with any guest visiting near mealtime, the boy “invited them to take dinner, which they did.” Indeed, settlers frequently welcomed Native Americans as more than guests; they constituted valued trade partners. One settler regularly traded “beeves . . . & all the cotton wood bread that . . . the Baker could cook” for hides and wild meat. Similarly, the son of J. J. “Jack” Cureton—Mexican War veteran, renowned Indian fighter, and original settler in Palo Pinto County—remembered Native Americans visiting settlers to “barter a turkey or ham of a deer . . . for milk, coffee, or cold biscuit.” The earliest white settlers in northern Texas benefitted from trade with Native Americans in two respects. Trade gave people far removed from markets access to a wider range of goods, and it promoted peaceful relationships between whites and Native Americans.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 176-7; George F. Atkinson(?), unpublished reminiscences, (ca. 1925), p. 3 (first quote), Atkinson (George F) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (hereafter CAH); Travis Flemming Jones, unpublished reminiscences, (1932), p. 1 (second quote), Jones (Travis Flemming) Reminiscences, 1850-1932, CAH; W. E. Cureton, “Personal Recollections of WE Cureton Texas Frontiersman: 1848-1925,” unpublished reminiscences, (1922), p. 5 (third quote), Cureton (WE) Recollections, ca 1848-1922, CAH.

Native American bands that refused to sign treaties, however, continued raiding. Before western counties of the 1850s had even been organized, sporadic violence plagued the area. While surveying approximately forty miles west of Dallas in 1848, for example, a man named Phelps and two others met untimely ends; their mutilated corpses suggested murder. Although Native Americans had little, if any, understanding of surveying, they likely understood the implications of three white men wandering, exploring, and taking note of land well beyond the line of white settlement. According to one Palo Pinto County resident, Indians resented “the encroaching pale face, depriving him of his hunting grounds and destroying his sources of living.” Census figures underscore the scale of white immigration. Tarrant County claimed 664 residents in 1850; a decade later, more than six thousand called it home. Denton County similarly grew from 641 residents to more than five thousand during the 1850s. Recognizing the relentless westward advance of the “pale face,” many Native Americans hoped make northern Texas an undesirable destination for white settlers. For a time, they succeeded.¹¹⁵

Native Americans used several tactics to frustrate, intimidate, and harass whites. Raiding parties typically avoided direct conflict with armed settlers, opting to kill or steal livestock instead. This tactic deprived farmers and ranchers of assets while providing Native Americans with food and highly valued horses. Indeed, some have characterized Native American raiders as more parasitic than predatory. Most plains

¹¹⁵ Isaac B. Webb, diary, entry for 15 April 1848, Early Dallas Church and Lodge Records and the Diary of an Early Settler, Special Collections, Dallas Public Library (hereafter DPL); Cureton, “Recollections,” p. 6 (quote); United States Department of the Interior, *Ninth Census—Volume I: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), p. 64.

Indians groups allowed individual ownership of horses, which in turn formed a common basis of wealth. Indian raiders could more easily steal domesticated horses than tame wild ones. Paradoxically, the presence of whites in northern Texas may have attracted some Native Americans who otherwise may not have come. In more daring episodes, Indians ambushed those traveling or living in remote areas. Despite frequent and widespread rumors that “the Indians were organizing with the intention of capturing all the frontier Towns and murdering the citizens,” raiders preferred attacking isolated homesteads rather than settlements. With limited resources and firepower, plains Indians seized the offensive when odds of success seemed greatest and risk of armed resistance seemed least.¹¹⁶

Instances of Indian depredations increased in lockstep with the populations of western counties and became common after 1856. That year, a Comanche County rancher reported thirty head of cattle stolen, and by the following year violent incidents between settlers and Indians had become common, if sporadic, in the state. In 1859, Governor Sam Houston believed the issue merited a few lines in his second inaugural address. The governor noted that “depredations by the Indians are so frequent, that to hear of them has almost ceased to excite sympathy and attention from the interior of our state,” no small feat considering the sensational reports that accompanied attacks.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ David La Vere, *The Texas Indians* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), pp. 181-2; John H. Chrisman, “Reminiscences, 1854-1865,” unpublished, (1915), pp. 11-2 (quote), Chrisman (John H.) *Reminiscences*, CAH.

¹¹⁷ Davis D. Hutchison, “A Short History of Comanche Co. Texas,” unpublished essay, (1884), p. 5, Comanche County Baptist Association Records, CAH; Sam Houston, “Inaugural Address, December 21, 1859,” in Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, eds., *The Writings of Sam Houston, 1813-1863*, vol. 7 (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1942), p. 379 (quote).

By 1860, depredations increasingly plagued whites in northern Texas. In a March letter to the Secretary of War, Governor Houston lamented that in the previous four months fifty-one people had been killed and 1,800 horses stolen. The remainder of 1860 proved no safer. In August, the murder of a black man near Palo Pinto stunned local residents. “A sad looking spectacle,” according to one man, “he was shot through with an arrow.” Two months later, an unfortunate teamster crossed paths with raiders who “killed him, stripped him, took his provisions” and left his body on the road. A more dramatic event transpired in November, when raiders stole “a large number of horses” and killed at least two dozen whites in Jack and Parker Counties. Perhaps the most sensational story emerging from that raid involved a woman who survived a scalping before her captors dumped her on the open prairie.¹¹⁸

Although atypical, raids that claimed more than a few lives sometimes inspired folk tales. When tales involved kidnapping and maiming women or children, they could assume legendary proportions. The story of Cynthia Ann Parker epitomized the genre. Kidnapped as a child in 1836, Parker gained membership into a Comanche band, eventually marrying one chief and giving birth to another. In December 1860, Texas Rangers “rescued” Parker after ambushing a Comanche camp. Despite reuniting with her white family, she struggled to rejoin white society until her death in 1870. Parker’s story made national news and became the basis for more formal works of fiction.

¹¹⁸ Sam Houston to John B. Floyd, 12 March 1860, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; Jonathan Hamilton Baker, “Diary 1858-1918,” entries for 19 August 1860 (first quote), 26 October 1860 (second quote), and 11 November 1860 (third quote), Baker (Jonathan Hamilton) Papers, CAH.

Although Parker never lost the desire to return to her Comanche family, her experiences gave hope to families that had lost members to Indian raids.¹¹⁹

In captive tales such as Parker's, Native Americans served as boogey men, waiting patiently in the darkness for a moment of opportunity. That depiction gave birth to a latent hatred for Native Americans. Portrayed as barbarians, unencumbered by Christian morality and given to act on their depravity, Indians made perfect villains for captive tales. Influential men tapped into hatred for Native Americans when they needed popular support. Settlers also wielded it for their own purposes, as it justified atrocities that ranged from mutilating Native American corpses on the battlefield to targeting women and children during raids on Indian villages. Those tactics, among others, demonstrated the degree to which whites had thoroughly demonized Native Americans in northern Texas. Moreover, hatred for Indians served as the emotional foundation for rationalizations supporting dislocation.

The boogey man depiction also encouraged vigilance, often to the point of paranoia. Families living in sparsely settled areas developed hair-trigger responses to signs of Indian activity. A Cooke County woman, for example, remembered her uncle leaving the farm one afternoon to work with the family's cattle. Soon after departing, his "horse came running home like a streak of lightning." The girl and her mother, working in fields far from the house, noticed blood dripping from the horse's saddle. Afraid and defenseless, the two hid in place for several minutes before spotting "Uncle . . . running like a horse across the prairie." A badly cut finger, rather than Comanche

¹¹⁹ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 166 and 205.

warriors, stood guilty for the scare. The tendency to panic afflicted towns as well. On New Years' Eve 1858, Palo Pinto erupted when "an Indian alarm was brought into town" to warn residents of an impending raid. A local resident described a scene in which "great consternation prevailed. Women crying and gathering their children together and seeking the safest retreat. Children running to and fro screaming and expecting to be carried off. Some of the men turning pale and walking up and down the streets." That episode proved a false alarm, one of dozens that occurred each year by 1860. The frequency of those alarms, paired with the reactions of settlers, suggests anxieties that precluded peaceful resolution to the conflict between whites and Native Americans in Texas.¹²⁰

Fear of Indian raiders enveloped white communities in northern Texas, and many chose to leave their homes. By mid-1860, Sam Houston warned federal authorities of people "quitting whole neighborhoods Their little cabins are deserted, their fields of corn and wheat are left to waste. . . . Starvation is staring them in the face." At times the homesteaders' retreat resembled an exodus, as in late 1860 when "trains of wagons, miles in length" left Palo Pinto County "for more secure abodes." Some fled shorter distances. A move one county to the east, or sometimes even into the nearest town, provided adequate safety from depredations in the minds of those settlers. The Parmer family in Jack County grew wary of vigilantly protecting their homestead and eventually attempted to manage their livestock from safer environs. After several years they gave

¹²⁰ Sarah Isabella Stephens Rogers, "Memoirs, 1850-1937," unpublished, (1937), pp. 28-9 (first quote), Belle Rogers Collection, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT); Baker, "Diary," 31 December 1858 (second quote).

up on the enterprise, selling out and purchasing a mill in relatively safe Johnson County. The Gholson family of Mills County, like the Parmers, tired of living under constant threat. Rather than attempting to manage their ranch from afar, however, they simply purchased land in nearby Coryell County and moved their entire operation east to safety. Others needed more dramatic changes of scenery. Jack County resident Joe Henry Martin experienced “so much trouble that he left the country” entirely, supposedly for Emporia, Kansas.¹²¹

Men and women who settled in northern Texas during the 1850s chose to occupy contested land. Native Americans in the region—caught between a hamstrung federal government and a hostile state government—used violence to dissuade potential migrants to the area. Those efforts proved counterproductive, however, as white settlers converted loss of life and property into the emotional fuel they channeled into retaliation. While some chose to leave, many more stayed and developed cooperative techniques designed to protect themselves and drive their enemies from the state.

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Settlers in northern Texas had come to the state at great cost, and most refused to leave without a fight. Native American warriors could appear without warning and overwhelm a homestead with remarkable speed. Few white families stood a chance against raiding parties. Consequently, settlers established informal pacts aimed at mutual defense of their homesteads. As few as five well-armed men supported by as

¹²¹ Sam Houston to John B. Floyd, 14 April 1860 (first quote), Frontier Protection Records, CAH; Baker, “Diary,” 30 November 1860 (second quote); Atkinson(?), reminiscences, p. 6 (third quote); B. F. Gholson, “Recollections of B. F. Gholson,” unpublished reminiscences, (1928), pp. 5-6, Gholson (B. F.) Reminiscences, CAH.

many women—a number easily produced between two or three families— could hold several times their number at bay from a fortified cabin. Discontent with playing defense, settlers also formed militias designed to pursue and engage raiding parties. Although finding only limited success, many citizens considered the militias superior to federal troops occupying western forts.

The presence of militias put citizens somewhat at ease, but none doubted that settlers could be forced to defend their own homes. If fortunate, they might have the help of neighbors. The defensive practice of “forting up” began in the late antebellum period and involved several families—sometimes more than a dozen—in a neighborhood gathering at a pre-designated homestead for mutual protection. Walter Cochran’s father left Georgia in 1853, and two years later he became the first white settler west of the Brazos River in Palo Pinto County. Walter “was there when the Indians went on the war path, and there all through the Indian time,” which gave him experience at forting up. “People all built picket houses,” according to the rancher, “and covered them with dirt to live in while they were forted up.” The practice became increasingly common during the Civil War, when fighting aged men became scarcer in the region.¹²²

Forting up constituted the most psychologically intense variety of cooperative endeavor practiced on the plains. It occurred under two different scenarios. In the first, men who volunteered to campaign “placed their wives and children in security”

¹²² Walter C. Cochran, “Story of the Early Days Indian Troubles and Cattle Business of Palo Pinto and Adjoining Counties,” unpublished reminiscences, (1930), pp. 1 and 11-2 (quote), Cochran (Walter C) Reminiscences, CAH; Baker, “Diary,” 29 November 1860.

provided by picket houses before going “to the relief of their more oppressed neighbors.” In the second, entire families anticipating imminent attack hurried toward picket houses. “Fort” Murray constituted one such structure, “which was not really a fort at this time but . . . a point where the settlers could rally for mutual protection.” In either case, settlers in cramped cabins fought for their lives against foes they could only hope would tire and leave.¹²³

Another “old picket yard,” George Bragg’s homestead played a key role in one particularly sensational Indian raid. The Elm Creek Raid occurred in October 1864, as hundreds of Kiowa and Comanche warriors stormed down the creek and into battle with dozens of white families. George Wooten first sounded the alarm that “indians 150 strong were coming down Elm Creek and Killing and burning everything in sight.” Because “Wooten was Known as a man highly endowed with the gift of exaggeration,” however, “his gruesome report served only to provoke a smile of incredulity.” Soon thereafter, a more reliable source “more than confirmed Wootens report by saying that if there was one indian there was 500.”¹²⁴

Thomas Wilson, a physician by trade, owned the ranch farthest up the creek. After hiding his family in a nearby thicket, Wilson mounted his horse and “made all speed possible down the valley to warn the settlers of danger.” Wilson helped conceal the women and children he encountered during his ride, but by the time “he reached old George Braggs house . . . a brisk fight was in progress.” That location, as it turned out,

¹²³ Houston to Floyd, 14 April 1860 (first quote); W. M. Green, “The Great Indian Raid in Young Co,” unpublished essay, (1932), p. 275 (second quote), Atkinson (George F.) Reminiscences, CAH.

¹²⁴ Willis Lang, diary, entry for 10 May 1860 (first quote), Lang (Willis) Diary, CAH; Green, “Great Indian Raid,” pp. 275 (second quote) and 276 (third quote).

saw the most intense fighting of the entire raid. In addition to Wilson and Bragg, defenders included Thomas Hamby and his son Thornton, as well as “Sol Bragg, a negro Boy about 18 years old.” Wilson gave his life defending the homestead and its inhabitants, and both the elder Hamby and George Bragg received injuries before a regiment of Confederate troops arrived and drove off the raiders.¹²⁵

In the aftermath of the raid, devastated settlers took stock of the damage. The Comanche and Kiowa warriors had “swept every thing . . . every rag of clothing was appropriated, beds and pillows were ripped open . . . provisions destroyed or carried away, the live stock carried away or killed.” As with farmers and ranchers victimized by severe weather, those who lost all at the hands of Native Americans turned to neighbors for help. “In those days,” one Palo Pinto rancher explained, “there was always room for one more, and the balm of a broad open hospitality awaited the unfortunate.”¹²⁶

Beyond the immediate needs of food and shelter, settlers on Elm Creek faced a clothing shortage in the wake of the raid. Reactions to that shortage testify to the strength of the communal ethos in northern Texas. With limited access to markets and even less access to cash, settlers “had to make their own clothes or go without.” Indian raiders had destroyed virtually every spinning wheel along the creek, but a few kept at Fort Belknap in Young County survived. A few days after the raid, a shipment of “woolen rolls” arrived from Fort Worth, one hundred miles to the east. “Every spinning Wheels loom in Belknap was set in motion,” according to an observer, “and Kept going

¹²⁵ Green, “Great Indian Raid,” pp. 277 (first quote), 277-8 (second quote), and 278 (third and fourth quote).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 284 (all quotes).

day and night for weeks. not for one moment were they allowed to remain idle Sunday not excepted.” Women organized the work and established a schedule while men fulfilled support duties, such as cooking meals and sculpting “rudely fashioned” grease lamps from clay. “Those most needy were served first,” one settler explained, “the great puzzle being which of the family was in greatest need.” Without the help of more fortunate neighbors, settlers on Elm Creek would have entered the winter facing critical shortages of clothing, and some would likely have abandoned their homes. Mutual aid kept the neighborhood intact despite the best efforts of Native Americans.¹²⁷

Forting up, while effective, held little potential as a long-term strategy. Most settlers believed that raids would continue until Texans displayed greater resolve; to that end, they advocated taking the fight to Native American doorsteps. By 1860, militiamen colloquially known as “rangers” (irrespective of official capacity) had a long history in Texas. As early as 1823, men sharing the title “ranger” voluntarily joined to attack Karankawa Indians living near the Texas coast. For the next five decades, Texans applied the moniker to anyone who volunteered for the common defense, usually by fighting Mexicans or Native Americans. At times—during the Texas Revolution and Lamar administration, for example—the government commissioned rangers as a paramilitary force. Commissioned ranger companies fought with distinction in the Mexican War but served little purpose after hostility ceased, as the federal government assumed responsibility for protecting settlers from Native Americans.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ibid., 285 (quote).

¹²⁸ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 115.

Ten years after the Mexican War, Comanche and Kiowa warriors routinely exploited weaknesses in the army's defenses. In response to raids, many communities assembled impromptu ranger companies. Residents of Comanche County formed such a group in November 1857. In that episode, twelve area farmers pursued a band of Comanches who had stolen several horses. They referred to themselves as "minute men," and some assembled informal companies that drilled monthly. In Coryell County, the "minute company" divided into two squads. The squads alternated two-week shifts in which they patrolled at night for signs of Indian mischief. In other areas companies proved less organized, but minutemen generally stood "ready to assist . . . neighbors at a moments warning." According to Gatesville minuteman John Chrisman, volunteers "kept our horse staked near the house . . . and a supply of bullets in our shot pouch." The resurgence and popularity of ranger companies underscored a pervasive sense that the federal government had reneged on its obligation to protect settlers in northern Texas. Those citizens responded with cooperative efforts to protect their land and property.¹²⁹

Many remained prepared to respond to depredations until the Civil War, but by then commissioned ranger units regularly assembled to scout for Native Americans. The ineffectiveness of federal troops spawned the widespread belief that only those with a vital stake in protecting homesteads could adequately perform the job. Governor Sam Houston made that case, and he believed the state constitution vested power "in the Executive to resist invasion." Correspondingly, Houston commissioned a regiment of

¹²⁹ Hutchinson, "History of Comanche Co.," p. 6 (first quote); Chrisman, "Reminiscences," pp. 10 (second quote) and 17-8 (third quote).

rangers to protect settlers. He explained that decision to the Secretary of War in 1860, arguing that regular army troops disliked scouting for Indians and showed little aptitude for it. Rangers, on the other hand, proved “excellent horsemen” and uniquely motivated. The governor noted that they had “their families, their kindred, and their neighbors to protect,” as well as “the recollection of a thousand outrages committed upon those dear to them by the savage, to impel them onward.”¹³⁰

Men undoubtedly joined ranger companies for many reasons, including the desire to protect their families and property. Some, including one Palo Pinto man, took “a secret pleasure that gives . . . comfort – the fact of being nobly employed, for . . . country and homes.” They also joined out of a sense of community. Men often responded enthusiastically to distant alarms. In 1857, five hundred men—more than the adult male population of Erath County—responded to a call-to-arms in Stephenville. The following year, according to one Cooke County resident, “news of Indian depredations, murdering & stealing horses 15 to 30 miles” away sparked war speeches and the assembly of “a small company to go after them.” The willingness to protect neighbors who lived hours away suggests that settlers took mutual protection seriously and established extensive networks of reciprocity. It also suggests that settlers conceived of their community broadly, extending beyond immediate friends and family. In the late antebellum era, cooperative efforts between virtual strangers became commonplace in northern Texas.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Sam Houston, address to the Texas Senate and House of Representatives, 13 January 1860 (first quote), Frontier Protection Records, CAH; Houston to Floyd, 14 April 1860 (second quote).

¹³¹ Baker, “Diary,” 25 December 1860 (first quote); Chrisman, “Reminiscences,” p. 12; Charles B. Moore, diary, entry for 5 October 1858 (second quote), Moore Family Papers, UNT.

White communities in northern Texas universally supported the men who ranged the countryside in search of a fight. Women took the lead in offering moral support. Willis Lang, for example, commented on the sendoff his company received, as “the ladies of Waco” presented “a beautiful banner . . . made of ribbon entire.” The women whose reputations fighting men sought to preserve regularly made special efforts to honor the rangers. If ranger expeditions encountered the Native American warriors, receptions welcoming them home surpassed even those sending them off. Such festivities often centered on barbecues. Ritual feasts allowed citizens to express appreciation for the risks rangers took and cemented communal bonds. In the autumn of 1860, Palo Pinto residents spent an entire day “helping prepare the barbecue grounds for a public dinner . . . given to the ‘Anti Base Line Rangers’, who had the late fight with the Indians.” The dinner attracted people from across the neighborhood, and ultimately several hundred attended. Similarly, following a skirmish in which John R. Baylor and a half dozen other men killed several Native Americans in Haskell County, “a barbecue was given at Palo Pinto and great rejoicing was in evidence everywhere, and Captain Baylor and his men were the men of the hour.” Such feasts reinforced a sense of community and lionized the men who roused their neighbors to action.¹³²

The gratitude that settlers showered on rangers hints at the relief men and women felt with their presence. According to one Palo Pinto resident, the mere suggestion that rangers patrolled the plains had “a tendency to quiet the citizens a little.” On at least one occasion, a ranging company paraded through Belknap for more than two hours in hopes

¹³² Lang, diary, 2 April 1860 (first quote); Baker, “Diary,” 12 October 1860 and 13 October 1860 (second quote); Cochran, “Early Days,” p. 14 (third quote).

of calming local fears. Although most scouting expeditions did not result in recovered livestock or battlefield glory, rangers nonetheless fostered a sense of security crucial to settlers' peace of mind. Beyond the gratitude embodied by barbecues and elaborate sendoffs, admiration for volunteers permeated white communities. Methodist circuit rider Walter South expressed as much in his description of "42 men, all well armed, going out voluntarily at their own expense to avenge themselves for the loss of property and friends." Indeed, the community exalted rangers explicitly for their courage and sacrifice, but, implicitly, admiration for rangers revealed faith in the efficacy of settlers.¹³³

Settlers competing with Native Americans for lands in northern Texas relied heavily on cooperation. Whether employing offensive or defensive tactics, they worked together for protection. That collective action resulted in part from the culture of mutual aid that also compelled neighbors to help each other establish homesteads. Common perceptions that the federal government refused to take westerners problems seriously encouraged cooperation as well.

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In the late antebellum era, the federal government sought peaceful (if asymmetrical) relationships with most Native American groups. Authorities attempted to eliminate violence between settlers and plains Indians by stationing troops in the West and establishing reservations. Most homesteaders viewed those measures skeptically and pushed for a more aggressive Indian policy. Their inability to persuade officials

¹³³ Baker, "Diary," 5 June 1859 (first quote); Lang, diary, 25 May 1860; Walter S. South, "Diary, 1860-1866," entry for 11 September 1860, South (Walter S) Diaries, 1860-, CAH (second quote).

created significant tension. As other southerners employed rhetoric demanding states rights, citizens of northern Texas demanded a more substantial federal response to their problems.

Beginning in 1848, the U.S. Army established a line of seven forts to protect Americans settling in western counties. Theoretically, the forts would discourage most Native American warriors from approaching white settlements and house soldiers to defeat the remainder in battle. Practically, the forts failed in almost every respect. Approximately one hundred miles apart, they proved an ineffective deterrent. When fighting mounted on the open prairies, moreover, U.S. troops paled in comparison to Comanche warriors. Noted Indian agent-turned-Indian fighter Allison Nelson voiced his frustrations on the matter directly to President James Buchanan in July 1858. “Twenty-five of our Citizens have been murdered by the Indians on this Northern Frontier and horses to the value of \$50,000 . . . driven off,” the Waco resident complained. “Yet, not one Indian has been killed and not twenty horses recovered out of seven hundred stolen from the people.” Nelson, like many, did not consider regular army troops generally inadequate, just poorly suited to Indian fighting. “You must have men who can ride and live like a Comanche and shoot like a Tennessean,” he insisted. In Nelson’s mind, U.S. regulars simply lacked the agility needed to keep pace with Indian raiders. Northern Texas needed Indian fighters who could “live on Buffalo as they do, travel without transportation, sleep without tents or fires, and know their habits.”¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Allison Nelson to James Buchanan, 15 July 1858, Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH (quote); Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 196-7.

Others offered less forgiving assessments of regular army forces. Bosque County resident T. C. Alexander complained that U.S. troops “had shown themselves totally unqualified” to defend the region. “The Indians can steal . . . their horses from under their guns and escape without injury.” Although Alexander judged U.S. troops more harshly than Nelson, the two shared a prescription for increasing success against Native American warriors: official deployment of Texas Rangers. Alexander claimed that Indians had kidnapped children, murdered entire families, and left others without the draft animals needed to raise crops, all “within sight of Camp Colorado.” He estimated that “one Texas Ranger is worth two regular Dragoons for frontier service.” Sam Houston answered the calls of white settlers by commissioning a regiment of rangers in 1860, but the federal government did not send sufficient numbers of cavalrymen to northern Texas until after the Civil War.¹³⁵

A more dramatic failing of the fort system became evident even before the army completed the final fort in 1850. Simply put, the federal government severely underestimated the pace of westward expansion in northern Texas. White settlers pushed the line of settlement about ten miles west each year; within a few years, it bypassed the newly constructed forts. In response, the army constructed a second line of forts 150 miles west of the original line and stationed cavalrymen, rather than infantrymen, in them. Disappointingly for white settlers in northern Texas, the federal government prioritized protecting central Texas and the road between San Antonio and

¹³⁵ T. C. Alexander to James Buchanan, 22 July 1858, Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH (quote).

El Paso. Consequently, only one fort in northern Texas housed cavalymen capable of confronting Native American warriors on even terms.¹³⁶

Although preparing for conflict, the federal government continued to extend an olive branch to Native Americans. In 1854, the state legislature turned land over to the federal government, which established two reservations. The Brazos Reservation hosted Caddos and similarly agricultural groups, and officials maintained the Clear Fork Reservation for more numerous Comanches. Responsibility for running the institutions fell on Robert Neighbors. A native Virginian, Neighbors arrived in Texas at the age of nineteen during the final days of the Texas Revolution. He began work as an Indian Agent for the Republic just prior to annexation, and by the late 1850s he had spent more than a decade mediating the wants and desires of the state's Native American and white populations. In 1853, after campaigning on behalf of fellow Democrat Franklin Pierce, Neighbors received appointment as Supervising Agent of Texas Indians.¹³⁷

As late as 1857, citizens believed that Neighbors had "long and ably filled" the role of Supervising Agent. After that date, however, raids into white settlements became more frequent. Consequently, public opinion turned against the state's most experienced Indian Agent. Less than a year after praising Neighbors's tenure, residents petitioned the federal government for his removal. Although many in January 1857 believed that Indians living on the reservations were "rapidly advancing in civilization," by December of that year a growing number thought Neighbors had "not given to the frontier the protection that he might have done from his position." Despite evidence, according to

¹³⁶ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 197-8.

¹³⁷ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 202-3.

area residents, that Native Americans had committed “depredations upon the frontier settlers, murdering and stealing their horses,” the renowned Indian Agent denied “any participation in these acts by his Indians.” Native Americans’ prospects in northern Texas diminished as settlers grew impatient with federal agents.¹³⁸

Beyond charges that Neighbors refused to acknowledge the role so-called “reserve Indians” played in terrorizing settlers, they contended that he treated “the complains of the citizens with insult and indignity.” Some conceded that “ignorant and prejudiced individuals may have acted . . . to give pretext” to charges of lawlessness, but the injustice remained that such charges had “been ceised on to close the ears of the Government to all charges . . . brought forward by the good law-abiding and long forbearing Citizens who compose the very large majority of the population on this frontier.” Many settlers explicitly argued that they only sought enforcement of the law. “We do not ask, or expect that Indians will become civilized in a few years,” one group of Lampasas County men contended, “but we do ask, that when they rob, and murder, our citizens, they may be punished instead of being defended by their agent. We see no reason why an Indian should be permitted to do with impunity what would hang or imprison a citizen.” In sum, many settlers in northern Texas blamed the federal government for poor relationships with Native American groups. Indian agents, they

¹³⁸ Harmonson et al. to ?, 20 January 1857 (first quote), Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH; Monroe et al. to Jacob Thompson, 15 December 1857 (second quote), Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH.

believed, undermined the efforts of settlers and fostered resentment by corrupting the people under their charge.¹³⁹

Calls for Neighbors's resignation came as early as December 1857. That month, citizens petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to aid them "in removing from office, the man whose cold indifference to our sufferings, and deliberate mismanagement" had invited depredations. "Unless a better system of management is adopted," they threatened, "we will be compelled, in self defense, to attack and break up the Comanche Reserve." Others considered Neighbors blind to reality. According to some area residents, the Indian agent's claims that Kickapoo Indians committed "all the depredations on the frontier," had "*no foundation in truth whatever.*" They worried that scant military resources would be "sent off upon fruitless expeditions after Indians who only exist in the imagination of Mr. Neighbors." Nevertheless, largely Washington ignored those concerns. Finally, in April 1859, settlers stopped writing those responsible for the Indian Agent's appointment and aimed their pleas at the man himself. "Having utterly failed to give satisfaction to the citizens of the frontier of Texas," one group wrote, "and for the reason that . . . you have acted in bad faith, to the Indian and whiteman;. . . we. . . demand your immediate resignation." Neighbors refused, but settlers remained determined to shape Indian policy in northern Texas.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Monroe et al. to Thompson, 15 December 1857 (first and third quotes); Nelson to Buchanan, 15 July 1858 (second quote).

¹⁴⁰ Monroe et al. to Thompson, 15 December 1857 (first and second quotes); Preston et al. to N. C. Givens, 1 February 1858 (third and fourth quotes), Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH; Fauntleroy et al. to R. S. [Robert Simpson] Neighbors and S. P. Ross, 4 April 1858 (fifth quote), Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH.

On several occasions representatives from the settlements—often in mob form—marched on federal forts and reservations to make their grievances directly to army officers and Indian agents. Those officials, typically the most prominent federal authorities in the West, carried out the unenviable task of mediating disputes between infuriated white citizens and the Native Americans they protected from vigilante justice. On some occasions they succeeded by forging agreements designed to keep Indians on the reservation and whites in the settlements. Native Americans had little choice but to accept such agreements. Whites generally accepted them as well, but not without caveats. At the 4th of July celebration of 1859 in Palo Pinto, “Capt. Hammer of Jack Co read the resolutions concerning the Indian, in which we were to let the Indians alone and the Government was to keep them on the reservations.” Although “the people voted the adoption of the resolutions,” they also resolved to organize a ranger company “to hold themselves in readiness to act on the defensive against any and all Indians,” including, presumably, those living on reservations. Even while settling for peace with Native Americans, settlers prepared themselves for expected violations of the terms.¹⁴¹

By 1860, citizens in northern Texas believed that the federal government lacked both the will and the expertise to take meaningful action against the Native Americans they viewed as a plague. In the opinion of one Palo Pinto man, a bleak future awaited settlers going into the spring of 1860. He lamented that in his neighborhood the federal

¹⁴¹ Baker, “Diary,” 20 June 1859 and 4 July 1859 (quote).

“Government affords us no protection, and we are too poor to protect ourselves. Truly,” he believed, area settlers constituted “a distressed people.”¹⁴²

Indeed, “distressed” seems an understatement considering the violent end visited upon Robert Neighbors. In June 1859, a letter to the Indian Agent from Zachariah Coombes—a schoolteacher at the Brazos Agency—anticipated future troubles. He warned that “the people between [Fort Worth] and the Agency are breathing threats of death on us all. We are almost ready to run from their homes.” He concluded with a prescient admonition to “inform the boys that they will have each one to keep wide awake for their own personal safety, whenever they leave the Agency.” That September, “Hostile Indians” ambushed Neighbors and a fellow Indian agent named Lapeer as the two traveled on official business. The agents survived, although Lapeer received severe injuries. After nursing Lapeer for several days, Neighbors walked to Belknap to gather supplies and report to superiors. While there, he argued with a local man “on account of the killing of a Reserve Indian not long since.” The fight ended when the local, “presumed to have been an entire stranger,” shot the Indian Agent. Twenty minutes later, Neighbors died.¹⁴³

Although several hundred Comanches chose to live on the Clear Fork Reservation, it ultimately failed to quell white anger. Instead, it gave focus to white complaints about Native Americans. Specifically, settlers believed that raiders regularly attacked white settlements and then found sanctuary on the reservation. Furthermore,

¹⁴² Ibid., 3 March 1860 (quote);

¹⁴³ Z. E. Coombes to Robt. S. [Robert Simpson] Neighbors, 6 June 1859 (first quote), Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH; M. Lapeer to Sir, 15 September 1859 (second quote), Neighbors (Robert Simpson) Papers, 1838-1935, CAH.

farmers and ranchers claimed that taxpayer-financed food and supplies distributed to reservation Indians eventually landed in the hands of hostile Native Americans. Both complaints likely had some basis in reality. Regardless, white rage intensified against Native Americans—and the federal government—through late 1860. By the end of the antebellum period, both of the reservations in northern Texas closed in the face of white hostility.

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The annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, and the subsequent Mexican Cession combined to lure settlers toward northern Texas in the 1850s. The country filled with white families who sought homesteads on land already claimed as hunting grounds by various plains Indians. Native American warriors seeking valued horses found inviting targets in farms and ranches. Settlers responded with cooperative solutions. They developed offensive and defensive tactics tailored to fighting Native Americans, but they also resented the necessity of doing so. Instances of Indian raids increased in lockstep with the white population of northern Texas despite the constellation of U.S. Army forts that dotted state maps. Reservations met with equally dismal results, as the short-lived experiment served only to complicate relations between Native Americans and whites. The former almost certainly used the protection afforded by U.S. troops to assist friends and family members living off the reservation. The latter almost certainly murdered innocent Native Americans deemed collaborators. Mistrust and ill will flourished.

Poor relations between settlers and Native Americans intensified through the final days of antebellum America. Hostilities between the two groups may have peaked

in the 1860s had the Civil War not siphoned critical resources eastward. Viewed in that context, the complaints of western citizens appear symptomatic of a general discourse of discontent with federal authority. Surviving on the plains took a great deal of work, and prospering required an equal measure of luck. Many settlers struggled financially and held many of the same complaints about the economy—such as a fixed money supply, poor access to credit and markets, and lack of cash in circulation—as their children and grandchildren would hold in the 1880s. Yet, they were not fully Populists—far from it. When faced with unpopular federal policy, they did not seek change by growing grassroots organizations, writing political platforms, establishing newspapers, and running third-party candidates for political office. Instead, they formed violent mobs and murdered the Indian agent.

In the 1850s, settlers in northern Texas developed a sense that their place in the minds of elected officials reflected their place on the periphery of white settlement. That thinking factored in the secession vote. Pro-Union sentiment proved stronger in northern Texas than in other parts of the state; nonetheless, most counties in the region voted for secession. While most secessionists primarily worried about the future of slavery, in northern Texas many could not support a federal government that seemed deaf to their pleas. The Civil War, however, fundamentally changed the calculus of government protest. In the post-bellum period, few harbored illusions about the legitimacy of secession. More importantly, Texans witnessed firsthand the significant changes peaceful elections could bring. By 1890, with their own experiences as evidence, citizens

of northern Texas believed dramatic changes in government could effect dramatic changes in people's lives.

CHAPTER VI

CONFLICT AND DISCONTENT IN KANSAS

On the morning of May 25, 1856, a Franklin County woman enjoying a Sunday morning stroll stumbled into a grizzly scene. A corpse lay mangled in the shrubs, massive gashes running through head, hands, and torso. A black bear initially took the blame, but Mother Nature played no role in the attack. Closer examination of the wounds suggested hatches, knives, and swords. Neighbors identified the man as Allen Wilkinson, member of the territorial legislature and local postmaster. The murderers who took Wilkinson's life executed four more men at two other homesteads that night in the Pottawatomie Creek Massacre. The killing spree implicated no less than John Brown, a dangerous man driven by abolitionist convictions.¹⁴⁴ What had the five men done to justify such ignominious ends? They engaged in the bellicosity common to both free state and proslavery advocates in Kansas Territory.¹⁴⁵

Brown and hundreds of other free state supporters pointed to the federal government's failures in justifying violent measures. Congress abdicated authority in implementing popular sovereignty, a dubious policy that threatened already cornered Missourians. A free Kansas meant a Missouri surrounded on three sides by free states. Supporters of slavery stole elections, harassed homesteaders, and murdered free staters

¹⁴⁴ The Special Committee to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas, H. R. Rep. No. 34-200, pp. 1197-9 (1856).

¹⁴⁵ Free state supporters consisted of two groups, free soilers and abolitionists. Free soilers were the majority and disapproved of slavery on the economic grounds that it devalued white labor. Many free soilers did not want any blacks—slave or free—in Kansas Territory. Abolitionists, the minority of free staters, opposed slavery on moral grounds and welcomed free blacks into the territory.

to prevent that outcome. Seeing the tide rising against their cause, abolitionist groups committed to countering proslavery tactics. Emigrant aid companies chartered to send settlers and supplies to the territory sprang up throughout the North, most famously in Massachusetts.¹⁴⁶

Company emigrants and other free state voters believed proslavery men formed a minority of the electorate and had violated the spirit of popular sovereignty. The elected territorial government—dubbed the “bogus legislature” by free staters—remained in power only through the support of successive Democratic presidential administrations. Frustrations linked to the unrepresentative legislature mounted, but discontent with federal policy waxed and waned. Violence between supporters and opponents of slavery occurred in three distinct phases. The first began in late 1855 and ran through the following summer, as free state supporters rejected appointed local officials. The second phase consisted of an uneasy peace marked by fierce debate over a proposed proslavery constitution. The third phase started in spring 1858 and concluded early the next year, when free state voters ended Bleeding Kansas at the polls. Free state thinking about the federal government evolved during those five years, as anti-slavery forces contended with sheriffs, governors, and Presidents who advocated slavery.

The sense that federal officials underpinned proslavery rule complicated homesteaders’ relationships with the government. Federal policy had paved the way for white settlement in the territory by negotiating treaties that (again) removed Native Americans and placed their land in the public domain. Although settlers seeped onto

¹⁴⁶ Committee to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas, p. 1193-9; Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 64.

Indian lands in advance of formal treaties or surveys, the U.S. government overwhelmingly protected white property rights at Native American expense. Army officers, Indian agents, and other federal representatives often regretted official treatment of Native Americans, but federal law encouraged the mindset that only homesteaders could lay legitimate claim to the land. That attitude meshed seamlessly with the free soil ideology advanced by most settlers. Elements of that ideology—“that all men have a natural right to a portion of the soil” and “that the public lands belong to the people”—profoundly influenced later generations searching for the proper role of government in American lives.¹⁴⁷ In the final years of antebellum America, Kansans took advantage of opportunities facilitated by the federal government while resisting that government’s efforts to override the will of the majority.

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Most historical narratives of Bleeding Kansas pit white Americans who supported slavery in the West against those who opposed it. Though useful, such an approach tends to gloss over or ignore Native Americans, a group with entirely different prospects in the territory.¹⁴⁸ In part, this situation results from scholarship that compartmentalizes the histories of Bleeding Kansas and Indian Kansas. Indian removal scholarship has focused on earlier periods and eastern places, such as the forced exodus

¹⁴⁷ Free Soil Party National Convention, “Platform,” (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 11 August 1852).

¹⁴⁸ Bryce D. Benedict, *Jayhawkers: The Civil War Brigade of James Henry Lane* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), chapter 1; Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), chapters 1 and 2; Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), chapters 1-3; Gunja SenGupta, *For God and Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

of Cherokees from Georgia in the 1830s. Similarly, research on Bleeding Kansas has centered on political aspects of the episode's role in bringing civil war.¹⁴⁹ The story of Indian removal in Kansas offers less drama than in places like Texas, and it certainly lacks the tension extant between proslavery and antislavery forces between 1856 and 1865. Nonetheless, federal policy toward Native Americans—and by extension toward homesteaders—aids in understanding evolving feelings toward the government during the late antebellum period.

Most Native American groups living east of the 20°-rainfall line had only lived in the territory one or two generations by 1854. Unlike in Texas, the federal government enjoyed great latitude in dealing with Kansas tribes and established treaties that paint complicated portraits of relations between the groups. Simplistic depictions that cast Native Americans as helpless victims fail to account for much of what occurred in Kansas Territory. Delaware, Shawnee, Miami, and Ottawa Indians, among others, made calculated decisions in ceding land to the U.S. government. Many shared the motivations of homesteaders, and white settlement promised to bring a higher standard of living to the region. Furthermore, by participating in economic development—purchasing stock in and selling land to railroads, for example—tribes hoped for lucrative financial returns. Their gambit ultimately failed due to legitimate business constraints and perverse interpretations of contracts, but in those respects Native Americans fared no worse than many white settlers.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ H. Craig Miner et al., *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), pp. ix-x.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-33.

The federal government's failure to protect Native Americans involved more than dealings with railroads. An inability to stem white encroachment proved more damning. Historians have noted that when Kansas Territory opened for settlement, white homesteaders had no legal access to the land. Undeterred, squatters caught elected officials by surprise, and by 1856 they outnumbered Native Americans on some reservations. Indian agents typically declined to act for fear of reprisal from homesteaders. In part, policymakers fell victim to self-inflicted wounds. Homestead laws invariably required that settlers "improve" claims, building permanent structures and farming or ranching in ways that conformed to American sensibilities. Failure to build a recognizable homestead translated into a failure to improve the land, and those who did not improve the land held no legitimate claim to it. Thus, homestead laws facilitated encroachment by both making land affordable and providing a justification for another round of Indian removal.¹⁵¹

Settlers did not have to infer the social position of Native Americans from the legal code, however. A chasm separated American and Indian cultures, and the disinterest most whites showed in bridging that gap manifested in negative attitudes. The appearances and customs of Native Americans often unsettled homesteaders. "Painted" bodies, "shaven" heads, and ears "slit and loaded with rings" intimidated many whites, who in turn considered Native Americans barbaric. Minimal clothing, often consisting of only "a little square piece of cloth and a pair of boots," further

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 3-4 and 107-15; Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 3-10.

contributed to white assumptions. Native American diets similarly bewildered whites. Settlers disparagingly applied the moniker “dog feast” to the Native American practice of barbecuing canines, a source of food some whites found nauseating.¹⁵²

Indeed, nothing about their new home seemed stranger to whites than Native Americans. More than three centuries after first contact, many European descendants still found indigenous people and their habits incomprehensible. O. N. Merrill revealed as much in his contemporary history of Bleeding Kansas. In his opinion, the material culture of Native Americans varied so greatly from Euro-American strains that white settlers misunderstood—and ultimately discounted—much of what they saw. The landscape, lacking “those relics of antiquity so interesting to the classic traveler,” seemed more akin to an unblemished paradise than a settled land. Without common points of reference to bridge the gap between familiar and alien, most homesteaders attributed differences to defects in Indian psychology or character. Perceptions of cultural inferiority also played into a circular logic that justified poor treatment. An absence of improvement demonstrated that Native Americans lacked civilization, and uncivilized people could not improve the land. In terms of settlement, this meant Native Americans had to choose between assimilation and landlessness.¹⁵³

Such cultural misunderstandings informed interactions between Native Americans and the first white settlers in the territory. Because homesteaders did not

¹⁵² [Elisha Mayo] to [Thankful Sophia Mayo], 28 May 1855 (both quotes), transcript in the hand of Thankful Sophia Mayo in her journal dated 1868, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter KSRL); G. W. Paddock, diary, entry for 5 May 1857, G. W. Paddock Diary Transcript, 1857-1861, KSRL.

¹⁵³ O. N. Merrill, *True History of the Kansas Wars, and Their Origin, Progress, and Incidents . . .* (Cincinnati: n. p., 1856), p. 9.

consider Indians fully developed people, they could not perceive attempts at neighborliness that would have seemed obvious coming from whites. When impoverished Native Americans approached the homes of settlers in search of food—an act of courage that testified to their desperation—many homesteaders saw only beggars. Whites often obliged, albeit sometimes out of fear. Perhaps if it had crossed their minds to ask for assistance in return, more settlers would have realized that Native Americans would reciprocate. As one emigrant noted, Native Americans offered no payment for assistance because they willingly shared food, shelter, and horses with whites in need.¹⁵⁴

Unlike in Texas, however, some in Kansas Territory held favorable views of their Native American neighbors. Groups in the eastern third of the territory—as opposed to Comanches and Cheyennes farther to the west—had already entered peaceful, if asymmetrical, relationships with white Americans. Consequently, Kansans avoided endemic horse theft, kidnappings, and other depredations that plagued Texans. Some newcomers even considered Native Americans productive members of society, cultivating both “the soil and the habits of civilized life.” Nonetheless, those with little or no experience around Native Americans needed some persuasion to migrate. Emigrant aid companies and others who published guidebooks, for instance, suggested that settlers living “by the Golden Rule” had “nothing to fear.” Through the late

¹⁵⁴ Chestina Bowker Allen, “Journey from Massachusetts to Kansas,” entry for 26 June 1857, *History of Pottwatomie County Chestina Allen Sketches and Journal*, Kansas Historical Society (hereafter KHS); Elizabeth Simpson Cooper, “Memories of My Life,” unpublished reminiscences, (1931), p. 7, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT); Robert Atkins Tovey, “A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory by an Actual Settler,” unpublished essay, (ca. 1856), p. 48, *A Twelve Months Practical Life in Kansas Territory Writen by an Actual Settler*, KSRL.

antebellum era, the federal government signed treaties that opened land to white settlement, paving the way for relatively peaceful relations between homesteaders and Native Americans. Those treaties also crystalized the usefulness of an active government in the minds of settlers.¹⁵⁵

In 1854, an estimated 10,000 Native Americans called Kansas Territory home. Within ten years, that number stood at fewer than one thousand. While violence and intimidation played some role in that outcome, the federal government acted as a willing partner. White settlers in Kansas Territory looked to the federal government for help in establishing homes and received preemption legislation that provided affordable land and implicit justifications for displacing Native Americans. Both free state and proslavery homesteaders took advantage of the laws and bought into those assumptions. Violence between whites and Indians occurred less often in the territory than in Texas, largely because Kansas tribes had longer histories with Americans and their government. Lack of racialized conflict should not be confused with peace, however. As opposed to Texas, fighting in the territory occurred along ideological lines.

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The seven-year period between the opening of Kansas Territory and the start of the Civil War remains difficult to understand despite its familiarity. According to one historian, “free-staters had the twin advantages of being both the winners and the good guys,” a fact that has occluded understanding of the tempest called Bleeding Kansas.

¹⁵⁵ [John Brown, Jr.] to Dear Father [John Brown, Sr.], 22 June 1855 (first quote), John Brown Collection, KHS; Thomas H. Webb, *Information for Kanzas Immigrants* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1856), p. 20 (second quote); O. B. Gunn, *New Map and Hand-Book of Kansas & the Gold Mines . . .* (Pittsburgh: W. S. Haven, 1859), p. 9; Tovey, “Twelve Months in Kansas,” p. 47.

The conflict's basic contours are well known. The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) opened the territory for white settlement and established popular sovereignty as the mechanism for deciding the fate of slavery in the prospective state. Nearby Missourians flooded into polling places and fraudulently elected a proslavery territorial legislature. In response, anti-slavery forces formed a shadow government, and conflict ensued from the unbroken western prairies to the halls of the United States Congress. Free state settlers bristled at combative policies emanating from Washington and carried out by proslavery partisans in the territory. Those policies soured Kansans on the Democratic Party and made them leery of federal authority.¹⁵⁶

Following the death of free-state supporter Charles Dow in November 1855 and the subsequent, casualty-free Wakarusa War in December, tensions between free state and proslavery factions escalated in January 1856. Free staters orchestrated unofficial elections that month to select a new government and approve the Topeka Constitution, a document prohibiting slavery. Proslavery settlers viewed the elections as usurpation and boycotted. Predictably, the constitution passed, and a slate of officers headed by free state governor Charles Robinson won election. That development rankled noses across the territory and beyond; no less than President Franklin Pierce deemed the elections unlawful and possibly treasonous. Nonetheless, determined free state supporters established a shadow government that claimed legitimacy over the proslavery legislature elected the previous year. The free state legislature convened in March 1856, and the

¹⁵⁶ Bill Cecil-Fronsman, "Death to All Yankees and Traitors in Kansas": The *Squatter Sovereign* and the Defense of Slavery in Kansas," in Rita Napier, ed., *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), p. 141; Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, pp. 14-5.

following month Pierce dispatched a committee in hopes of finding a peaceful path through the morass of territorial politics. The committee found widespread fraud in the elections won by proslavery candidates and determined that the free state legislature best represented the sentiment of “actual settlers” in the territory. Events beyond the committee’s control rendered that verdict moot, however, as violence again took center stage. Unlike the chicanery of 1855, violent proceedings of 1856 focused national attention squarely on Kansas Territory.¹⁵⁷

In mid-April, as Pierce’s committee worked to discern the facts surrounding territorial elections, Douglas County Sheriff Samuel Jones entered Lawrence to arrest Samuel Wood. Jones suspected Wood of freeing a fellow free stater arrested the previous autumn. The townspeople rose to Wood’s defense, refusing to surrender him and physically threatening the sheriff. In the heated standoff, a round fired from the mob found Jones’s backside, and the sheriff hastily retreated from the abolitionist stronghold. The open defiance of legal authority infuriated Jones, President Pierce, and proslavery advocates across the South. Consequently, Jones returned to Lawrence a month later with a posse nearly one thousand strong. The first sacking of Lawrence (not to be confused with William Quantrill’s much bloodier Civil War raid) targeted free state leaders and institutions. Jones achieved mixed results, destroying abolitionist printing presses but failing to capture any free state leaders. The sheriff’s men also destroyed the Free State Hotel after an effort—including more than fifty direct hits from a cannon at close range—that lent credence to claims the structure was less hotel than fort. Although

¹⁵⁷ Neely, *Border between Them*, p. 47; SenGupta, *God and Mammon*, pp. 99-101.

the only fatality in the sacking came by accident, the action convinced free state supporters to distrust their own government.¹⁵⁸

Sheriff Jones, who doubled as the postmaster of Westport, Missouri, offended free state residents of Douglas County more than any other local figure. An outspoken advocate for slavery, the sheriff broadly symbolized political corruption. Appointed by a territorial governor who had been appointed by a Democratic President, Jones embodied abolitionists' fears that slavery threatened to push west without "protection to life or property or restraint upon the lawless disposition of men . . . except by physical force." Although free state migrants hoped to keep the territory free at the ballot box, federal unwillingness to accept the will of the majority bred discouragement and discontent.¹⁵⁹

One day after the destruction in Lawrence and half a continent to the east, cane-wielding South Carolina Senator Preston Brooks approached colleague Charles Sumner on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Brooks mercilessly beat the unsuspecting Massachusettsite, who had recently delivered a speech critical of slaveholders and the illegitimate outcome of elections in Kansas Territory. In the main, free staters worried that force would supersede democracy in settling the slavery question. A smaller but growing number

¹⁵⁸ Miner, *Kansas*, p. 64; SenGupta, *God and Mammon*, pp. 109-10; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 53-4.

¹⁵⁹ O. E. L. [Oscar Learnard] to My Dear Parents and Sister, 6 April 1856 (quote), Oscar E. Learnard Collection, KHS; John [Everett] to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 28 January 1857, John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS.

believed violence should be repaid in kind. The most vocal among those was John Brown.¹⁶⁰

Abolitionists represented a minority of free state settlers in the territory, and those willing to kill for their cause represented a minority of abolitionists. Brown personified violent sentiment among abolitionists more than any individual in Kansas Territory and perhaps the entire nation. Two nights after proslavery men sacked Lawrence, he led a small group of men on the Pottawatomie Creek Massacre, a barbarous display that even ardent abolitionists disavowed. Indeed, Brown denied involvement in the five horrific murders, although other participants admitted his pivotal role in the atrocity after his death. Before the massacre, the bluster surrounding Bleeding Kansas had far exceeded the casualties it produced. The massacre changed the conflict's character, however, and began an escalation of ill will. If Brown hoped to settle the issue with a single shocking display of brutality, then he badly underestimated his enemy. In the following three months, Brown and other free staters met proslavery forces in dozens of skirmishes and nominal battles at Black Jack, Franklin, "Fort" Titus, and Osawatomie.¹⁶¹

Battles remained small, even during the tense summer of 1856, because most settlers rejected violence. Arrivals from both free and slave states distinguished between homesteaders invested in the territory's future and opportunists. Conjecture abounded that violence served primarily to advance the political, military, and publishing careers

¹⁶⁰ Neely, *Border between Them*, p. 58.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-9; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 64-6; Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, p. 18; SenGupta, *God and Mammon*, pp. 111-2.

of ambitious men, and most fighting took place in areas populated by partisans, such as Lawrence and Osawatimie. Other factors corroborated charges that fighting men on the free state side held more interest in ending slavery than in developing the territory. The centrality of abolitionists in Bleeding Kansas proved disproportionate to their numbers in the general population; moreover, those who fought received materiel and other support from abolitionist groups, often in secret. The tactic of packing arms “in Dry goods boxes with bedding or other useful things” encouraged proslavery sympathizers to search a great deal of cargo traveling down the Missouri River from free states. Consequently, even peaceful migrants to the territory could not avoid the conflict.¹⁶²

Tensions between settlers competing for western lands did not begin in the 1850s, but fighting in the territory quickly became politicized. Nationally, the Democratic Party supported popular sovereignty in general and the Kansas-Nebraska Act in particular. Popular sovereignty effectively repealed the Missouri Compromise, theoretically taking responsibility for the future of slavery from Congress and placing it with the people. In reality, the executive branch of the federal government overruled popular will in the territory. Kansans received an education on the power of the executive branch and how a seemingly distant government could influence local conditions.¹⁶³

Kansans reviled no individual more than Franklin Pierce. Some believed him corrupt, under the influence of railroad corporations. Others saw the devil in him. “I

¹⁶² O. [Orville] C. Brown to Dear Sir [Edward Allen], 18 March 1856 (quote), Orville Chester Brown Collection, KHS; T. [Thomas] C. Wells to Mother [Sarah Elizabeth Clark Wells], 13 April 1856, Thomas Wells Collection, KHS.

¹⁶³ Democratic Party National Convention, “Platform,” (Cincinnati, Ohio, 4 June 1856).

should not lose 10 sec. of sleep,” one free state woman told a friend, “if I should hear . . . that man or demon or whatever he be had been assassinated!” Other homesteaders viewed him as “hostile to freedom & . . . the free states” due to his handling of fraud in territorial elections and refusal to acknowledge the free state government. Moreover, that vitriol spread to every element of government tainted by the administration. U.S. troops, for example, rarely participated in violence between free state and proslavery factions. On several occasions, however, free staters considered the army a tool of the president. Sometimes that meant soldiers protected proslavery men who destroyed property or otherwise broke the law. Other times it meant that soldiers acted against free state supporters. Soldiers periodically questioned travelers in free state strongholds, for example, and they played a key role in disbanding the free state legislature. Whether actively or passively aiding proslavery settlers, the actions of federal representatives in the territory reflected on Pierce and cast a shadow over his term in the minds of most Kansans.¹⁶⁴

In the first act of Bleeding Kansas, free staters sought redress for the fraudulent territorial elections of 1855. The presidential election of 1856 momentarily dashed their hopes, as Democrat James Buchanan defeated the inaugural Republican candidate, James Frémont. The president-elect ran on a platform identical to Pierce’s with regard

¹⁶⁴ Brown to Dear Sir, 18 March 1856; Sarah M. C. Everett to Dear Cynthia, 1 August 1856 (first quote), John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS; Thad [Thaddeus Hyatt] to Al [A. L. Winans], 17 July 1856 (second quote), Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS; John [Everett] to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 6 June 1856, John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS; John Everett to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 10 July 1856, John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS; M. [Milton] C. Dickey to Mr. [Thaddeus] Hyatt, 23 October 1856, Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS; Samuel Adair to the Free Mission Sewing Society of the First Congregational Church in South Brookfield Mass., 1856, Samuel and Florella Adair Collection, KHS.

to the territory: popular sovereignty had determined that slavery should be legal. Far from over, however, the contest between free state and proslavery forces would continue through most of the territorial period. By the time it concluded, those who lived through the troubles felt a distinct sense of ownership over their state's government because they had fought so fiercely to control it.

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By autumn 1856, Kansas Territory had become symbolic of the broader struggle to determine the boundaries of slavery in the United States. More significantly for Kansans, few homesteaders had worked as diligently as needed in developing farms even as the weather turned cool. Memories of the previous winter's hardships still haunted farmers, and many welcomed another tenuous peace brokered by newly appointed territorial governor John Geary in September. The former mayor of San Francisco and future governor of Pennsylvania took a decidedly more neutral stance between free state and proslavery factions than either his predecessor or the President, and his brief tenure marked a period of decreased bloodshed. Although bitterness continued to characterize both sides of the debate, violence subsided for nearly two years. During that time, Kansans made their feelings on slavery known through more peaceful means.¹⁶⁵

Most homesteaders viewed open violence as an unwelcome distraction at a time when farmers needed to raise more corn and less hell. Some, for instance, felt

¹⁶⁵ SenGupta, *God and Mammon*, p. 131; Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, p. 18; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 72-3; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 65-6.

inconvenienced by irregular mail and church services. More became concerned with an inability to develop farms. Anxiety drove farmers from their homes when gangs of marauders entered the neighborhood. Some hid for days, valuable possessions in tow, hoping that trouble would pass. When not hiding, concern for safety compelled farmers to adopt inefficient patterns of work. “In order to plant a little corn,” one farmer related, men “had to unite 8 or 10 together & go from field to field carrying . . . rifles.” That measure brought peace of mind but reduced the number of acres under cultivation. Most grew just enough to eat and failed to produce a surplus, leaving them vulnerable to misfortune. In a hundred smaller ways—such as fortifying schools or traveling across state lines for supplies—farmers beat plowshares into swords, diverting critical and scarce resources away from crop production.¹⁶⁶

Slavery simply failed to produce the requisite emotional fuel needed for most Kansans to take up arms outside of self-defense. Free soilers, the majority of the free state camp, had no real interest in slavery beyond preventing its spread, and migrants from slave states did not typically own slaves. Concerned for the safety of their neighborhoods, however, some organized for mutual protection, intending not “to

¹⁶⁶ John [Everett] to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 13 November 1856, John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS; [Orville] Chester [Brown] to My dear Friends, 2 September 1856, Orville Chester Brown Collection, KHS; Caleb S. Pratt to My Dear Sir [Thomas Higginson], 1 December 1856, Thomas W. Higginson Collection, KHS; National Kansas Committee, “Kansas Experiences of A. R. Scolen, William Reap, Ephraim McCoy, and Capt. Samuel Anderson,” unpublished interview, 23 December 1856, Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS; National Kansas Committee, “Kansas Experiences of Charles E. Dewey,” unpublished interview, 24 December 1856, Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS; National Kansas Committee, “Testimonies of Samuel Nickel and Miles Morris,” unpublished interview, 30 December 1856, Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS; National Kansas Committee, “Experience of John E. Stewart,” unpublished interview (quote), Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS; James Y. Campbell, *First History of Anderson County . . .* (Garnett, KS: Garnett Weekly Journal, 1877), pp. 9-10; Franklin Loomis Crane, “Diary, Franklin Loomis Crane,” entry for 4 September 1855, Franklin Loomis Crane Collection, KHS.

interfere with the rights of any man; but solely to act on the defensive.” Mutual defense companies formed slowly in some communities for another reason suggesting generally peaceful intentions: many had migrated west without firearms. Indeed, aggressive abolitionists lamented a dearth of firearms in the hands of free state supporters, a primary factor in Henry Ward Beecher’s decision to clandestinely ship Sharps rifles—known as “Beecher’s Bibles”—into the territory.¹⁶⁷

John Geary resigned from office in March 1857, and Robert Walker began his turn on the carousel of territorial governors. Walker had no more luck dissolving the free state government than his predecessors, but his tenure did witness a return of free state supporters to officially sanctioned elections. That development had less to do with Walker than with demographic trends, as free staters who had abandoned claims in summer 1856 returned the following spring. One abolitionist who had remained through the winter noted “proslavery men . . . backing down and backing out,” while free state men marched in “by the thousands to fill their places.” By September 1857, every substantial town in the territory save Lecompton tilted free state. That lone exception, “built up entirely by the patronage of Uncle Sam” according to one homesteader, gave free staters further reason to link slavery with federal authority. In democratic political

¹⁶⁷ Campbell, *First History of Anderson County*, p. 8 (quote); John [Everett] to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 4 December 1856, John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS; National Kansas Committee, “Testimony of S. H. Moore,” unpublished interview, 28 November 1856, Thaddeus Hyatt Collection, KHS.

systems, demographics predict political outcomes. Trends in 1857 foretold a bleak tale for slavery in Kansas Territory.¹⁶⁸

Despite unfavorable population trajectories, the proslavery Lecompton Constitution passed in its first appearance before voters in May 1857. The election provided choices to accept the document one of two ways, with slavery or without. Free state men boycotted in hopes of delegitimizing the election, as it provided no option to reject the entire document. Free staters increasingly scoffed at other forms of federal authority, as well. The citizens of Lawrence openly flaunted the law, electing officials and collecting taxes without permission. When publicly admonished by Walker, the townspeople responded with a published satire in which they apologized for such misdeeds as having “the audacity to assemble in a private room” and ordering a “dead horse . . . removed beyond the limits of the city,” an “act of usurpation which cannot for a moment be tolerated.” As free state immigrants displaced their proslavery counterparts in the territory, rejection of federal authority became more brazen.¹⁶⁹

Free state proponents cast ballots in droves for members of the territorial legislature in October 1857, and for the first time they won a majority of seats in a sanctioned election. The following January free state men won a second election, defeating the Lecompton Constitution in its second appearance before voters. Come communities voted “yea” unanimously; the men of Sugar Mound, for example, tallied

¹⁶⁸ John [Everett] to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 14 May 1857 (first quote), John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS; John [Everett] to Dear Father [Robert Everett], 18 September 1857 (second quote), John Roberts and Sarah Maria Everett Papers, KHS.

¹⁶⁹ Robert J. Walker, “Proclamation, To the people of Lawrence,” 15 July 1857, KHS; Robertus J. Walkerus, “Proclamation, No. 2, To my rebellious subjects at Lawrence,” (quotes), KHS; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 74-5; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 66-9.

124 votes against the constitution and zero for. Unwilling to cede Kansas Territory to Republicans, Buchanan ordered a third election in hopes of attracting a majority in favor of the document. Mustering all the incentives within his grasp, he sweetened the pot for ratification: if the constitution passed, Kansas would gain immediate admission to the union and receive additional federal land. A vote against ratification, on the other hand, meant the territory would wait until meeting statutory population requirements before gaining admission. In April 1858, voters eschewed federal enticements and rejected the Lecompton Constitution for the second time in four months. After a decade of promotion by Democrats, popular sovereignty had prevailed.¹⁷⁰

Political struggles surrounding the Lecompton Constitution drained energy from the violent impulses that plagued 1856. Yet, armed conflict did not abate completely. Violent episodes in 1857 typically involved only a few men, and hostilities spurred on by the slavery question often proved indistinguishable from those spurred on by land and resource disputes that happened to be between free state and proslavery supporters. In the middle of John Geary's comparatively peaceful tenure, however, "a body of armed men" from Missouri vandalized and robbed the Shawnee Mission, according to one area resident.¹⁷¹ The long-standing mission had played no role in the troubles of 1856, hinting at the nature of the conflict to come. By year's end, as the Lecompton Constitution seemed poised for defeat, the nature of the fighting became clearer.

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¹⁷⁰ Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, pp. 18-22; S. [Samuel] L. Adair to John Brown, 2 October 1857, John Brown Collection, KHS; Joseph Trego, diary, entry for 4 January 1858, Joseph Trego Collection, KHS.

¹⁷¹ Richard Mendenhall to Augustus Wattles, 19 January, 1857 (quote), History Indians Shawnee, KHS; Paddock, diary, 3 May 1857.

In late 1857, Kansans had reason to believe the worst lay behind them. The year had witnessed fewer sensational episodes of violence than 1856, and a newly elected legislature—replete with free state representatives—promised to guide the territory into the union as a free state. Voters greeted 1858 by rejecting the Lecompton Constitution on the strength of those returning to abandoned claims. Optimism quickly faded, however, just as free staters seemed to have democratically ended the slavery question. Proslavery men on both sides of the Kansas-Missouri border mounted a furious effort to regain momentum, and President Buchanan dangled carrot after stick to dissuade free state voters. In the final years of territorial Kansas, those who would call the state home risked their lives for democratic principles while retrenching their views of the Democratic Party.

As free staters effectively ended the prospect of slavery in the territory, proslavery forces desperately fought to reverse their fortunes. Charles Hamilton, a Georgian living in Missouri, led a few dozen men into the territory on May 19, 1858. His gang came across eleven free state men in Linn County and after marching them into the countryside attempted to execute them. Five men died in the Marais des Cygnes Massacre, which quickly drew comparisons to the murders along Pottawatomie Creek two years earlier. Yet, the killings along the Marais des Cygnes River differed from the violence of 1856 in telling ways. Although the eleven victims of the attack supported the free-state cause, none had been involved in territorial violence or politics prior to that day. As importantly, none of the attackers resided in the territory.¹⁷²

The Marais des Cygnes Massacre constituted a turning point in Bleeding Kansas. The hesitation many free staters had shown to spill blood evaporated almost instantly, and some who had previously avoided violence took broad aim at those who promoted or protected slavery. At the center of that trend stood James Montgomery. Born in Ohio, Montgomery had lived in Missouri until the opening of Kansas Territory. He settled on the Little Osage River near the Missouri border among like-minded free staters. In 1856, many of Montgomery's neighbors left the area for fear of proslavery raiders, a development that radicalized the future Union colonel's thinking on violence in the territory.¹⁷³

When his neighbors returned in 1857, Montgomery organized a militia to protect the neighborhood. Like the threat facing those so-called jayhawkers, the nature of free state resistance had evolved between the appointment of Geary in late 1856 and the Marais des Cygnes Massacre. No longer content to play defense, free state militias actively drove proslavery homesteaders from the territory. A more revealing change involved attitudes toward federal troops. While those who led antislavery forces in 1856 adamantly refused to engage the army, the leaders of 1858 had few qualms about attacking U.S. soldiers, marshals, or judges. In their minds, the string of free state electoral victories in late 1857 and 1858 had settled the slavery question; any subsequent federal refusal to support free staters after that was extralegal.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 74-5; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 66-9.

¹⁷³ Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, pp. 42-3; Neely, *Border between Them*, p. 61; Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, pp. 20-1.

¹⁷⁴ J. W. Williams to Governor [James W.] Denver, 16 May 1858, James W. Denver Collection, KHS; H. P. A. Smith to General [James W. Denver], 16 May 1858, James W. Denver Collection, KHS; Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, pp. 42-3; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 61-2; Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, p. 2.

No episode demonstrated mounting ill will toward the federal government better than the standoff at Fort Scott. The town housed the territorial court of Judge J. W. Williams, a gubernatorial appointee suspected of proslavery sympathies. As early as November 1857, free staters held Williams's court in contempt. They refused to recognize his authority and established a "squatters court" to adjudicate differences. James Montgomery and his jayhawkers arrived in Fort Scott on May 30, 1858, two weeks after the Marais des Cygnes Massacre. Armed with two arrest warrants issued by the squatters' court, the free state men met armed resistance from townspeople. For weeks Williams had pleaded with Governor James Denver to "send additional forces of military" to protect the town from "Montgomery and his murderers," but the governor declined. Within minutes the scene at Fort Scott became "intensely painful to all," as violence seemed inevitable. No arrests occurred before Montgomery and his men peacefully left, although destruction came one week later when the jayhawkers returned and burned several buildings. Many free state leaders, including James Lane and Charles Robinson, condemned Montgomery's actions, but popular support for his tactics had grown since 1856.¹⁷⁵

Through the end of 1858 jayhawkers succeeded in making Kansas Territory an unpalatable destination for proponents of slavery. As Montgomery and others forced proslavery homesteaders out, free soilers took stronger measures. Those efforts culminated in John Brown's final act against slavery in the territory. The week before

¹⁷⁵ Williams to Denver, 16 May 1858 (first quote); Geo. [George] W. Clarke to Saml. [Samuel] J. Jones, 2 June 1858 (second quote), James W. Denver Collection, KHS; Trego, diary, 1 November 1857; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 61-4.

Christmas, Brown crossed the Missouri border with a band of abolitionists and liberated eleven slaves, bringing them back into the territory and sending them along the Underground Railroad. One slaveholder died during the raid, but justice would have to wait. His work done, Brown left the territory for good days later. Though tame by the standards of Bleeding Kansas, the raid illustrated how dramatically free state proponents had turned the tables on their foes by 1859.¹⁷⁶

The early months of 1859 witnessed a final lull in violence as most proslavery homesteaders, seeing the handwriting on the wall, either left the territory or resigned themselves to living in a free state. The advantages of external support had coupled with fierce resolve to give free state migrants a hard-fought victory over their adversaries. In July delegates drafted the fourth and final state constitution. The Wyandotte Constitution's complexity reflected thinking in the free state camp. African Americans could enter the state and enroll in public schools, but they could not vote. The constitution similarly disfranchised women, though not without considerable debate. The Wyandotte Constitution proved too conservative for some, especially the abolitionist faction of the free state camp. On economic issues, the document proved more liberal. A popular homestead exemption protected farmers facing tax delinquency or debt, and unmarried women received significant property rights.¹⁷⁷

The drought year of 1859 stole wind from the sails of remaining proslavery homesteaders, and by autumn free state supporters prepared to put the final nail in

¹⁷⁶ J. G. Anderson to Dear Brother [J. Q. Anderson], 14 January 1859, Richard Hinton Collection, KHS; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 74-5; Benedict, *Jayhawkers*, pp. 22-4.

¹⁷⁷ S. C. S. [Samuel C. Smith] to Dear Doctor [Charles Robinson], 29 December 1858, Charles and Sara Robinson Collection, KHS; Trego, diary, 27 January-1 February 1859; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 77-8.

slavery's coffin. On October 4, two weeks before John Brown's fateful raid on Harper's Ferry, voters passed the Wyandotte Constitution by a two-to-one margin. It proved the decisive blow; there would be no slavery in Kansas. Statehood did not come instantly, however. Southern Democrats maintained enough legislative power to delay the territory's admission more than a year. On January 26, 1861, Louisiana became the sixth state to secede from the Union, tipping the balance of power in Congress toward Republicans. Three days later, Kansas became the thirty-fourth state.¹⁷⁸

Free state advocates conclusively won the final round of Bleeding Kansas. Although violent tactics changed little between 1856 and 1858, the attitudes of free soilers took a dramatic turn. Support for men like Brown and Montgomery grew as the federal government repeatedly attempted to force the Lecompton Constitution on Kansans. Fear and anxiety encouraged widespread acceptance of bloodshed and intimidation, particularly as free state supporters began to believe that the Democratic Party would insist on slavery in Kansas. Ultimately, however, victory came not on the battlefield, but at the ballot box. Free state settlers maintained faith in the efficacy of democracy and worked diligently to achieve the desired electoral outcomes over objections from local, territorial, and federal authorities. Their victory laid the foundation for a powerful creation story that later Kansans summoned for their own ends.

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¹⁷⁸ Miner, *Kansas*, p. 81.

In his Thanksgiving 1860 sermon, Topeka pastor Peter McVicar asked his congregation to “let the past bury the past.” He implored his brethren to “look out upon the prospect of the present & future,” and be thankful that “free labor has been established on our soil.”¹⁷⁹ Bleeding Kansas claimed fewer than one hundred lives, but its significance defies such simplistic accounting. The event demonstrated the depths of emotion slavery could stir among whites and the lengths to which many would go to realize their vision of the republic. It also shaped attitudes toward the federal government. Homesteaders witnessed first-hand the power a president could wield, but in successfully resisting the will of the executive branch they also developed a sense of the power resting in the citizenry.

Contradictory threads of Democratic policy produced conflicting feelings toward the party. Indian removal created a viable destination for migrants, and without government treaties in place settlement may have proven as violent in Kansas Territory as in Texas. At the same time, the party’s reluctance to allow Kansas into the union as a free state provoked considerable consternation. Democratic presidents appointed proslavery territorial governors who upheld the legitimacy of the bogus legislature even as its fraudulent origins became apparent. Those governors in turn appointed local officials who enforced proslavery law against the will of the majority. Meanwhile, free state tempers flared within the territory and beyond. In establishing a shadow government, free staters rejected federal authority on the grounds that it did not reflect popular thinking.

¹⁷⁹ Peter McVicar, “First Thanksgiving Sermon,” 29 November 1860 (quote), Peter McVicar Collection, KHS.

Bleeding Kansas, like the Civil War, centered on the existence of slavery in a free society. Those who emerged from the struggle victorious had invested their financial and physical well-being in the success of their cause. By 1861, Kansas's homesteaders viewed themselves as eminently capable of shaping the character of their state, but they also understood that Bleeding Kansas could have ended differently. It became imperative to ensure that men who valued labor and opportunity for common folks filled elected offices. That impulse informed both abolitionists and free soilers, and it would later inform farmers struggling to earn a living. Kansans did not soon forget lessons learned during the territorial period concerning the reach of governmental power. In time, they would apply those lessons toward once again bringing their society in line with their views of right and wrong.

CHAPTER VII

WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION ON THE PLAINS

On a mid-summer morning in 1860, an extraordinary astronomical event caught the eye of Jonathan Baker. The Texas educator initially mistook it for a large brush fire but quickly decided “the light was too pale for that.” After several minutes, he concluded he had seen “some meteoric phenomenon, which in ancient days would have been looked upon as a harbinger of some national calamity soon to occur.” The previous week, Baker had delivered a speech on temperance at the Palo Pinto Independence Day celebration. Six months later, he joined virtually every other voting man in the county—and the majority living in northern Texas—in supporting secession. In the minds of those Texans, reasons for leaving the union abounded: the federal government had responded weakly to pleas for protection from Comanches and calls for help in economic development, and a new political party, centered in the North and hostile to the expansion of slavery, proved ascendant in November 1860 with the election of Abraham Lincoln. For Baker and his neighbors, that outcome facilitated decisions to secede. Some Texans, most notably Sam Houston, argued against the futility of secession, but those arguments found only a small audience.¹⁸⁰ Four years later, none doubted that the nation had indeed experienced a calamity.

¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Hamilton Baker, “Diary 1858-1918,” entries for 13 July 1860 (first quote), 4 July 1860, and 23 February 1861, Baker (Jonathan Hamilton) Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (hereafter CAH); Sam Houston to H. M. Watkins and Others, 20 November 1860, in Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, eds., *The Writings of Sam Houston, 1813-1863*, vol. 8, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1943), pp. 192-7.

The Civil War tried Texans in many ways. Like other members of the Confederate States of America (CSA), the state fell victim to Union blockades and a lack of southern industry. Furthermore, distance from the East proved a double-edged sword. Texans witnessed less fighting and experienced less property loss than other southerners, but the CSA viewed their needs as secondary to those in more war-torn regions. If the U.S. government mustered only a lackluster defense against Native Americans, then the CSA's effort proved downright anemic. Comanches took note as fighting age men left Texas and targeted poorly defended homesteads. The seemingly relentless expansion of white settlement first halted and then fell into retreat as Native Americans briefly pushed back. Throughout the war Texans begged for increased protection, but the CSA simply lacked the resources to both fight the Union and protect the vast line of white settlement stretching from the Rio Grand to the Red River.¹⁸¹ As the Confederacy collapsed, homesteaders again felt abandoned by their elected officials.¹⁸²

Kansans' Civil War experiences differed greatly from those of Texans. Lincoln's victory elated residents of the territory, who would no longer face opposition from Democratic officeholders. To the extent southerners viewed Lincoln's win as a catastrophe, Kansans received it as a godsend. Attitudes shifted months later as war set in. Like Texans, Kansans volunteered with gusto, and many hoped to serve in the home

¹⁸¹ Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 259-63; James Marten, *Texas Divided: Loyalty and Dissent in the Lone Star State, 1856-1874* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), p. 1; David Paul Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas' Rangers and Rebels* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), p. xiii.

¹⁸² David P. Smith, "Conscription and Conflict on the Texas Frontier, 1863-1865," in Ralph A. Wooster, ed., *Lone Star Blue and Gray* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1995), pp. 275-288; David La Vere, *The Texas Indians* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), pp. 202-3; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 266-7.

guard to protect their friends and loved ones from local threats. Many Missourians—despite opting not to secede—harbored grudges from Bleeding Kansas and saw the war as an opportunity to settle old scores. Kansans feared Confederate guerilla fighters based in the sharply divided state much as those in Texas worried about retribution from Native Americans. The Union army’s focus on battlefields in the East forced Kansans to once again defend themselves from marauders. In contrast to the territorial period, however, wartime fighting in Kansas garnered little attention from easterners.¹⁸³

One obvious fact differentiated Kansas and Texas: Kansans fought on the winning side of the war, and Texans fought for the losers. Texans generally resented the policies of Congressional Reconstruction, but those in northern Texas also recognized the role U. S. troops could play in regaining ground lost to Comanches. The federal government occupied contradictory ground in the minds of Texans between 1865 and 1874, serving as both oppressors and liberators. While those in northern Texas remained loyal Democrats through Reconstruction, they also remembered that Republicans facilitated Indian removal. Their conflicted feelings toward the federal government manifested nuanced thinking and open-mindedness concerning party affiliation after Reconstruction ended.¹⁸⁴

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¹⁸³ Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts*, 3d ed., (Arlington Heights, IL: Forum Press, 1989), pp. 88-97; Jeremy Neely, *The Border between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), chapter 4; Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind*, Authorized ed. with a New Preface, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), chapter 6.

¹⁸⁴ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 291-5; Carl C. Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), pp. 143-6; La Vere, *Texas Indians*, pp. 203-14.

At the war's onset, Texans joined other southerners in enthusiastically enlisting for service. As in other Confederate states, however, some regions generated more enthusiasm than others. Just as yeomen in the Georgia upcountry and other parts of the "corn South" reluctantly supported the new nation, so too did Texans living in western counties. Then-colonel Earl Van Dorn explained that most Texans wished not "to fight against those troops of the United States who had been defending their frontier for years, . . . many of whom had been personally endeared to them by long association, and by their gallant deeds." Despite moments of irritation, most settlers recognized that U. S. troops offered some measure of protection and ultimately sided with white homesteaders in disputes with Native Americans. Those troops also boosted local economies. Before refrigerated railcars and the popularity of modern canning, local farmers and ranchers produced much of the army's food supply. They often sold surpluses to the government, and troops frequented nearby towns for shopping and leisure. In at least two instances (Fort Worth and Fort Gates), communities sprang forth from the shadows of garrisons.¹⁸⁵

When war commenced, consequently, residents of northern Texas suffered doubly. Hundreds of troops who protected their homes and buoyed their economies abandoned the region just as a new nation requested deep sacrifices. In the opening salvo of a struggle that lasted longer than the war, Texas Governor Edward Clark wrote Jefferson Davis a week before the assault on Fort Sumter. As Texas had come "under the guardianship of the Government of the Confederate States," he argued, "it is right

¹⁸⁵ Earl Van Dorn, "General Order No. 5," 13 May 1861, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), chapter 3; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 244; Walter L. Buenger, *Secession and the Union in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), chapter 6.

that the defense of our frontier . . . should be sustained by that Government upon which devolves the military defense of the entire country.” The CSA sent troops but failed to man the forts at prewar levels. That response disheartened Texans. Although the CSA assumed responsibility for security in western counties, it disappointingly viewed “Indian troubles” as minor relative to the intensifying standoff with northern states.¹⁸⁶

By spring 1862, the Confederate government’s efforts at protection left homesteaders underwhelmed. One Lampasas County resident related the necessity of civilian defense against Comanche attacks in a request for ammunition from Governor Francis Lubbock. For eighteen months the governor relayed those requests to Confederate authorities and, in the fall of 1863, finally declared the situation untenable. Contributions to borderland defense threatened to bankrupt the state, and, worse, those defenses proved only minimally effective. Unfortunately for Texans, Richmond turned a deaf ear to their pleas.¹⁸⁷

Compensating for inadequate troop levels, citizens revived techniques for mutual defense. Undrafted men volunteered for ranging patrols, and some farmers offered their homesteads for fortifying up. Many worried about the quality of those defenses, however. In response to a report of Indians in the neighborhood, one Palo Pinto resident ironically explained that “the ‘military’ was soon armed, mounted and in hot pursuit.” Others derided plans to send men on patrols. When away from the neighborhood, Native

¹⁸⁶ Edward Clark to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1861 (first quote), Frontier Protection Records, CAH; John Hemphill to L. P. Walker, 11 April 1861 (second quote), Frontier Protection Records, CAH.

¹⁸⁷ D. W. Taylor to F. [Francis] R. Lubbock, 9 April 1862, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; F. [Francis] R. Lubbock to Jefferson Davis, 13 November 1862, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; F. [Francis] R. Lubbock to E. Kirby Smith, 31 August 1863, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; F. [Francis] R. Lubbock to J. S. Ford, 18 September 1863, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; F. [Francis] R. Lubbock to H. E. McCulloch, 2 September 1863, Frontier Protection Records, CAH.

American warriors attacked with impunity, taking or scattering livestock and fighting homesteaders on favorable terms. Just a month after the First Battle of Bull Run, Comanches recognized a shift in the balance of power. They began raiding towns, on one occasion stealing horses from the Palo Pinto town square. Fear encouraged imaginations to run wild. Townspeople worried that abolitionist-supported Indians capable of killing at 600 yards with Union-supplied rifles massed in the countryside planning an invasion. In counties bordering Indian Territory, sighting even a single Native American on the horizon sent homesteads into defensive postures. By mid-war, many whites felt helpless to stop Comanche attacks, and they resented the manner in which the Confederate government discounted their problems.¹⁸⁸

Some Texans sought to leave their homes for reasons unrelated to Native Americans. Many experienced conflicting loyalties. As recent migrants to the state, they felt obligated to new neighbors, but they also felt responsible to their birth states. Some returned east to volunteer under the banners of other states, but most remained in their adopted home. Although reasons that motivated thousands of men in other states to fight—patriotism, pride, duty, ambition, and even boredom—undoubtedly compelled Texans as well, most hoped to battle Comanches rather than Yankees. The CSA generally acquiesced, allowing men in western counties remain near their homes for

¹⁸⁸ Walter S. South, "Diary, 1860-1866," entry for 25 May 1861, South (Walter S) Diaries, 1860-, CAH; Walter C. Cochran, "Story of the Early Days Indian Troubles and Cattle Business of Palo Pinto and Adjoining Counties," unpublished reminiscences, (1930), pp. 11-2, Cochran (Walter C) Reminiscences, CAH; George F. Atkinson(?), unpublished reminiscences, (ca. 1925), p. 11, Atkinson (George F) Reminiscences, ca 1925, CAH; Baker, "Diary," 8 May 1861 (first quote), 15 May 1861, 1 August 1861, 8 September 1863, and 19 March 1864; J. T. Rowland to J. B. [James Buckner] Barry, 3 September 1863, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH; Minna Von Moeller Steffens, diary, entries for 4 May 1862 and 24 March 1863, Steffans (Louis) Diary, 1860-1863, CAH.

Indian protection, at least early in the war. At times discipline broke down, as men close to home frequently took leave to work their farms and spend time with loved ones.

Military authorities grudgingly tolerated some degree of insubordination to prevent a general boycott of the draft.¹⁸⁹

In 1864, as the Confederacy's fate became predictable, desertion ran rampant in northern Texas. Men who enlisted on the pretext of remaining in the state abandoned their posts as the exigencies of war promised to pull them out. Chaos infiltrated Confederate ranks, where disobedience often went unpunished. Commanders issued amnesty orders forgiving deserters who returned to their units, but the threats of Union troops and Confederate justice never equaled the danger posed by Comanches.¹⁹⁰

By autumn the CSA sat on the brink of failure as it begged more troops from Texas. Confederate officers and politicians believed those living in designated "frontier counties" exaggerated threats from Native Americans to avoid service. Those threats seemed less exaggerated the first week of January 1865, when a force of five hundred militiamen and Confederate troops engaged an Indian camp on Dove Creek. The offensive proved a debacle from the start. Poor reconnaissance led officers to mistake

¹⁸⁹ Baker, "Diary," 5 July 1861 and 21 November 1863; William G. Webb to Edward Clark, 26 June 1861, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; F. [Francis] R. Lubbock to H. E. McCulloch, 24 December 1861, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; L. H. Graves, diary, entry for 8 June 1861, Graves (LH) Diary, 1861-1864, CAH; DeWitt Clinton Thomas, Sr., unpublished reminiscences, (1878), p. 9, Thomas (DeWitt Clinton, Sr) Reminiscences, 1836-1912, ca. 1964, CAH; John H. Chrisman, "Reminiscences, 1854-1865," unpublished, (1915), p. 23, Chrisman (John H) Reminiscences, CAH; Hillory G. Bedford, unpublished reminiscences, (1905), pp. 21-2, Bedford (Hillory G.) Reminiscences, undated, CAH; E. S. Burluson(?) to J. B. [James Buckner] Barry, 12 September 1861, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH; James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), chapter 1.

¹⁹⁰ J. B. [James Buckner] Barry, "Special Order No. (?)" 13 May 1864, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH; R. E. [Robert Edward] Lee and E. Kirby Smith, "General Orders No. 2," 11 February 1865, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH.

peaceful Kickapoos migrating toward Mexico for Comanches. Those officers demonstrated extraordinary ineptitude, moreover, as they allowed pettiness to prevent a coordinated attack. Inaccurate scouting reports sent troops trudging through dense thickets while taking enemy fire; a dozen men fell dead in the first minutes of battle. Most damning, the Kickapoos recognized the forthcoming attack well in advance and identified themselves, insisting they had no interest in a fight. The hopeless battle plan proceeded nonetheless.¹⁹¹

When the dust settled, fewer than one hundred Kickapoo warriors had held off the invaders, killing scores before white commanders called a retreat. The loss constituted the worst Confederate defeat at Native American hands during the entire war. The Kickapoos made their way south with a dozen casualties, while white troops spent several cold, exposed nights dining on horse carcasses to prevent starvation. The Battle of Dove Creek reinforced notions that Texas could ill afford to let fighting men leave the state despite the Confederacy's deteriorating condition. Loyalty to ideology or distant comrades again placed second to that afforded neighbors.¹⁹²

As men left homesteads to fight, neighborhood dynamics changed profoundly. Women and children assumed non-traditional roles, and families merged to mitigate the loss of men's labor. When word of deaths arrived, survivors faced difficult decisions. Some returned east, although that option became less appealing as the war devastated

¹⁹¹ C. S. West to Sir [Pendleton Murrah], 19 October 1864 (quote), Frontier Protection Records, CAH; Smith, *Frontier Defense*, pp. 151-5.

¹⁹² J.P. Jones, "The Dove Creek Fight," unpublished essay, pp. 132-2, Atkinson (George F) Reminiscences, ca 1925, CAH; J. [James] W. Throckmorton to Dear Sir [John Burke], 29 January 1865, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; J. J. Callan to Governor [Pendleton Murrah], 15 February 1865, Frontier Protection Records, CAH; Smith, *Frontier Defense*, pp. 151-5.

civil life in the South. Others remained in their adopted home, for better or worse.

Neighbors occasionally turned on each other, as communities expelled people suspected of abolitionist leanings or known to have voted Republican. Men foolish enough to fight for the Union and return to Texas during the war often met untimely ends.¹⁹³

Paranoia ran rampant as homesteaders imagined grand conspiracies involving slave rebellion fomented by abolitionists and their Native American allies. Despite the fancifulness of those scenarios, men suspected of impolitic beliefs faced dire consequences. The most notorious example of anti-Unionist violence occurred in Cooke County in October 1862. Militiamen there took more than two hundred men suspected of Union sympathies prisoner and corralled them in Gainesville, where they stood trial before a kangaroo court run by vigilantes. Within three weeks, forty-three men died at the end of a hangman's rope. The Great Hanging at Gainesville differed from other episodes in Gainesville and neighboring communities in degree but not kind. Fear, suspicion, insecurity, and lawlessness fostered by Confederate inattention to northern Texas bore much responsibility for the grisly episode. Those emotions also illustrated the mindset of contemporary Texans attempting to secure their neighborhoods in the face of an unresponsive government.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ South, "Diary," 19 July 1862 and 5 August 1862; Baker, "Diary," 14 April 1862, 3 August 1864, and 2 February 1865; Sarah Isabella Stephens Rogers, "Memoirs, 1850-1937," unpublished, (1937), p. 70, Belle Rogers Collection, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT); Wm. [William] O. Yager to Jas. B. Barry, 27 September 1861, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH; Bedford, reminiscences, p. 25; Cochran, "Early Days," p. 25; Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Angela Boswell, "The Civil War and the Lives of Texas Women," in Charles D. Greer, ed., *The Fate of Texas: The Civil War and the Lone Star State* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008), pp. 69-82.

¹⁹⁴ Richard B. McCaslin, *Tainted Breeze: The Great Hanging at Gainesville, Texas, 1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), chapters 3 and 4; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 265-6.

Lack of access to household staples compounded the distress associated with isolation. As part of the Union's blockade strategy, northern forces controlled the port of Galveston from the onset of war through mid-1863. The port closure combined with the quick fall of Louisiana and Arkansas to sever Texas from the rest of the Confederacy. Within months, consumer goods dried up through much of the state, forcing citizens to do without. The experiences of Methodist circuit preacher Walter South exemplified the effectiveness of northern blockades. As early as December 1861, he noticed "some goods . . . getting scarce," including cloth, scissors, and belts. By the following February, South substituted wheat for coffee and could not find pork for sale near Corsicana. As the winter of 1862-3 approached, the season's potato crop failed, and a pound of tobacco sold for five dollars. In early 1863, a neighbor just eight miles from the preacher's house charged seventy-five cents for a bed and breakfast, the first time South "was ever charged for lodging so near home." That June, he paid \$2.50 for a branding iron, an "unreasonably high price" considering he had provided the iron. As the war continued, the state's lack of industry contributed to hardships. Replacement parts for broken mills, spinning wheels, and other equipment grew scarce as commerce with the North ended. South struggled to find people who could transform cloth into clothing, corn into meal, and leather into shoes. Like most others, he relied on home industry for necessities.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ South, "Diary," 30 December 1861 (first quote), 1 February 1862, 7 February 1862, 10 November 1862, 23 January 1863 (second quote), 9 June 1863 (third quote), and 11 August 1863; Redmoun G. Gaines, "Looking Back at the Course of Human Events," unpublished reminiscences, p. 8, Tate (Mrs. Claude B) Papers, 1844-1875, CAH.

After four years of sacrifice in blood and gold, the Civil War mercifully ended. News reached western settlements slowly, and its veracity remained uncertain. John Chrisman led a detail aiming to purchase horses when word caught up with him in Bell County. Confusion reigned before Chrisman dismissed the men under his charge and made his way home. Like many, he had slept in his own bed only twice in the previous three-and-a-half years and eagerly returned to his homestead. What he found upon arrival defied belief. Chrisman reported that “the ravages of war had laid its heavy hand upon every thing” in his adopted hometown of Gatesville. Residents had surrendered the town square to “broom weeds over knee high” and “wild Mexican hogs.” Store shelves sat empty, as an utter lack of currency in circulation devastated both consumers and business owners. More fortunate homesteaders had adequate food supplies; the less fortunate immediately became concerned with survival. Many arrived home too late to make a harvest before winter, and the countryside teemed with a surplus of labor. The dearth of cash meant a share of the crop often constituted payment. As a harvester, for example, Chrisman earned a bushel of wheat per day. The desperate situation forced men who owned land into labor arrangements they would not have likely considered prior to the war, offering a glimpse of the economy to come.¹⁹⁶

In addition to shortages of food and market items, many found homesteads had deteriorated during their absence. Untended fields and homes in need of repair greeted thousands. Barns, fences, and other improvements had crumbled as well, leaving livestock unprotected and prone to wandering. One settler remembered “badly

¹⁹⁶ Chrisman, “Reminiscences,” pp. 28-30 (both quotes); Thomas, reminiscences, pp. 50-1.

impoverished” neighbors faced with the daunting tasks of gathering herds of cattle “scattered to the four winds” and restoring farms “taken by the weeds.” By summer 1865, vast herds of unbranded cattle roamed western counties. With no means of proving ownership, the cattle belonged to the person who rounded them up, a development that directly linked Kansas and Texas economically later in the decade. Many amassed small fortunes as drovers during those “mavericking days.”¹⁹⁷

Less tangible changes often met returning soldiers as well. Those who remained on the home front suffered immensely from war weariness. For four years they watched their society disintegrate before their eyes; homes, farms, ranches, schools, government buildings, and businesses fell into ever-worsening disrepair. Only sporadic moments of sheer terror accompanying Indian alarms and abject grief arriving with news from the frontlines interrupted a constant, dull aching for more prosperous times. While the conflict undoubtedly transformed those who left to fight, the hardships it wrought also changed those who stayed behind. Deprivations induced by war exceeded their worst nightmares, and the deaths of fighting men frayed tapestries of community across Texas. Veterans returned home to find neighbors—the people from whom they had traditionally drawn strength and comfort—emotionally exhausted.¹⁹⁸

During the Civil War, sanguine Texans hoping the CSA would offer more support than the U. S. quickly became disillusioned. Fighting east of the Mississippi River drained resources from the state, and the Confederate government considered

¹⁹⁷ George F. Atkinson(?), unpublished reminiscences, (ca. 1925), pp. 17-8, Atkinson (George F) Reminiscences, ca 1925, CAH; Bedford, reminiscences, pp. 26-7 (first quote); Chrisman, “Reminiscences,” pp. 30-31; Cochran, “Early Days,” p. 29 (second quote).

¹⁹⁸ Thomas, reminiscences,” p. 50; Travis Flemming Jones, unpublished reminiscences, (1932), p. 3, Jones (Travis Flemming) Reminiscences, 1850-1932, CAH; South, “Diary,” 30 June 1862.

Native American raiders more a nuisance than a threat. Homesteaders in northern Texas held a different point of view, and their support for the war waned as they realized governmental priorities lay elsewhere. Indeed, the most damning evidence of treason brought against the men hung at Gainesville consisted of membership in a group working to subvert newly passed conscription laws. The Confederacy staggered into 1865, its money worthless, its government in disarray, and its citizens suffering. In later decades, Texans who lived through the war's hardships needed no imagination to visualize the fall of society. They had lived it. Moreover, they had themselves to blame. Citizens of western counties had exchanged a semi-responsive federal government for a Confederate state even less interested in their problems. That experience reinforced notions that full political support should only be thrown behind elected officials focused on local needs.

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While Texans focused their attention on the federal government, local politics preoccupied Kansans in the weeks before Union and Confederate armies first met in battle. Several men courted the state legislature for U. S. Senate seats, and Atchison, Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Topeka vied for the state capitol. A sense prevailed that statehood meant the ugliness of Bleeding Kansas could indeed be buried in the past. Particularly promising, the Republican Party controlled both state and federal

governments. Free states formed an antislavery firewall across the plains, and free soil prospects in the West looked encouraging.¹⁹⁹

In many respects Kansans avoided the hardships that plagued Texans during the Civil War, but the two groups shared similar experiences as well. Like Texans in the western counties, most Kansans had recently migrated from points east. Their new location instilled a sense of living on the periphery of war; the North had already won Kansas, after all. Like the Lone Star State, moreover, Kansas survived the war mostly unscarred by battle. Most guerilla fighting occurred before 1864, and by conflict's end Kansas showed great promise. Disparate experiences with state and federal governments sent Texans and Kansans on different trajectories following the war, however. Whereas the former witnessed the collapse of social order, the latter partook in an unprecedented war effort orchestrated by a federal government that pursued policies—including the Homestead Act (1862) and development of a transcontinental railroad—in the economic interest of westerners. Nonetheless, governmental and public inattention to the state after 1861 allowed Kansans to empathize with homesteaders in Texas.²⁰⁰

Like their Texan counterparts, Kansans volunteered for service in the Civil War with gusto—and caveats. As in Texas, many in Kansas hoped service would keep them at home rather than sending them east. Sharing a long border with Indian Territory, the state seemed vulnerable to Cherokee and Osage attacks, possibly supported by Texas

¹⁹⁹ A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Huntoon to Lizzie [Huntoon], 15 March 1861, Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS.

²⁰⁰ Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), pp. 82-3; Richmond, *Kansas*, pp. 86-8.

troops sweeping up from the south. Comanches, Cheyennes and other groups living on the western plains still threatened those venturing beyond the eastern third of the state as well. Although the threat presented by Native Americans in Kansas existed mostly in the minds of settlers, the fear they induced encouraged many to volunteer on the condition that they would remain near home. The prospect of Native American attack seemed small by the end of 1861, however. Indeed, that November General James Lane enlisted the aid of more than two thousand Creek and Seminole auxiliaries willing to support his force. A treaty signed with Ottawas in June 1862 further discounted the threat posed by Native Americans, who never made significant efforts to attack whites in Kansas during the war.²⁰¹

The fear engendered by Missourians, in contrast, had a solid foundation in reality. Bleeding Kansas had answered the slavery question, but hard feelings lingered on both sides of the Missouri border. Missourians chose not to secede, but many harbored strong sympathies for the Confederacy. Both they and Kansans viewed the war as an opportunity to renew grudges and settle scores, forcing citizens of both states to protect their families and property from the same people they fought during the territorial period.²⁰²

²⁰¹ A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Huntoon to My Dear Lizzie [Huntoon], 18 April 1861, 26 April 1861, and 12 May 1861, Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS; A. J. Huntoon to My Beloved Wife [Lizzie Huntoon] & Boy [Prentice Huntoon], 20 October 1861 and 19 November 1861, Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS; Richmond, *Kansas*, p. 97; Clinton Carter Hutchinson, *A Colony for an Indian Reserve in Kansas* (Lawrence: State Journal Steam Press Print, 1863), pp. 4-7.

²⁰² Elizabeth Simpson Cooper, "Memories of My Life," unpublished reminiscences, (1931), p. 29, Archives and Rare Books, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT); Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, pp. 43-5; Neely, *Border between Them*, pp. 96-103; Bryce D. Benedict, *Jayhawkers: The Civil War Brigade of James Henry Lane* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), p. 26.

Fear in Kansas centered less on a potential invasion by Confederate regular troops and more on incursions by guerilla fighters. Most of the so-called “bushwhackers” from Missouri never formally enlisted for service or fell under the Confederate army’s chain of command. Those irregulars sent shivers through Kansas. They claimed to be soldiers but refused to wear uniforms, instead blending in with the civilian population. They had leaders but answered to no Confederate officers. Most disturbingly, they operated outside of the accepted rules of warfare. Union troops captured by regular Confederate soldiers could expect to become prisoners of war. In many instances, a lack of manpower forced troops on both sides of the conflict to immediately release prisoners with nothing more than a promise that they would not rejoin the fight. Soldiers captured by guerillas faced less certain fates. Irregulars routinely robbed, beat, or murdered such unfortunate men. Kansans living nearest the Missouri border predictably faced the greatest threat from guerillas, but concern spread across the state and lasted the duration of the war.²⁰³

Many responses to renewed fighting perpetuated wartime fears of guerilla activity. Kansans and Missourians readily blamed one another for chaos on both sides of the border, often with good reason. As in Bleeding Kansas, the fighting resembled a blood feud in which acts considered beyond the pale justified and ensured cyclical violence. “The worst feature in this war,” one Paola man complained to his sister, consisted of “guerilla bands that infest the country.” Jayhawkers raided in Missouri,

²⁰³ Samuel Adair, diary, entry for 15 June 1864, Samuel & Florella Adair Collection, KHS; J. [Joseph] F. Smith to Dear Brother & Sister, 22 December 1861, Joseph F. Smith Letters, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence (hereafter KSRL); Otho Edmund Cope, *The Pioneers of Yesteryears*, n. p., pp. 6-7.

stealing personal property, robbing stores, and violating women. Such actions begged “for revenge & retaliation” from Missourians, who would then “raid on some unprotected place in Kansas, plunder the stores, & take off whatever . . . is valuable.” On occasion, Kansans even reported victimization at the hands of the men claiming to protect them. Some viewed jayhawkers as miscreants who made everyone in Kansas a target for guerillas and discouraged economic development. Others felt more directly threatened. Farms proved difficult to defend, and some jayhawkers forced farmers to feed them without compensation. Those who refused risked the label of “d____d secessionist.” Indeed, opportunists accused neighbors of holding unpopular political convictions to justify criminal activity. Although Kansans faced many dangers only tangentially connected to the war, the war fostered an environment where those dangers could thrive.²⁰⁴

Kansans, like Texans, faced various hardships linked to the war beyond physical violence. The legendary drought year that began in spring 1859 ended in autumn 1860, leaving Kansans unprepared for the coming conflict. “There was literally no surplus of food,” one minister later recalled, primarily due to “time . . . spent in beating back Border Ruffians.” Some farmers hauled water miles to keep crops and livestock alive. Beyond such trials, many endured emotional hardships. Like families in Texas and across the nation, Kansans worried for loved ones gone to battle. Slow and unreliable news from the front often left them concerned about the fates of sons, brothers, and

²⁰⁴ A. T. Ward to My Dear Sister [S. T. Roberts(?)], 27 October 1861 (first three quotes), Allen T. Ward Papers, KHS; A. J. Huntoon to My Dear Lizzie [Huntoon], 16 June 1861 (fourth quote), Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS; Adair, diary, 10 February 1863.

fathers. In December 1862, for example, Union chaplain Samuel Adair read a dispatch recounting a battle that produced seven hundred casualties, including his son's commanding officer. The report excluded the names of enlisted men killed or injured, and, despite the battle occurring in nearby Arkansas, Adair waited weeks to learn his son had survived intact. In the meantime, he experienced "considerable anxiety." Many battlefield deaths—whether in Kansas, Missouri, or points east—left families without breadwinners. Communities provided widows with charity and employment to alleviate suffering, but the state's still nascent economy left few in positions to offer such help. In contrast to Texas, however, the Kansas economy rebounded quickly after 1865, providing widespread relief.²⁰⁵

The war also afflicted Kansans in more subtle ways. As in Texas, homesteads fell into disrepair as working-age men left farms to fight. Bourbon County resident William Blake, shot in the face at the Battle of Antietam, lamented his home "going to rack and ruin" while he recovered at his parents' home in Vermont. Specifically, he felt discouraged that, in addition to normal wear and tear resulting from neglect, neighbors took his fences and much of the lumber that constituted his house. Blake questioned the war's toll on his neighbors' moral fiber, but he also worried about the conflict's effects on soldiers in the field. Although he entered combat with men "who professed to be Christians," he witnessed a "profane & wicked" transformation in many. Chaplain Adair's evaluation of the soldiers hospitalized in Kansas concurred. "Vulgarity, intemperance, gambling, and dishonesty" prevailed, in his estimation, and he suspected

²⁰⁵ Adair, diary, 6 September 1862 (first quote), 24 November 1862, 3 December 1862, 14 December 1862 (second quote), 17 December 1862, 21 December 1862, 1 September 1863, and 6 November 1863.

the war would harden men irreversibly. Weak responses to his ministering and poor church attendance exacerbated his concerns. What would become of Kansas, after all, if her sons returned from battle devoid of the compassion and generosity characteristic of antebellum homesteaders?²⁰⁶

With the status of slavery settled, news of prolonged droughts hurting its image, and the primary route to the state passing through semi-hostile Missouri, emigration to Kansas slowed considerably during the war. Nevertheless, Kansans worked to improve their neighborhoods and maintain a semblance of normalcy throughout the conflict. In contrast to Texas, the Kansas economy continued to function much as it had during the late antebellum period. Residents purchased clothing, shoes, and household goods without much difficulty. Perhaps more tellingly, new construction continued during wartime. Congregationalists in Osawatomie, Episcopalians in Leavenworth, and Methodists in Topeka raised money to build or expand churches. Residents of Neosho Falls erected their first schoolhouse in 1863 and a steam mill one year later. Work continued on the Kansas Pacific Railroad as well. In short, the wartime experiences of Kansans diverged from those of Texans in terms of economic development and stability. Consequently, local economic conditions forced relatively few Kansans into sharecropping arrangements in the immediate postwar period.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Wirt [William Wirt Blake] to Dear Sister, 6 June 1862 (first quote), William Wirt Blake Collection, KHS; Wirt [William Wirt Blake] to Dear Sister Mary, 18 May 1862 (second quote), William Wirt Blake Collection, KHS; Adair, diary, 28 November 1862 (third quote), 1 September 1862, 16 November 1862, 1 March 1863, 23 August 1863, 13 September 1863, and 19 October 1863.

²⁰⁷ Adair, diary, 22 April 1861, 24 October 1863, 3 November 1863, and 21 November 1863; A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Huntoon to My Dear Lizzie [Huntoon], 26 April 1861, Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS; Harriet Naomi Clark, unpublished reminiscences, pp. 16 and 19, Sarah Goss Clark Papers, KSRL; Hutchinson, *An Indian Reserve*, p. 11.

In addition to business, religion, and education, other aspects of civil society continued almost unabated in Kansas. Fourth of July celebrations assumed added significance for men and women working to preserve the Union, but in form they largely resembled antebellum affairs, featuring speeches, community barbecues, and dancing. Public debates remained popular as well, with topics ranging from the proper administration of Baptisms to scientific interpretations of biblical creation to “true manhood in its application to popular education.” While Texans steadily watched their world fall into decline, Kansans previewed the robust society that awaited the end of hostilities. Despite setbacks, their experiences taught them to expect better tomorrows. When those expectations went unmet in the decades following the war, a sense prevailed that something had gone terribly wrong.²⁰⁸

Wartime Kansas both resembled and diverged from wartime Texas. Neither state hosted the iconic battles that dotted eastern landscapes, nor did they face formidable invading armies, their worst fears notwithstanding. The contributions of Kansans and Texans to the war effort should not be underestimated, however; tens of thousands from each state willingly served on both sides of the Mississippi River, and those who remained on the home front made considerable sacrifices as well. Like Texans, Kansans worried more about irregular forces than traditional armies. The ambushes and banditry that characterized Bleeding Kansas continued into the war but on an increasingly intense scale. In the face of that lawlessness, many wondered about their place in the Union.

²⁰⁸ Adair, diary, 29 September 1863, 30 September 1863 (quote), and 7 July 1864; H. [Henry] Barricklow to My Son Joseph, 8 September 1862, Barricklow Letters, Special Collections, Collins Library, Baker University (hereafter CLBU).

During the territorial period, Kansas often sat at the center of national debate, and Americans closely followed the machinations of proslavery and free state homesteaders. Once the war began, attention once showered on the Sunflower State evaporated, and many felt their needs pushed to the side. In contrast to Texans, however, Kansans managed to maintain a vibrant civil society. With fewer concerns about meeting basic needs such as food and shelter, Kansans finished the war with energy and resources to spare. Toward century's end, many channeled those abundant assets into securing state governments more attentive to local needs.

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Minor differences between antebellum Kansas and Texas grew enormously during the Civil War. Unlike Kansans, Texans came home to utter disarray. The Confederate economy had collapsed, slavery had ended, and thousands of young men had died in the war. As unsettling, many Texans believed they no longer lived in a democratic society. Disfranchisement loomed large in the minds of whites who failed in their bid for secession, and even those who regained the right to vote believed they exercised little control over government. Reconstruction's end met with rejoicing for white Texans, although memories of the war and its aftermath reverberated strongly in the minds of those who seized the mantle of the Lost Cause. The decade following the Civil War profoundly influenced their views of proper government and economy for generations to come.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ H. W. Barclay, "Reminiscences," unpublished, p. 50, Barclay (H. W.) Reminiscences, undated, CAH; Gaines, "Looking Back," p. 29; Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War*, pp. 6-9.

Even before the Confederacy formally surrendered, the stillborn nation's economy ground to a halt. In contrast, the U. S. government started printing fiat currency, so-called "greenbacks," to meet obligations early in the war, and before the conflict ended some of that cash had entered Texas. Merchants rarely accepted greenbacks at full face value, and shortages of cash endemic to the antebellum era continued during Reconstruction. Bartering allowed homesteaders to exchange goods and services, but a lack of liquid capital hampered economic development in the region. Businesses could not exist where people had no money; consequently, food and clothing remained in perilously short supply going into the winter of 1865-6. Building projects, railroad construction, and other improvements to infrastructure seized up after secession, and when hostilities ceased, abandoned work symbolized frozen economic growth.²¹⁰

The postwar economy also suffered for reasons unrelated to infrastructure, neglect, or the cash supply. Fighting did not stop in northern Texas when the war ended. Without U. S. troops in the region until 1867, Comanches carried out increasingly daring raids. In February 1866, for example, a raiding party rustled horses from the streets of Palo Pinto, an act of bravado unheard of in the late antebellum era. Those in rural areas felt even more anxious about run-ins with Native Americans. According to one Jack County rancher, men, women, and children vigilantly watched for signs of Native Americans during those "dark and trying times," when the government supplied "neither . . . arms nor ammunition." Many arrived at innovative solutions to security problems. Farmers and ranchers took time-consuming precautions to protect livestock. Many led

²¹⁰ Gaines, "Looking Back," pp. 17-8; Rogers, "Memoirs," p. 105; Moneyhon, *After the Civil War*, pp. 10-5.

horses a mile or more from their homes and secured them in secluded areas in anticipation of nighttime raids. Belle Rogers's mother "often baked bread for the cowboys" in an effort to keep a comforting number of armed men near their home. Without more formal protection available, however, homesteaders struggled to protect their lives and property.²¹¹

While grim economic circumstances and combative Native Americans worried Texans caught in the wake of war, their political standing generated equal consternation. Many found Andrew Johnson's Amnesty Proclamation an "agreeable surprise" and applauded relatively lenient terms of readmission to the Union. Hoping to regain control of their state and communities, eligible whites swore amnesty oaths and reentered the electorate. Those steps proved premature, however, as Republicans in the U. S. Congress assumed control of Reconstruction in 1867. Unwilling to watch southerners return to their antebellum ways, those Republicans enacted laws that took power from southern whites and vested it in federal authorities. That process involved disfranchisement. Men who lifted arms against the Union lost the right to vote through the end of the decade, as did many who held elected offices in the Confederacy. Jonathan Baker, for example, lost his vote for serving as deputy sheriff of Palo Pinto County during the war. Local boards of registration determined who would be disfranchised and came to symbolize oppression in the minds of white Texans. Their

²¹¹ Baker, "Diary," 5 February 1866; Atkinson(?), reminiscences, pp. 27-8 and 151 (first quote); Cochran, "Early Days," p. 23; Rogers, "Memoirs," p. 91 (second quote); Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 291.

rulings sometimes triggered violent reactions. Indeed, emotion overwhelmed many in the region who longed for days gone by.²¹²

The war's emotional toll prodded some to socially disengage. The promise of peace following Lee's surrender offered hope but quickly gave way as federal policies reordered southern society. One String Prairie man who could no longer manage his feelings of disgust moved farther west, to the very edge of white settlement in the state. "I went among strangers," the former sheriff recalled, "to live in peace and hear as little from the outside world as possible. . . . In short . . . *to be alone*." By 1870, the preponderance of appointed state officials stifled interest in politics according to a Bosque County woman who believed that "there was not a man in 20" who could name the governor. Frustrated white Texans believed they lacked the ability to influence events outside of their homes and focused their attention on the considerable task of rebuilding. Renewed interest in politics would only arrive after Reconstruction's end.²¹³

Despite a desire to put the war behind them and build for the future, consequences associated with losing the Civil War surrounded Texans. Confederate veterans remained disfranchised while freedmen gained the right to vote. More disconcertingly, federal officials tightly controlled local affairs. Circumstances surrounding the legal system exemplified discontent. Federal district courts replaced county courts, but a lack of resources dictated that each court met only annually. Many believed the unavailability of courts impeded economic recovery and encouraged

²¹² Bedford, *reminiscences*, pp. 26-7 (first quote); Baker, "Diary," 10 February 1866, 8 August 1867, and 15 August 1867; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 264-70; Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War*, p. 90.

²¹³ Thomas, *reminiscences*, p. 52 (first quote); Gaines, "Looking Back," p. 23 (second quote).

lawlessness. Drawing on wartime experiences, vigilantes—unable to jail miscreants—resorted to hangings to enforce justice. By 1870, Texans believed the federal government focused on punishing ex-Confederates rather than helping the state recover.²¹⁴

Beyond courts and boards of registration, the army constituted the most recognizable sign of federal authority in Texas. Unlike most southerners, those living in western counties held conflicting opinions about U. S. troops. Farmers and ranchers recognized the fundamental role professional soldiers played in staving off Native American raiding parties. Indeed, a reduced military presence in the region largely accounted for inroads made by Comanches between 1861 and 1867. Troops returned to western forts just as congress established military districts across the South to enforce the terms of Reconstruction, a coincidence that complicated attitudes toward the federal government. During “the reconstruction days,” according to a Jack County homesteader, “troups were placed in the Country more to watch the People . . . than for their protection.” Townspeople also viewed the army’s presence in negative terms. One Waco woman tellingly equated “Yankee Soldiers and niggers” who had moved into the community and ran it “in the most outrageous manner.” Regrettably, in her opinion, residents no “longer had any rights and life was no longer worth living in that once good town.” Although affording protection, U. S. soldiers still garnered widespread resentment from many Texans.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Gaines, “Looking Back,” pp. 25 and 37; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 276-80.

²¹⁵ George F. Atkinson(?), “The Thrilling History of the Friends,” unpublished essay, p. 151 (first quote), Atkinson (George F.) *Reminiscences*, ca. 1925, CAH; Gaines, “Looking Back,” p. 12 (second quote).

Despite considerable acrimony concerning federal troops, farmers and ranchers found some relief from their presence. The army's return signaled the beginning of the end of Indian Texas; by 1875, Native Americans no longer threatened whites in Texas. That process took time and effort, however, and soldiers frequently seemed outmatched by their Comanche counterparts. During one forty-eight hour period in 1867, a small Native American raiding party killed a dozen men in Young County, terrorized a schoolhouse in Erath County, and stole horses from cavalymen posted in Jack County. Such embarrassing episodes notwithstanding, the relative fortunes of whites and Native Americans after 1867 took unmistakably different paths. Comanches, Kiowas, and other groups slowly ceded ground to aggressive American soldiers and buffalo hunters, and homesteaders filled the vacuum left behind. By 1869, white settlement again reached into areas last occupied in 1860.²¹⁶

The push to rid northern Texas of Native Americans received renewed vigor on May 19, 1871, after an incident known as the Warren Wagon Train Raid. The raid featured unremarkable details: about one hundred Kiowa warriors ambushed, robbed, and burned a lightly guarded wagon train in rural Young County, killing seven teamsters in the process. The wagons belonged to Henry Warren, a contract freight carrier working for the army. The raid's only noteworthy characteristic involved a chance encounter between Warren's train and the traveling party of General William Sherman less than an hour before the attack. Sherman—who passed through the ambush point unmolested—had recently arrived in Texas to evaluate the veracity of claims made by

²¹⁶ Baker, "Diary," 26-7 July 1867; Gaines, "Looking Back," p. 19; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 291.

homesteaders. News of the wagon train's fate, as well as his narrow escape, chilled Sherman's attitude toward Native Americans.²¹⁷

Immediately following the raid, Sherman ordered the arrests of its ringleaders, Big Tree, Satank, and Satanta. The general then took an unprecedented step in ordering civil trials for the three men. Guards killed an escaping Satank before standing trial, but juries found Big Tree and Satanta guilty of murder and sentenced them to death. Although Texas governor Edmund Davis commuted their sentences to life in prison (and paroled them two years later), the raid and its aftermath produced significant outcomes. The attack shook Sherman's faith in the efficacy of the peace policy advocated by President Ulysses Grant and led to offensive operations that subdued Native Americans living outside of reservations. Furthermore, Sherman's shifting attitude spoke to the hearts of homesteaders. For the first time since the end of the Civil War, Texans believed the federal government had taken concrete steps to improve their fortunes.²¹⁸

Indeed, Sherman's response to the Warren Wagon Train Raid soothed tensions between the army and citizens of northern Texas. In part, farmers and ranchers appreciated that a high-ranking official understood their complaints and took them seriously. They also praised the effectiveness of a more aggressive Indian policy. Some Texans thought Grant's peace policy naïve at best. At worst, they worried that he wanted

²¹⁷ George F. Atkinson(?), "History of the Friends," unpublished essay, p. 62, Atkinson, (George F.) *Reminiscences*, ca. 1925, CAH; La Vere, *Texas Indians*, p. 211.

²¹⁸ Atkinson(?), "History of the Friends," pp. 62 and 68; H. G. Bedford, "Why I Never Fought the Indians," unpublished essay, p. 94, Atkinson (George F.) *Reminiscences*, ca. 1925, CAH; D. R. P. McDermott, "Some Thoughts from a Pioneer Texas Woman," unpublished reminiscences, p. 3, Mrs. Paul C. Gerhart Collection, Special Collections, Dallas Public Library (hereafter DPL); La Vere, *Texas Indians*, pp. 211-2; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 332.

to please poorly informed northerners who objected to violent relations with Native Americans in the West. In the eyes of homesteaders, Sherman's "honest straight forward course checked the expressions of sympathy . . . made by the Northern & eastern People toward the oppressed Indian" and made the region safer for whites. The new Indian policy healed old wounds to the point that Texans could extol Sherman's virtues despite his prominent role in the CSA's destruction.²¹⁹

Through 1872, U. S. troops devastated Native American groups in Texas. Comanches, Kiowas, and others remained elusive, but the army adopted brutally effective tactics to force Native Americans onto reservations. Simply put, the federal government adopted a starvation strategy. Professional hunters armed with rifles accurate to half-a-mile decimated buffalo herds, robbing plains Indians of their chief sources of food, shelter, and fuel. Meanwhile, American officers made concerted efforts to find and destroy winter villages, depriving Native Americans during the harshest time of year. Some Texans found the policies unsettling but ultimately considered them a net good. The regrettable mass slaughter of buffalo, they reasoned, removed a nuisance that impeded the spread of agriculture. Native Americans stood to gain as well, at least in the long term. If they left "uncivilized" lifestyles and adopted American religion, education, and economic practices, they would share in the growing nation's prosperity. Widespread faith in the federal government's ability to acculturate Native Americans spoke volumes about Texans' evolving thoughts on federal authority.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Bedford, "Why I Never Fought," pp. 91-3; Atkinson(?), "History of the Friends," pp. 66-7 (quote).

²²⁰ Bedford, "Why I Never Fought," pp. 107-8; Hillory G. Bedford, "Bring Up the Past and Enjoy It at the Present," unpublished reminiscences, (ca. 1912), p. 15, Bedford (Hillory G.) Reminiscences, undated, CAH; La Vere, *Texas Indians*, pp. 211-3; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, pp. 332-4.

Native Americans continued an unceasing retreat through 1873 as soldiers and buffalo hunters cleared a path for the return of farmers and ranchers. Henry Belding recalled the February morning when he heard “a volley of guns fired” in the distance as he worked in his garden. News soon arrived of a skirmish with Native Americans that resulted in a single casualty; Jesse Veal became the last man to die fighting Indians in Palo Pinto County. Later in the year, Jack County residents similarly witnessed their final fight against Native Americans. In June 1874, as hunters and soldiers moving into the Texas Panhandle presaged the advance of white homesteaders, several hundred Comanche and Kiowa warriors drew a line in the sand at a small outpost called Adobe Walls. Disheartened at their inability to overwhelm two dozen hunters staying there—and demoralized by a shot from William Dixon that killed one warrior at a thousand yards—the attacking force retreated. By autumn, the army waged total war against remaining holdouts. The Red River War culminated in a September raid on a combined Comanche, Kiowa, and Cheyenne village in Palo Duro Canyon. Caught off guard, Native Americans beat a hasty retreat, warriors providing cover for women, children, and the elderly. After the battle, soldiers burned more than 450 homes, destroyed stores of buffalo meat, and killed more than a thousand Indian horses. Native Americans consequently faced the prospect of a winter on the high plains without shelter, food, or transportation. Seeing no alternatives, survivors agreed to move permanently to Indian Territory. The war for ownership of Texas had ended, and Texans had the U. S. army to thank.²²¹

²²¹ Henry Belding, “Historical Facts about Palo Pinto County,” unpublished essay, p. 145, Atkinson

Like other Americans following the Civil War, Texans hoped to quickly mend neglected homesteads and heal broken spirits. Most tried to put the war behind them, a task complicated by the onset of Congressional Reconstruction. Farmers and ranchers still reeling from wartime losses perceived congressional policies as onerous, but those in northern Texas saw potential advantages in the army's return. Once federal authorities committed to removing Native Americans from Texas, attitudes toward troop presence softened. Even William Sherman earned grudging approval from his former adversaries. By the end of 1874, the federal government had succeeded in clearing Native Americans from the region; as promised, moreover, it had released the state from federal oversight upon meeting the criteria to end Reconstruction. Many took critical lessons from the years immediately following the war. The federal government proved a capable partner, even in the hands of Republicans. The Democratic Party's grip on northern Texas had loosened, if only slightly. For area farmers, party loyalty no longer trumped self-interest.

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Commencement of the Civil War set Kansas and Texas on disparate paths. Two sides of a coin, the former constituted part of the more industrialized and economically dynamic North and the latter part of the ravaged South. The coin itself, however, sat on the edges of white settlement and American consciousness. Though fighting on opposite sides of the war, citizens in both states felt the sting of irrelevance. The Union and

(George F.) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, CAH; Bedford, "The Past," p. 104; George F. Atkinson(?), "The Civilization of the Indians in about 1874," unpublished reminiscences, (1874), pp. 222-4, Atkinson (George F.) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, CAH; La Vere, *Texas Indians*, pp. 209-14; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, pp. 335-41.

Confederacy each asked for thousands of men to fight in the eastern theater of the war while largely ignoring local dangers.

Civil War Kansas witnessed a continuation of the hostilities that characterized the territorial period. Guerilla fighting seemed achingly familiar, and wartime violence surpassed even the darkest days of Bleeding Kansas. Nevertheless, death and destruction along the Kansas-Missouri border paled in comparison to that found east of the Mississippi River. In the late antebellum era, Kansas stood at the center of the debate over slavery's expansion into the West, and the happenings there constituted national news. None doubted the territory's importance or that of the people living there. After April 1861, attention quickly shifted to states in the Mid-Atlantic and Upper South, relegating the travails of Kansans to a footnote. As the war siphoned men and other resources from the state, many came to agree with one Shawnee County physician who considered Kansans "in the most defenseless position of any people in the nation." The state would later reap the benefits of fighting for the victors, but farmers there would not forget their place in the imaginations of easterners or Republican leaders.²²²

Although never receiving the same national attention as territorial Kansans, Texans similarly felt abandoned and forgotten after the war began. Federal troops evacuated the state after the firing at Fort Sumter, leaving homesteaders to their own devices until the CSA sent replacements. Those replacements proved too few, as the CSA chose not to make western defense a priority. Consequently, Texans enthusiastically volunteered for service, provided they could remain in the state to

²²² A. J. [Andrew Jackson] Huntoon to My Dear Wife [Lizzie Huntoon], 26 June 1861 (quote), Andrew Jackson Huntoon Papers, KHS.

protect their neighborhoods. The struggle between those volunteers and Confederate authorities seeking a greater commitment outside the state heightened the sense that easterners viewed Texas as a secondary consideration.

Meanwhile, Native Americans deftly seized the opportunity to reclaim lost ground. Texans resumed tactics of mutual defense with only limited success. Farms, ranches, and towns fell into disrepair as those who remained on the home front simultaneously worked to support the war and defend their homes. As the Confederacy's fortunes turned south, it requested ever-deeper sacrifices from Texas. By war's end, the state showed clear signs of neglect. As one Jack County man lamented, "deaf ears have been turned to our cries and the story of our wrongs has been discredited." Upon returning to the Union, moreover, the plight of those in western counties remained low on the list of national priorities. When authorities ultimately eschewed peace in favor of conquest, grateful Texans reevaluated their views of government.²²³

On December 6, 1873—twelve years after voting for secession—the men of Palo Pinto County organized a ranger company to patrol for Native Americans who no longer roamed the countryside. Four days earlier, Texas voters similarly sealed the fate of state Republicans, electing Democrat and former Confederate officer Richard Coke governor. Coke defeated his opponent by a two-to-one margin, a landslide victory that anticipated Democratic dominance in the state. Indeed, a century passed before another Republican resided in the governor's mansion. Coke's inauguration "set the country afire,"

²²³ Atkinson(?), *reminiscences*, p. 72 (quote).

according to one Bosque County woman. “We had been living under a dark cloud for ten years—as far as we were concerned with no government.” In the years following Reconstruction, jubilation turned to discontent as Redeemer Democrats proved long on promise and short on delivery.²²⁴

After 1873 the state’s Republican Party fell into deep hibernation, but Democratic hegemony did not go unchallenged. By century’s end, people seeking more responsive governance had posed serious challenges to Democratic rule. Texans tired of faltering economic conditions and inept—or uninterested—governance. In that respect, they again found themselves standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Kansans. Although Kansas and Texas viewed the years between 1865 and 1873 through wildly different lenses, farmers in both states increasingly recognized the similarity of their fates as the final decades of the century approached.

²²⁴ Baker, “Diary,” 6 December 1873; Gaines, “Looking Back,” p. 36 (quote).

CHAPTER VIII

CEMENTING CULTURES OF DISSENT

Western states witnessed explosive growth in the 1870s and 1880s as railroads made the plains an accessible and viable destination for a second generation of homesteaders. Midwesterners, especially those from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio, came to dominate the population of Kansas, and they brought Midwestern sensibilities with them. Texas's southern hue similarly deepened during Reconstruction as migrants from states ravaged by war—led by Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia—moved west in hopes of finding better prospects. Increasing populations in both states ushered in new eras of growth, and as towns emerged, the gender imbalance that characterized the 1850s evened out. By 1890, places that sat on the periphery of white settlement in 1850 had been fully integrated into American society.

Until late in the century, the Lone Star State trailed Kansas in industrialization, particularly in terms of railroad mileage. Those disparate economic conditions directly led to cattle drives, which offered Texans traveling through Kansas a glimpse of things to come. The same railroads that ended the cattle drives also brought cotton monoculture to northern Texas. By 1880 Texans recognized links between cotton farming, the rising price of land, and increased rates of sharecropping and tenancy. Similarly, Kansans concluded railroads ultimately drove property values beyond the reach of all but those willing to accept significant risk. Hoping to halt that trend, farmers in both states formed cooperative marketing associations designed to link growers directly with

buyers. Those endeavors grew naturally from a well-established ethos of mutual aid and a culture of voluntary association.

The neighborliness and cooperative mindset that characterized societies on the plains allowed discontent spread like wildfire in the 1880s as farmers felt the pinch of droughts, bankrupt railroads, and declining crop prices. In response, they turned to solutions that made sense to them. When fire destroyed a homestead, neighbors helped rebuild it. When dangerous men threatened communities, families banded together for protection. And when faced with systemic economic inequity, farmers formed organizations to advance their interests. The move into politics did not come instantly; instead, rural folks built on previous experiences. Most organizations explicitly forbid direct political participation, and farming cooperatives did too—for a time. The collapse of the relatively prosperous Texas Farmers Alliance Exchange in 1889 reignited debate over the need for a political movement to buttress economic agendas. Within a year, those advocating political change had laid the foundation for the grandest third-party effort in American history.

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The plains experienced dynamic change in the generation following the Civil War. Around 1870, the region reached a tipping point—a critical mass of homesteaders and modern conveniences broadened its appeal to easterners. Quickly growing towns catered to the needs of families, offering places to learn, shop, and worship. Societies in Kansas and Texas did not develop identically, however. Kansans proved particularly adept at town building, and bustling communities filled the state within thirty years of its

founding. Texas remained more rural, and Redeemer Democrats who took control of state government after Reconstruction pursued policies that retarded growth in many areas, including education and banking. Nonetheless, both states continued to shed frontier identities through the 1880s as they came to more closely resemble the rest of the nation.

The emergence and growth of towns coincided with a closing of the gender gap in the final decades of the nineteenth century. By 1890, women outnumbered men in twenty of Kansas's thirty-five towns despite remaining a slight minority in the state. With women came families, and the churches and schools that had constituted features of western society since the 1850s became hallmarks of prairie towns after 1870. Schools and churches constituted bedrock institutions that offered men, women, and children from rural areas space to socialize. Growing populations also made specialized businesses viable, and towns became home to an array of skilled workers such as cobblers, butchers, and wheelwrights. Just as farmers rapidly populated the countryside, those artisans, laborers, and professionals filled cities quickly. The combined populations of Dallas and Fort Worth, for example, blossomed from fewer than five thousand in 1870 to more than sixty thousand in 1890, when the former became the largest city in Texas. Wichita witnessed similar development; on the brink of the twentieth century, it grew faster than any city in the nation. That growth proved widespread but uneven, and with each passing year discernable differences arose between neighboring communities. Development in Texas largely resembled that in Kansas in kind but not degree. By 1890, Kansas featured thirty-five towns and northern

Texas only twelve. In some respects differences reflected differential economic prospects in the two states, but Kansans also demonstrated a civic pride that seemed absent from many Texas communities.²²⁵

Schools played central roles in western communities. Those in Kansas and Texas shared many features in common: a single teacher instructing students of varying ages and competencies in reading, spelling, writing, geography, history, and arithmetic. Common educational texts included the *McGuffey Reader*, *Webster's Blue Back Speller*, and the Bible. Outside of traditional lessons, teachers imparted knowledge of civics in the form of mock trials and class elections. Recitations punctuated school terms, often in crowded public displays that allowed parents and other citizens to gauge the quality of instruction their children received. In short, both states offered typical western one-room schoolhouses focused on practical education.²²⁶

Despite similarities in content, schooling in each state reflected disparate outlooks on the government's role in education. Texans tended toward private instruction. Typically, a person advertised commencement of a school term to area parents and took pupils on subscription. Without a system for issuing credentials, communities made local determinations—often involving an oral examination—

²²⁵ William Curry Holden, *Alkali Trails: Social and Economic Movements of the Texas Frontier, 1846-1900* (1930; repr., Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), p. 170; U.S. Department of the Interior, *Report on the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1895), pp. lxxii, 458, and 482.

²²⁶ EMW [Emma Wattles Morse] to Dear Grandma, 21 December 1884, Augustus Wattles Collection, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka (hereafter KHS); Eva Woodward Bull, diary, 6 February 1874, Eva Woodward Bull Papers, 1873-1877, Kenneth Spencer Research Library (hereafter KSRL), University of Kansas, Lawrence; Jonathan Hamilton Baker, "Diary, 1858-1918," 23 December 1859, 21 June 1860, and 1 June 1860, Baker (Jonathan Hamilton) Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History (hereafter CAH), University of Texas, Austin; T. U. Taylor, "The Frontier Home," unpublished essay, (ca. 1925), p. 114, Atkinson (George F.) Reminiscences, ca. 1925, CAH; O. C. [Ocie Bugbee] to Mr. L. G. [Lester Gladstone] Bugbee, November 1887, Bugbee (Lester Gladstone) Papers, 1823-1902, CAH.

concerning a teacher's competency. Several variables factored into the cost of attending school, including the term's length, the number of pupils, and the number of subjects taught. During the brief period of Republican rule during Reconstruction, state law allowed counties to implement taxes supporting education. The Redeemer Constitution that took effect in 1876, however, required a two-thirds majority vote to implement school taxes while simultaneously slashing state funding for schools. Those measures dealt a severe blow to rural areas. Low pay discouraged potential teachers, as did a reduction in the school year from ten months to four. Textbooks and other supplies imposed further financial burdens, and facilities proved inadequate. In the cash-strapped 1860s, most reconciled themselves to poor public services. By century's end, however, farmers resented Democratic governors and legislators that habitually crippled schools while refusing to tax railroads and wealthy individuals.²²⁷

Kansans, on the other hand, imported common schools to their new homes and elected governments that prioritized education. State law considered anyone between the ages of five and twenty-one "school aged," one of the most liberal policies in the nation. Fierce neighborhood debates often centered on which version of public education to implement, as Bay Staters, Buckeyes, Hoosiers, and others stumped for familiar systems. Irrespective of the details, residents of Kansas had better success

²²⁷ Baker, "Diary," 13 July 1859; Mamma [Mary Fannie] to Mr. L. G. [Lester Gladstone] Bugbee, 30 March 1886, Bugbee (Lester Gladstone) Papers, 1823-1902, CAH; W. E. Cureton, "Personal Recollections of W. E. Cureton, Texas Frontiersman: 1848-1925," pp. 9 and 20, (1922), Cureton (W. E.) Recollections, ca. 1848-1922, CAH; Minna Von Moeller Steffans, diary, 4 May 1862, Steffans (Louis) Diary, 1860-1863, CAH; Redmound G. Gaines, "Looking Back at the Course of Human Events," unpublished essay, p. 5, Tate (Mrs. Claude B.) Papers, 1844-1875, CAH; Carl H. Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), pp. 189-90, and 202.

implementing and supporting state-funded schools. As early as the territorial period, Kansans passed laws mandating common schools in every county, and they permitted those counties to raise taxes to support them. Lawrence boasted “the best appointed school-room west of the Mississippi” according to one resident, and by 1860 more than 130 school districts operated in the territory. A strong tradition of tax-supported schools in the Midwest and New England followed migrants west, and aid companies and others outside the state committed resources to the state. By 1870, consequently, the percentage of school-aged children taking classes in Kansas doubled the percentage in Texas.²²⁸

Establishment of a state normal school factored heavily in comparatively high rates of school attendance. One Lawrence resident representing a common sentiment considered quality teachers “not only the foundation, but also the only motive of the whole system” of public education and pushed for a normal school in the 1850s. Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools Samuel Greer concurred, and he argued passionately on behalf of a normal school until the state legislature established the Kansas State Normal School (later Emporia State University) in 1863. By then, the state had demonstrated an affinity for higher education. Agriculturally oriented Bluemont

²²⁸ Ephm [Ephraim] Nute to Dear Fr. [Amos A. Lawrence], 5 January 1857 (first quote), History, University of Kansas Collection, KSRL; New England Emigrant Aid Company, “Articles of Agreement and Specifications, Topeka School House Construction,” construction contract, 9 June 1857, History, Topeka Collection, KHS; James Redpath, circular letter to the people of Boston, February 1857, Thomas Wentworth Higginson Papers, KHS; Samuel W. Greer, *Report of Samuel W. Greer, Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools*, n. p., 16 January 1859, pp. 2 and 4; Samuel W. Greer, *Report of the Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools*, n. p., 31 December 1859, pp. 4-6; Interior Department, *Report on Population, 1890*, p. 2; U. S. Department of the Interior, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States . . . From the Original Returns of the Ninth Census* (Washington, DC: GPO), p. 394; U. S. Department of the Interior, *Report on Education at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), p. 8.

College (later Kansas State University) opened in Manhattan in 1859, complementing the town's common school, public library, and "literary institution." The University of Kansas commenced as the Civil War drew to a close, giving the fledgling state three public universities a full decade before an equivalent institution existed in Texas. Enthusiasm for higher education continued during the postwar period, as evidenced by a collection taken in Baldwin City to build a new college at privately owned, coeducational Baker University. Residents contributed more than three thousand dollars during the first hour of fundraising, demonstrating the value placed on education and the health of the local economy following the war. Kansans attitudes toward education demonstrated that they expected government to help them improve their lives, and when Texans arrived in Kansas to sell cattle, they noted disparate educational opportunities in the two states and left feeling the Democratic Party had served them poorly.²²⁹

A pervading sense of optimism in postwar Kansas manifested in town building. Organizations such as the New England Emigrant Aid Company had jump-started town development, sending hundreds of well-funded settlers west for the express purpose of forming communities. Despite evolving into targets for proslavery antipathy, free state settlements developed rapidly. By spring 1856, according to one farmer, Osawatomie had two general stores, regular mail service, and "the largest steam Mill in the Territory," which powered two saws, a lathe, and a grist wheel. Topeka featured a

²²⁹ W. F. M. [William Frederick Milton] Army to His Excellency John W. Geary, Gov. of Kansas T., 8 December 1856, broadside replication of a letter (first quote), KHS; Greer, *Report of the Territorial Superintendent*, pp. 10-1; Henry L. Denison to My Dear Uncle [Joseph Denison], 11 May 1859, Isaac Goodnow Collection, KHS; Sarah Elizabeth Keifer, diary, 4 February 1866, Sarah Elizabeth Keifer Diary, Special Collections, Baker University Library, Baker University, Baldwin City, Kansas (hereafter BUL); James Redpath to Sir, circular letter, February 1857 (second quote), Thomas Wentworth Higginson Papers, KHS; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 121-5; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 317-8.

limekiln in addition to dozens of small houses, and Lawrence played host to the Free State Hotel and a printing press—at least temporarily. Manhattan started late but quickly became the territory's crown jewel. In 1857 the number of buildings there increased from 16 to nearly 100, and residents had access to several churches and stores, a schoolhouse, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, and a carriage shop. Towns unaffiliated with aid companies—including Ottawa, Burlingame, and Tecumseh—followed suit, placing territorial citizens' proclivity for town building on full display.²³⁰

Kansans capitalized on solid starts achieved in the late antebellum era, and by the 1870s signs of progress abounded. The town of Greeley exemplified that trend. Founded in 1856, the Anderson County burg had grown considerably by 1876. In addition to common institutions—a church, a schoolhouse, and three blacksmiths' shops—the town featured a land agent, lawyers, and county officials, as well as a drug store, dentist, and two physicians. William Tranks built wagons, and L. J. Fuller operated a photography studio. Thirsty citizens chose between two saloons, and the hungry opted between the butcher, the baker, and the grocery vendor. Other businessmen specialized in jewelry, hardware, lumber, and shoes, and several men ran dry goods stores. Simply put, residents of Greeley wanted for little. The availability of luxury items and amenities there, moreover, proved noteworthy not because the town

²³⁰ O. [Orville] C. Brown to Dear Sir [Edward Allen], 18 March 1856 (first quote), Orville Chester Brown Collection, KHS; Franklin Loomis Crane, "Diary, Franklin Loomis Crane," May 1855, Franklin Loomis Crane Collection, KHS; Wm. E. Goodnow to Mr. Hiram Hill, 17 August 1857, Hiram Hill Collection, KHS; John W. Robinson to Hiram Hill, 17 August 1857, Hiram Hill Collection, KHS; E. Hoogland to Thos. N. Stinson, 6 July 1856 and 21 January 1857, Thomas Nesbit Stinson Collection, KHS; James R. Mead to My Dear Father, 13 August 1859, James Mead Collection, KHS; Joseph Trego, diary, 29 October 1859, Joseph Trego Collection, KHS; G. W. Paddock, diary, 18 April 1857 and 19 May 1857, G. W. Paddock Diary Transcript, 1857-1861, KHS.

was exceptional, but because it was typical. As hardships of the 1850s and 1860s faded into memory, Kansans in the 1870s looked toward better days.²³¹

Small enterprise proliferated in Kansas largely because of access to capital. Kansans established banks as early as the territorial period. Direct linkages to New York and Boston facilitated the development of banking in Lawrence and other aid company strongholds. The Wyandotte Constitution allowed the establishment of state banks, and by 1870 most had access to corporate lenders. Regulations remained lax until the 1890s, however, and practices (not to mention competency) varied considerably. Banks routinely failed, a factor that largely accounted for interest rates many considered onerous later in the century. Nevertheless, the ability to borrow boosted local economies by funding new business endeavors and supplying farmers with purchasing power. Conversely, Texans—many steeped in the Jacksonian tradition’s skepticism of concentrated wealth—stymied banking in their state. The first state constitution prohibited establishment of state banks, as did the Redeemer constitution of 1876. By 1878, only a dozen national banks operated in the entire state. Fewer banks meant less enterprise; moreover, the circumstance increasingly forced small farmers into borrowing arrangements with furnishing merchants.²³²

In the aftermath of the Civil War, westerners resumed the business of building societies on the plains. Much of that work involved establishing towns that linked rural

²³¹ James Y. Campbell, *First History of Anderson County, from the Earliest Period of Settlement of the Count to the Centennial Year of 1876* (Garnett, KS: Garnett Weekly Journal, 1877), pp. 20-30.

²³² Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts* (Arlington Heights, IL: Forum Press, 1989), p. 143; P. P. Elder, *P. P. Elder’s Financial History: Ups and Downs from 1862 to 1880*, n.p., pp. 7-16; Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2000), pp. 9 and 46; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 213-4 and 343.

people in several ways. Quickly growing populations provided incentive for skilled labor and more complex local economies, and an influx of women balanced gender ratios and spurred the creation of institutions that catered to families. By 1880, the “frontier” had largely receded into memory, but the plains culture first established in the 1850s remained powerful. Cooperation and the belief that government should work for common folks informed the worldview of Kansans and Texans.

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While Kansas generally thrived during the fifteen years following the war, Texas lagged behind. Redeemer politicians and their New South mantra promised brighter days ahead, but progress arrived slowly. A dearth of railroads best symbolized the state’s industrial backwardness, although some recognized opportunities in that lack of development. Capitalizing on the availability of unclaimed cattle roaming western counties, cowboys and would-be ranchers accumulated herds that numbered in the hundreds. Cattle drives constituted big business in northern Texas through the 1870s, but opportunities for small operators vanished as railroads reached the region. At the same time, those railroads opened new doors. Unencumbered access to distant markets fundamentally altered rural economics, encouraging a transition from safety-first to market agriculture. As farmers became trapped in the webs of international finance, they turned to cooperative strategies that had served them well as far back as the late antebellum era.

The origins of and issues related to driving cattle constitute well-trod historical ground.²³³ In 1865, northern Texas—like most of the state and the South—sat devoid of railroads. Only crude wagon trails connected the region to the wider world, as the Great Raft made travel on the Red River perilous and neither the Brazos nor Trinity Rivers proved navigable. Kansas, in contrast, sat relatively well connected to the national rail network. The Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western Railroad (later Kansas Pacific) linked Lawrence with the Missouri River in 1864, and a year later the state contained seventy miles of railroad. By 1870, the Kansas Pacific stretched west to Denver, and Kansas claimed more than 1,200 miles of track. Those circumstances facilitated the first meaningful economic linkage between Texas and Kansas. Cattle drives sent Texas herds north to Kansas railheads, where trains carried them to St. Louis, Chicago, and beyond. The cattle business proved lucrative for those with the capacity to round up mavericks and drive them north quickly and efficiently. Drovers with little skill or bad luck could spend six months away from home and return with nothing to show for their efforts, but successful herd bosses earned as much as ten thousand dollars before expenses. Cowboys' pay fell on the opposite end of the spectrum, typically ranging between twenty and forty dollars per month. Although work as a cowhand promised little hope for riches, many considered payment in cash preferable to working for farmers on shares. Cash, after all, could purchase land.²³⁴

²³³ Holden, *Alkali Trails*, chapter 3; Robert W. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Cattle-Trailing Industry: Between Supply and Demand, 1866-1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973); Edward Everett Dale, *The Range Cattle Industry* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1930).

²³⁴ Richmond, *Kansas*, pp. 107-10 and 123-7; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 297-9; Edward Stafford to Father, 23 July 1868, Edward S. Stafford Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, Ablah

Market inefficiencies provided the impetus for cattle drives. Cattle worth three dollars a head in Texas sold for ten times that amount in Kansas, and once drovers solved fundamental logistical problems—optimal herd size, number of cowboys required, and amount of provisions needed—cattle could be driven north for as little as fifty cents a head. The prospect of such handsome returns tempted Texans still struggling to find their economic footing after the war. Virtually all the cattle in western counties younger than five years of age roamed the countryside unbranded. Prospective cowboys targeted those mavericks, rounding up hundreds at a time in “cow hunts.” Most avoided hunting cows in the dead of winter, but intrepid souls ranged the prairie with punk, flint, and steel, prepared to start a fire and heat branding irons on a moment’s notice. Cow hunts typically ceased by early summer, when cattlemen began preparations for the long drive north. The uniform timing of cattle drives overwhelmed the extant infrastructure and created bottlenecks along trails. Crossing the Red River on the Chisholm Trail, for example, constituted an exercise in patience. One herd boss approaching the river in 1871 counted forty-five wagons ahead of his, all waiting on a single ferry. Within five years railroads revolutionized market access in the area; until then, however, the same dismal state of transportation that distorted beef prices in the East also aggravated drovers bound for Kansas.²³⁵

Upon entering Indian Territory, some drovers experienced déjà vu. Although Native Americans in the territory had agreed to make peace with the U.S. government,

Library, Wichita State University (hereafter WSU); Baker, “Diary,” 28 October 1869, 14-8 October 1870, 10 March 1871, and 19 May 1877; Cochran, “Early Days,” p. 35; John A. Knight to Dear Retta, 22 May 1874 and 29 June 1874, Knight (John A. E.) Papers, 1850-1915, CAH.

²³⁵ Holden, *Alkali Trails*, pp. 36-7; Baker, “Diary,” 2 September 1869, 28 June 1870, and 31 October 1870; Walter C. Cochran, “Early Days,” pp. 31-3; Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 297.

cowboys considered them a threat, sometimes with good reason. Native Americans easily scattered poorly guarded cattle, and time spent recovering lost animals cost cowboys money. The law of supply and demand dictated that the first herds to reach Kansas fetched the best prices. Subsequent herds found markets with more cattle and fewer buyers. Many drovers requested army escorts to the Kansas border, usually to no avail. In lieu of federal help, herd bosses often aided each other, combining their herds in massive but tightly knit formations. Although in competition, they cooperatively drove cattle to secure the best odds of maximizing profits. That strategy—cooperation within the competitive framework of capitalism—testified to agrarian thinking at century’s end.²³⁶

Few travelled between Kansas and Texas prior to cattle drives, as uninviting Indian Territory stretched more than two hundred miles from north to south. Despite relative proximity, the 1870 census revealed fewer than two hundred Kansas-born residents of Texas and fewer than one thousand native Texans residing in Kansas. Consequently, cowboys witnessed differences between the two states before most. Kansas lands struck Texans as fertile and its farmers as industrious, although in both respects they differed little from home. In contrast, bustling towns immediately captured cowboys’ imaginations. Jonathan Baker made the first of his three cattle drives in 1869, returning home by train that autumn. Along the way he passed through the “pretty village” of Iola, the “lively town” of Humboldt, and the “thriving” community of Chetopa. The following year’s trip through Wichita made an even greater impression.

²³⁶ Baker, “Diary,” 3 and 5 July 1870, 20 August 1870, 13 July 1871.

The burgeoning city had “made extraordinary progress” since he last visited. “It is nothing short of marvelous to see the extent of improvement,” he believed, “especially in the way of building.” A seasoned traveler in northern Texas, Baker undoubtedly compared the rate of progress in Kansas to that at home. In some respects, he found his home state wanting.²³⁷

Baker and others returning from Kansas recognized that financial opportunities traveled in both directions across Indian Territory. Herd bosses and others who took the lion’s share of profits from cattle sales speculated in consumer goods, purchasing items in Kansas and transporting them to Texas for resale at substantially higher prices. In that manner, business savvy cattlemen leveraged the market inefficiency that produced inflated prices for beef while bringing both goods and cash back to the state. Texans gained access to previously unavailable or difficult to obtain items, particularly manufactured clothing and processed foods. Sometimes drovers purchased additional wagons to haul items home, knowing that local scarcity would allow them to sell the wagons for a profit as well. In 1870 Jonathan Baker returned home with the first sewing machine in Palo Pinto, where it proved “quite a curiosity.” Baker proved so adept at multiplying his profits from cattle sales that he opened a mercantile shop stocked with items purchased in Kansas. Similarly, some enterprising Kansans operated cattle drives in reverse. A small group of cattle buyers from the Sunflower State arrived in Bosque County in 1870 with wagons full of spring-operated clocks. Clocks nine inches tall cost

²³⁷ Interior Department, *Statistic of the Population, 1870*, pp. 330 and 333; Baker, “Diary,” 13 November 1869 (first and second quotes), 17 November 1869 (third quote), 30 August 1870 (third quote), 31 August 1870 (fourth quote), and 2 September 1870; Gaines, “Looking Back,” p. 17.

cattlemen one cow and one calf. A fifteen-inch clock could be had for two cows, and three cows purchased a twenty-four-inch clock. Within days the buyers moved on, after which, according to one county resident, “you could call at any cabin and get the time of day.” Cattle drives spurred the Texas economy as nothing else for fifteen years following the war.²³⁸

An abundance of cattle in Texas formed one half of the impetus for cattle drives, and railroads formed the other. Most Texans, even war veterans who fought outside the state, had never beheld a train before arriving at the end of the trail. They uniformly reacted with awe. W. S. Ikard recalled riding a mule toward a locomotive in Abilene to get a better view in 1866. While marveling at the machine, the train’s whistle sounded, startling both man and beast. “He threw me off, ran away and stood braying,” remembered Ikard, who “got up and stood staring.” Others had similar experiences in Fort Scott, Kansas City, and Coffeyville. Beyond the spectacle locomotives generated, railroads offered an object lesson in the scope of America’s industrial economy. Entire herds vanished into stock cars that transported them farther in an hour than drovers could in a day. Such developments dazzled rural folks. In time railroads would symbolize all that farmers disliked about the industrial economy, including concentrations of wealth and the political corruption they spawned. Initially, however, the promise of unprecedented economic transformation stoked support for railroad development.²³⁹

²³⁸ Baker, “Diary,” 2 November 1869, 13 October 1870 (first quote), 18 November 1871, and 29 December 1871; Gaines, “Looking Back,” p. 24 (second quote).

²³⁹ W. S. Ikard, “W. S. Ikard Tells of Experiences of Early Days in the Cattle Business,” unpublished essay, (ca. 1927), p. 7 (quote), Ikard (W. S.) Papers, 1847-1935, CAH; Baker, “Diary,” 18 September 1870; Cureton, “Personal Recollections,” pp. 21-2.

By 1870, no one in America clamored more loudly for railroads than Texans. The Houston & Texas Railroad emanating from Galveston reached Dallas in 1872 and connected with the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad (MKT) in northern Texas the following year. Thereafter, rail and telegraph linked Texas to the rest of the nation. The newfound ability to ship cattle by rail directly from Texas spelled the end of drives. A series of technological, social, and economic developments clustered in the mid-1870s contributed to their demise as well. The advent of barbed wire ended the practice of gathering mavericks, and the removal of Native Americans from lands west of the 98th meridian paved the way for cattle ranching on an unprecedented scale. Refrigerated rail cars arrived in 1876, making possible long-distance transportation of dressed beef. Perhaps most decisive, the Panic of 1873 paralyzed the American economy. Demand for beef plummeted as unemployment spiked, and by the time Texas cattle regained favor railroads had thoroughly replaced cattle trails.²⁴⁰

As railroads transformed ranching into a wealthy man's pursuit, those of modest means sought to capitalize on widespread access to markets through farming. Histories of Populism often emphasize shrinking prospects for farmers, focusing on the rise of sharecropping and tenancy in cotton-growing areas that became hotbeds of agrarian radicalism.²⁴¹ Those labor arrangements certainly became more common in the 1870s

²⁴⁰ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, pp. 303 and 306; Holden, *Alkali Trails*, pp. 30-2; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 138-9; Richmond, *Kansas*, pp. 130-1.

²⁴¹ John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), chapter 2; Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), chapter 2; Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmers' Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897*, Economic History of the United States, vol. 5 (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), chapter 13; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1951), chapter 7; Edward L. Ayers,

and 1880s, but anecdotal evidence complicates narratives that portray a linear relationship between their prevalence and support for the People's Party. Jonathan Baker, for example, spent time on both sides of the owner-tenant line, but his experiences defied stereotype in both instances. In 1873 Baker rented a farm in Palo Pinto County not out of necessity, but rather because he wanted a place to experiment growing sugar and to keep a few cows. He owned a home in town, where he served in local offices and started several business ventures. Renting offered him access to agricultural land without the costs involved in purchasing a farm. According to a farmer in nearby Bosque County, improved land rented for about three dollars an acre, "a good price for land that was . . . fifteen to twenty dollars per acre" for buyers. Baker later bought a farm where he lived and worked for more than a decade. By 1890 he wanted to sell, but no furnishing merchant forced him from his land. His place remained on the market for more than a year; meanwhile, he rented it on shares before selling it for eight thousand dollars. Baker's experiences, while perhaps atypical, suggest a complex picture of ownership and tenancy in the late nineteenth century.²⁴²

Further muddying the waters, census records fail to support a linkage between enthusiasm for Populist candidates and the prevalence of sharecropping or tenancy. Sharecroppers and tenants worked a majority of Texas farms as of 1890, yet they formed a majority in none of the three counties in northern Texas that voted the Populist ticket

Southern Crossing: A History of the American South, 1877-1906 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), chapter 2; Bruce Palmer, *Man over Money: The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism*, Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 72-4.

²⁴² Gaines, "Looking Back," p. 40 (quote); Baker, "Diary," 13 January 1873, 5 August 1890, and 4 May 1891.

in 1892. In two of those three counties, 70 percent of farmers owned their homesteads. Twenty-one counties in the region gave at least 30 percent of the vote to James Weaver; in all but two, landowners represented at least 60 percent of all farmers. Conversely, sharecroppers worked more than 40 percent of farms in nine of the eighteen counties where Populists failed to reach the 30 percent threshold. Figures for Kansas tell much the same story. Land ownership proved a poor predictor of support for the third party, as did the rate of growth in landless farmers between 1880 and 1890. In sum, the correlation between land ownership and Populist support seems weak.²⁴³

In contrast, the rise in landlessness tracked more closely with the rise of cotton agriculture. Farmers in northern Texas only dabbled in cotton prior to Reconstruction, growing just enough to manufacture homespun cloth. Once access to markets became reliable and affordable, however, cotton became an obvious choice. Unlike other southern cash crops such as sugar, indigo, or tobacco, cotton grew well on the plains. The crop also generated more revenue per acre than grains or cattle and proved more resistant to drought and disease. The move toward raising cotton also had emotional roots. Cotton occupied a special place in the southern mind, as it had long symbolized wealth and prosperity in the region. By the late antebellum era, most southerners had little hope of obtaining prime cotton-growing land, but the war violently shook economic realities. Northern Texas proved a unique case, as westward expansion barely scratched

²⁴³ Department of the Interior, *Report of the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1895), pp. 20-1, 142-4, and 182-9; Kansas Department of State, *Eighth Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Kansas, 1891-92* (Topeka: The Hamilton Printing Company, 1892), pp. 97-102; Texas Department of State, *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Texas, 1892* (Austin: Ben C. Jones & Co., 1893), pp. 58-87; Department of the Interior, *Report of the Productions of Agriculture as Recorded in the Tenth Census, June 1, 1880* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1884), pp. 53-4 and 88-93.

the region's surface until the postwar era. Migrants to the area enjoyed opportunities to partake in cotton agriculture on more favorable terms than residents of older states. And partake they did.²⁴⁴

New cotton gins in northern Texas testified to the crop's growing popularity. By 1868 farmers in the region grew enough cotton to merit construction of a gin in Bosque County, midway between the emerging cities of Waco and Fort Worth. One county farmer recalled that "every fellow that could get a half shovel or Cary plow tore up sod enough . . . to make a bale." Few initially harvested more than a bale (500 pounds) or two in a season, but the crop's sudden prevalence made ginning ventures financially feasible. By 1871, the operation at Valley Mills ginned 1,400 bales valued at more than one hundred thousand dollars; three years later, area farmers ginned 30,000 bales.²⁴⁵

Economic prospects in Texas and Kansas looked much different in 1880 than they had in 1855 or 1865. Railroads crisscrossed the plains, linking some of the fastest growing towns in the nation to vast eastern markets. Cattle drives gave way to cotton, which spread through northern Texas at breakneck speed for both practical and emotional reasons. The crop's long association with wealth seduced many who could not see the far-reaching changes industrialization wrought on the American economic landscape. Cotton prices in Texas and wheat prices in Kansas continuously fell as expanding railroads opened new growing areas that produced unprecedented surpluses. In contrast to the economy, rural culture evolved slowly. As farmers sensed their

²⁴⁴ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, p. 312.

²⁴⁵ Gaines, "Looking Back," pp. 18, 20 (quote), 29, and 38; Holden, *Alkali Trails*, pp. 235-9.

shifting relationship with the industrial economic order, they relied on each other to improve their circumstances as they had since before the Civil War.

* * *

Cooperative efforts to market crops followed naturally from mutual aid that characterized early settlement. Those efforts also had deep roots in the culture carried westward by migrants to Kansas and Texas. Indeed, the ethos of “public associations in civil life” that Alexis de Tocqueville identified as uniquely American in scope and scale in the 1830s later permeated western societies. Just as their grandparents made “associations to give entertainments, to found establishments for education, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books,” and otherwise propose “a common object to the exertions of a great many,” so too did men and women in the final third of the nineteenth century. Those associations facilitated communal solutions to social problems and played key roles in fostering a sense of solidarity among men and women who increasingly perceived common interests. They also manifested in robust civil societies. Men and women who joined in cooperative work socialized together, forming friendships that reinforced bonds between neighbors.²⁴⁶

A patchwork of leisurely pursuits facilitated community in the earliest days of settlement on the plains. Hunting provided recreation while supplementing diets. Hunters often targeted bears, wolves, and other potentially dangerous game. The most talented made careers of hunting, including renowned buffalo hunter and cofounder of Wichita James Mead. In the postwar period—when dangerous animals and food scarcity

²⁴⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, trans. by Henry Reeve (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), pp. 593 (first quote) and 594 (second quote).

became more rare—hunting more often took recreational overtones. Men found camaraderie hunting for turkeys near the winter holidays, for example, and boys often passed their leisure time targeting rabbits, squirrels, and frogs. Deer hunting proved particularly popular, as men transformed antlers into trophies that generated good-natured rivalries. Those exploits also provided fodder for storytellers who similarly competed to spin the most interesting yarn. Storytelling further fostered camaraderie between men and afforded boys the opportunity to learn values central to manhood in the West.²⁴⁷

Like hunting, gambling offered men opportunities for competitive socializing. Gambling, and specifically poker, had long proven a pastime among men and remained so through the nineteenth century. Professional “blacklegs” and cardsharps famously plied their trade in the West, but card games found popularity among ordinary rural folks as well. In Civil War Texas, military commanders fought a losing battle against poker, banning it with a regularity suggesting the futility of their efforts.²⁴⁸ While disdained by some, gambling aided in developing trust between men. Texan Travis Jones, for example, occasionally enjoyed a “big stiff high game of poker” when his wife left to visit relatives. A professional gambler hosted regular events and “never allowed any crooked work to go on, so all felt safe for an honest game.” The law would not enforce payment of bets, after all; only honor and trust made gambling a viable form of

²⁴⁷ Bull, diary, 7 February 1874; Hillory G. Bedford, unpublished reminiscences, (1905), pp. 38, 60, and 73, Bedford (Hillory G) Reminiscences, Undated, CAH.

²⁴⁸ H. E. McCullough, “Regimental Orders No. 13,” issued 13 July 1861 from Camp Jackson, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH; J. E. McCord, untitled circular, 17 June 1863, Barry (James Buckner) Papers, 1847-1917, CAH.

entertainment. As men collected winnings and paid losses, bonds of trust became fortified.²⁴⁹

Masculinized forms of recreation such as hunting and poker had more women-friendly cousins. Horse racing packaged gambling in a socially acceptable way. Races often formed part of larger programs that typically included dances, speeches, and community picnics. The throngs who attended races stood in stark contrast to more intimate—and exclusively male—poker games, meaning they did less to build trust between individuals but likely had greater impact in broad community formation. Similarly, “wolf chases” generated larger crowds than ordinary hunts and appealed to both men and women. Customarily, a family hosted the wolf hunt, which began early in the evening with a dinner attended by dozens. Afterward, hunters took their mounts and, in cooperation with hunting dogs, tracked down wolves, coyotes, and wildcats that preyed on livestock. The hunt therefore served a practical purpose, but for most “the sport was the main thing.” As importantly, wolf chases differed from earlier hunting trips in that women joined in the revelry, riding alongside—and directly competing with—men.²⁵⁰

Like horse races and wolf chases, dances afforded young men and women a socially acceptable way of spending time together. Dances often accompanied holidays, and larger communities hosted regular social hops, hoedowns, and fandangos. They also

²⁴⁹ Travis Fleming Jones, “Reminiscences of Travis Fleming Jones, 1850-1932,” unpublished, (1932), pp. 11-2 (first and second quotes), Jones (Travis Fleming) Reminiscences, 1850-1932, CAH; Otho Edmund Cope, “The Pioneers of Yesteryears,” unpublished manuscript, p. 23, *The Pioneers of Yesteryears—Manuscript* by Otho Edmund Cope, WSU.

²⁵⁰ Cope, “Pioneers of Yesteryears,” p. 23; Samuel Lyle Adair, diary, 4 July 1863, Samuel Lyle & Florella Brown Adair Family Collection, KHS; Baker, “Diary,” 31 January 1874; Holden, *Alkali Trails*, pp. 163-4; Bedford, “Memoirs,” pp. 83-7.

formed spontaneously at a host of events, including weddings, anniversaries, and birthdays. Square dancing remained the most common form of folk dance in the West, but in the post-bellum period the region fell victim to a scandalous new dance craze: the waltz. The dance proved a generational divider. Younger people enjoyed the waltz's close quarters, while their parents detested the "vulgar" thought of "a nice refined lady permitting any one, and every one in a public ball room to encircle her waist with his arms, her head leaning on his shoulders, and going round and round." Even as the new dance caught on, older forms of song and dance, including square dances, remained popular as well.²⁵¹

Growing towns hosted amusements that combined recreation and education, and they also attracted travelling shows. Book clubs offered contemplative opportunities to mingle and tended to focus on political history, classical philosophy, and the works of William Shakespeare. Public debates drew larger crowds, as did lectures and symposia. Audiences seeking more action patronized circuses and "animal shows" that toured the countryside and introduced excited crowds to "elephants, lions, leopards, tigers, monkeys," and other exotic species. Magic lanterns similarly drew substantial crowds with projected images depicting astronomy, artwork, and distant locales. Ventriloquists and "sight of hand" shows offered amusements for those seeking novelty, as did one

²⁵¹ Willard Orvis Hubbell, diary, 25 February 1859, Willard Orvis Hubbell Collection, KHS; John Deering, diary, 1 January 1858, John Deering Diary, BUL; Baker, "Diary," 4 November 1859 and 15 July 1880; Holden, *Alkali Trails*, pp. 165-7; DeWitt Clinton Thomas, Sr., reminiscences, (1878), pp. 84-5 (quote; emphasis in original), Thomas (DeWitt Clinton, Sr.) Reminiscences, 1836-1912, ca. 1964, CAH; Bull, diary, 31 March 1874; Ocie Bugbee to L. G. [Lester Gladstone] Bugbee, 3 January 1888, Bugbee (Lester Gladstone) Papers, 1823-1902, CAH; Sarah Isabella Stephens Rogers, "Memoirs, 1850-1937," unpublished, (1937), p. 75, Belle Rogers Collection, Special Collections, Willis Library, University of North Texas, Denton (hereafter UNT).

blind escape artist who could wriggle from sixty-five feet of knotted rope in less than five minutes.²⁵²

While dances, fairs, and exhibitions passively cultivated civil society, fraternal organizations and secret societies more actively strengthened communities. Freemasonry proliferated in western counties as it had throughout the U.S., gaining footholds in Kansas and Texas well in advance of the Civil War. Courtesies and assistance extended between freemasons exceeded even the generosity common among neighbors. When Jonathan Baker hit the end of the trail while driving cattle into Kansas, for example, a stranger—and fellow freemason—in Baxter Springs loaned him two hundred dollars to finish his journey. Common hospitality involved free room and board and cash to cover traveling expenses. Freemasonry also functioned as a charitable organization for the broader community, helping families rebuild after fires or pay for funeral expenses. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows similarly focused on benevolence, offering relief to orphans, the indigent, and the elderly.²⁵³

Many fraternal organizations helped members and those in need, but some focused on broader societal transformation. Following the model established by freemasonry, the American-born Independent Order of Good Templars promoted

²⁵² No Name Club, "Record Book No. 1, February 21, 1876 to January 6, 1880," 23 February 1876, No Name Club Collection, KSRL; The Old and New Club, annual reunion banquet programs, 30 December 1876, 29 September 1877, 4 October 1879, 3 October 1880, The Old and New Club, Lawrence, Kansas, KSRL; Baker, "Diary," 23 January 1860, 28 January 1871, and 12 October 1885 (first quote); G. W. Blake to Dear Brother, 12 February 1859, William Wirt Blake Collection, KHS; Gaines, "Looking Back," p. 25; Charles B. Moore, diary, 17 May 1858 and 12 August 1858, Moore Family Papers, UNT; OC (Ocie Bugbee) to Mr. Dutch Bugbee (Lester Bugbee), 5 March 1887, Bugbee (Lester Gladstone) Papers, 1823-1902, CAH; Rogers, "Memoirs," p. 62.

²⁵³ Anna Margaret Watson Randolph, diary, 15 December 1858, Anna Margaret Watson Randolph Collection, KHS; Hubbell, diary, 8 February 1859; Holden, *Alkali Trails*, pp. 176-7; Baker, "Diary," 2 November 1871; Thomas, reminiscences, pp. 9 and 46; Campbell, *History of Anderson County*, pp. 35-6.

temperance. Given the prominence of temperance on the plains, the Good Templars' popularity came as little surprise. Teetotalers diligently worked to rid their society of alcohol's ill effects, particularly where single young men abounded. The organization lobbied for temperance laws in state legislatures and demonstrated a willingness to use the government to make desirable social changes. Like other social organizations in the 1860s such as the Grange, the Good Templars provided a template for political change through activism.²⁵⁴

The Good Templars also pushed for new social norms more subtly. Although not explicitly working to advance women's rights, the organization's willingness to accept women as equal members signaled its stance on those issues. Kansas and Texas diverged on women's rights even more than they did on temperance; whereas temperance enjoyed at least some support in Texas, the women's movement proved far more active in Kansas. Clarina Nichols, for instance, moved her family to Kansas Territory immediately after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and exemplified the women's suffrage movement's vitality there. Active in the women's movement in the East, Nichols felt compelled to tackle the slavery issue in the West, where she worked on the Underground Railroad until the Civil War. Afterward, she became a popular writer and lecturer on behalf of women's suffrage in Kansas. Women had organized to gain the vote during the territorial period, and only a handful of votes prevented their inclusion in the electorate in the final version of the state constitution. After the Civil War, women continued to exert influence in the Sunflower State despite their inability to

²⁵⁴ Joel Grover, "The Grover Diary, 1857-1858," 3 July 1858, Grover Diary, KSRL; Baker, "Diary," 15 May 1881 and 5 May 1882; Miner, *Kansas*, pp. 125-8.

vote. They had long supported temperance and women's suffrage, and they decisively animated conversations that resulted in laws prohibiting alcohol and giving women limited suffrage prior to ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. The same field of talent watered by Nichols and her contemporaries produced prominent Populist speakers Mary Elizabeth Lease and Annie Diggs, both champions of temperance and women's rights who later carried the People's Party banner. Those movements found less traction in Texas, which failed to produce Populist leaders of Lease and Diggs's stature from the ranks of its women.²⁵⁵

Where the women's movement struggled in Texas, however, organizations designed to advance the fortunes of farmers and rural folks proliferated. Founded shortly after the end of the Civil War, the National Grange of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry quickly became the most popular national farmers organization. In an effort to appeal to veterans from both sides of the war, the Grange initially avoided politics and focused on providing educational and social opportunities for rural Americans. By the 1870s, tension developed between that mission and more practical concerns facing farmers, namely the high cost of railroad transportation. The fine line walked by Grangers trying to balance social aspects of the organization with a non-partisan political agenda anticipated striking similar machinations within the Farmers Alliance a decade later. Beyond railroad costs, the Grange promoted cooperative marketing efforts among farmers. Those endeavors enjoyed varying degrees of success, but even in failure

²⁵⁵ *Constitution, By-Laws, and Rules of Order of Tecumseh Lodge, No. 3, of the Independent Order of Good Templars of Kansas* (Lawrence: Herald of Freedom Steam Press, 1858), p. 3; Susan Wattles to Dearly Beloved Friend, 30 May 1857, Augustus Wattles Collection, KHS; "Moneka Woman's Rights Association, Secretary's Book," pp. 3-4 and 10-4, History, Linn County Collection, KHS.

farmers learned valuable lessons. A culture of mutual aid proved fertile ground for cooperative marketing as evidenced by the proliferation of organizations aimed at selling crops directly to buyers without the services of local middlemen.²⁵⁶

The Grange's popularity among farmers ebbed and flowed, but agriculturalists continuously experimented with cooperative efforts. Texas ranchers formed associations immediately following the Civil War, for example, "for the purpose of stopping . . . wholesale gathering and driving off of every ones cattle." In 1875, several Lampasas County ranchers formed the Texas Alliance for the purposes of protecting their livestock and purchasing supplies at reduced bulk rates. That organization floundered for several years before reorganizing as the Farmers State Alliance with the broader purpose of advancing the interests of farmers as well as ranchers. The organization initially eschewed politics, and its memberships soared by the mid-1880s under the leadership of Charles Macune. Although few at the time would have predicted that the organization would play an instrumental role in establishing the People's Party, the success of an organization founded on the principles of mutual aid would have come as little surprise.²⁵⁷

The culture of voluntary association that travelled westward with homesteaders thrived among people who valued mutual aid. Through the 1870s and 1880s, many types of voluntary associations developed in western communities. Some nurtured mind and body, and others provided spectacle. Reformers joined together as well, hoping to

²⁵⁶ Bull, diary, 13 March 1874; Campbell, *History of Anderson County*, pp. 38-9.

²⁵⁷ Jermie to A. W. Buchanan, letter, n.d., Buchanan (A. W.) Papers, CAH; Cochran, "Early Days," p. 34 (quote); Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, pp. 83-6.

shape society to their liking. Farmers and ranchers worked and marketed crops cooperatively, although banks, railroads, furnishing merchants, and the Democratic and Republican Parties often colluded to stifle those efforts. Consequently, rural men and women increasingly considered using social organizations to achieve political goals. By 1890, experiences gained through those organizations convinced many that a third party devoted to the needs of farms was viable and necessary.

* * *

In the final three decades of the nineteenth century, industrialization and its conjoined twin—urbanization—swept across the plains. Towns emerged as focal points in previously decentralized neighborhoods and ushered in an era of social and economic growth. Schools, churches, and businesses proliferated, attracting new settlers who added to the dynamic energy of their new western homes. Kansans demonstrated a particular aptitude for town building that suggested the priority they placed on civic engagement, perhaps best exemplified by public schools and universities. Enterprising Yankees built railroads with equal fervor, and by 1890 the Sunflower State boasted more railroad mileage per capita than any state in the nation or any nation on earth. In the 1890s, Kansans combined an aptitude for organizing and a belief in their political agency to play a central role in the Populist movement.²⁵⁸

Texans also made important contributions to the movement, though it enjoyed less electoral success in the Lone Star State. While sentiment in Texas mirrored that found in Kansas, Texans had less success influencing elected officials. The policies of

²⁵⁸ Miner, *Kansas*, p. 97.

Redeemer Democrats stifled education and the economy, as investors saw little exciting in the impoverished state. Cattle drives evolved in the transportation-barren environment and provided some economic spark. As that environment changed, so too did financial strategies pursued by agrarians. Cotton seemed a natural choice for farmers capable of easily marketing crops. That ease proved a double-edged sword, however; Texas cotton—like Kansas wheat—contributed to a glut that drove prices consistently downward through century's end.

Farmers responded to falling prices—and an increase in landlessness—as they had responded to challenges in earlier decades. Populism did not materialize from thin air in the years following Reconstruction; rather, cooperative efforts to sell crops in the 1880s grew from a strong culture of mutual aid established decades earlier. That cultural ethos also promoted voluntary association. Clubs and organizations aiming to entertain, enlighten, and reform and represented the spirit of voluntary association that increasingly characterized after 1870. They also provided blueprints for farmers struggling to make ends meet. Groups such as the Grange and the Farmers Alliance that focused on improving rural life emerged from a culture that prized not only neighborliness, but also coordinated efforts to achieve goals.

The 1880s witnessed a confluence of factors that pushed farmers in Kansas and Texas toward Populism. As areas first settled in the 1850s came to resemble those in older states, expectations grew. Railroad expansion meant that citizens in Emporia, Kansas or Weatherford, Texas should have lived much like their counterparts east of the Mississippi River. Or so they believed. Disappointment prevailed when those beliefs

ran headlong into the realities of commercial agriculture in the late nineteenth century. Farmers made up for a lack of knowledge about financing railroads and marketing crops and a lack of influence over captains of industry by employing strategies that had seen them through countless difficulties in the past. When cooperative economic endeavors buckled under the weight of an industrialized economy, many agrarians took aim at institutions designed to respond to popular will. The Populist movement found support from people whose experiences had taught them to distrust extant political parties and to rely on neighbors in times of need.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

On September 15, 1896, more than 40,000 people gathered at the makeshift “town” of Crush, fifteen miles north of Waco. They assembled to witness a publicity stunt arranged by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad; two locomotives set four miles apart sped toward each other at full speed, meeting head-on in front of the frenzied crowd. The resulting explosion surpassed expectations, and three people died from injuries caused by shrapnel whizzing through the Texas sky. By the following morning, the spectators had left, but one question remained. Why had so many turned out to see the so-called Crash at Crush?²⁵⁹

By the 1890s, Kansans and Texans viewed railroads differently than they had in the 1870s. No longer symbols of economic prosperity, railroads represented the asymmetrical relationship between corporations and common folks wrought by industrialization. The opportunity to watch two locomotive engines self-destruct proved irresistible to thousands who wanted to see those corporations similarly destroyed. The 1892 People’s Party platform held that the time had come when “railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads,” a demand that suggested broader rural thought. Demands for an increase of currency in circulation and public ownership of telegraphs similarly arose from the belief that government had an important part to play in securing economic fairness for all Americans. Usurious

²⁵⁹ E. L. Connally, *Crash at Crush: Famous Duel of the Iron Monsters* (Waco: Texian Press, 1960).

railroad rates and terms of credit offered by furnishing merchants in the 1880s contributed to that belief, but the impulse to view the federal government as a partner had roots far deeper in the nineteenth century. Long-standing trust in neighbors and faith in cooperative work similarly drove thousands to abandon the parties of their fathers in favor of a new political party beholden only to the interests of farmers and working people.²⁶⁰

Migrants established homes in the West for many reasons in the decade before the Civil War. Access to affordable land compelled some, but others journeyed westward for reasons unrelated to finances. Whether escaping traumatic memories or fulfilling the need to change scenery, many ventured out to begin anew. Settlers in Kansas and northern Texas relocated in areas devoid of white settlement rather than previously settled regions. That choice reveals a mindset among the men and women who homesteaded in the West. They wanted to start homes in nascent societies, places that gave them uncommon influence over their communities. That desire to shape society appeared most obviously in Kansas Territory, where the debate over slavery attracted reformers bent on abolition.

Upon arriving in the West, many struggled adapting to new climates and ecosystems. Those struggles facilitated a culture of mutual aid, which quickly assumed a prominent place on the plains. Homesteaders raced to build homes and plant crops before winter weather made such work tedious, if not unbearable. Grasshoppers, wildfires, and drought similarly tested settlers' resourcefulness and encouraged

²⁶⁰ People's Party National Convention, "Platform" (Omaha, Nebraska, 4 July 1892).

cooperative endeavors. By 1860, men and women expected neighbors to pitch in during times of need, and they stood prepared to reciprocate if circumstances warranted.

Settlers arriving after the Civil War found communities thoroughly imbued with an ethos of mutual aid. In those communities, rural people met obligations to offer assistance without hesitation, and in the process they nurtured friendships that often translated into voluntary association. That association manifested in several ways; farmers formed book clubs, organized county fairs, and shared communal meals to celebrate holidays or honor local heroes. As importantly, mutual aid laid the groundwork for cooperative labor. Assistance rendered to neighbors establishing homesteads in the 1850s set a tone for social relations that resulted in farmers' cooperatives in the 1870s and 1880s. Those cooperatives enjoyed varying degrees of success, but they signaled rural thinking about problem solving in the latter half of the century. When confronting social problems, farmers sought help from the same neighbors who had helped them navigate the pitfalls inherent to homesteading on the plains in the decade before the Civil War. The Populist movement thrived in the fertile and longstanding culture of mutual aid that characterized Kansas and northern Texas by the late nineteenth century.

While cooperation typified experiences in both states, each also shared unique relationships with the federal government that propelled them toward the Populism. Put simply, Kansans and Texans reached the Populist solution from different starting points, both rooted in the 1850s. Kansas Territory hosted one of the more intense domestic conflicts in U.S. history between 1856 and 1860 as free state and proslavery advocates

fought for control of the state's future. Democratic presidential administrations seemed determined to see slavery in Kansas irrespective of majority will, but residents of the territory refused to bow to federal authority. After the Civil War, the state's population exploded. The homesteaders who flocked to Kansas proved industrious, and they constructed a vibrant society replete with schools that nourished their minds, clubs and activities that lifted their spirits, and economies that reflected the state's dynamism. By the 1880s, citizens in parts of the state settled in the 1850s exercised considerable control over state government. When they came to believe that Republican officeholders no longer represented their interests, those voters flocked toward the People's Party. The party's astounding success in the Sunflower State testified to the efficacy of the men and women who sought meaningful change there. It also attested to the strength of the state's reform culture. Unlike migrants bound for Texas, those seeking homes in Kansas often arrived with a strong desire to remedy social ills. Abolition, temperance, and women's rights found receptive audiences in Kansas, and Populists exploited that spirit of reform to full effect. When hard times afflicted rural Kansans, they responded as they always had: they enforced their will by seizing control of state government and electing men sympathetic to their point of view.

In contrast to the sense of agency that undergirded Kansans' support for Populism, a feeling of powerlessness drove Texans toward the movement. In the 1850s, settlers in northern Texas encountered Native Americans who also had designs on the region. The federal government attempted to mediate disputes between the two groups, but white homesteaders perceived those attempts as capitulation. They demanded a

more aggressive Indian policy, and when federal authorities balked, settlers felt ignored. Most voted for secession to escape the rule of an unresponsive (rather than an overly active) federal government. The Confederate government proved even more disappointing than its American counterpart, however, and Texans again felt the sting of indifference. During Reconstruction, disfranchisement and federally appointed officials further tested their faith in democratic governance. Brighter days seemed just ahead when Reconstruction ended, but the Redeemer Democrats who filled state offices did little to facilitate the vibrancy that characterized Kansan society. By the 1880s, Texans had lost patience with ineffective governance and believed extant political parties habitually failed to consider their interests. Unlike residents of eastern Kansas, however, citizens in northern Texas exercised little control over state politics. Although Populist sentiment in the Lone Star State matched that found in Kansas, an absence of reform culture and lack of influence in state government tempered Populism's success.

In both states, rural people reacted to their circumstances in a manner consistent with their experiences. Their understanding of economic fairness and governmental obligation stemmed from decades of life on the periphery of white settlement. The plains' climate, ecosystem, and distance from the East challenged homesteaders, forcing them to depend on each other for survival. Meanwhile, federal responses to their wants and needs sculpted political thought in both states. Economic hardship alone fails to account for Populism's appearance or strength, as evidenced by disparate paths to the movement. Instead, Populism emerged first and most powerfully where cultures of

mutual aid paired with either cultures of reform or legacies of discontent with federal authority to offer farmers viable solutions to their problems.

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