

“A Species of Town-Building Madness”

Quindaro and Kansas Territory, 1856–1862

by Jeff R. Bremer

In the late antebellum period the United States experienced one of the greatest economic booms in its history. From 1843—when the nation began to recover from the recession of the late 1830s—until the Panic of 1857, economic growth continued almost uninterrupted and the nation’s gross national product doubled. New technologies such as the telegraph and the railroad improved communications and transportation and helped tie the disparate sections of the country together into an increasingly unified capitalistic market. Territory gained from the Texas annexation, the Mexican War, and Oregon settlement added vast tracts of land and resources to the United States. Americans moved west, pulled by dreams of California gold or by new farms in Wisconsin, Iowa, the Pacific Northwest and, finally, Kansas. Unregulated banking and gold from western mines poured money into the economy and fueled the boom with easy credit. Americans tried to make a quick profit on everything from stocks and guano to slaves, and speculation became almost a national pastime. Towns sprang up across the West as settlers from both North and South moved in, lured by hopes for easy riches. Quindaro, one of these small towns, materialized in early 1857 on the Missouri River, a few miles upstream from the frontier town that became Kansas City.¹

The hopes of Quindaro’s boosters, businessmen, and speculators rested upon operating as a transit point for Northern settlers heading into Kansas Territory. Early settlers had made quick profits as land prices doubled in

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The author would like to thank Jon Earle and the Kansas State Historical Society for their guidance and support.

1. Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790–1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 204–9; Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln: Douglas, Buchanan, and Party Chaos, 1857–1859* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950), 182; George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 346–47; William Barney, *The Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of the United States in the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1987), 182.

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 26 (Autumn 2003): 156–71.

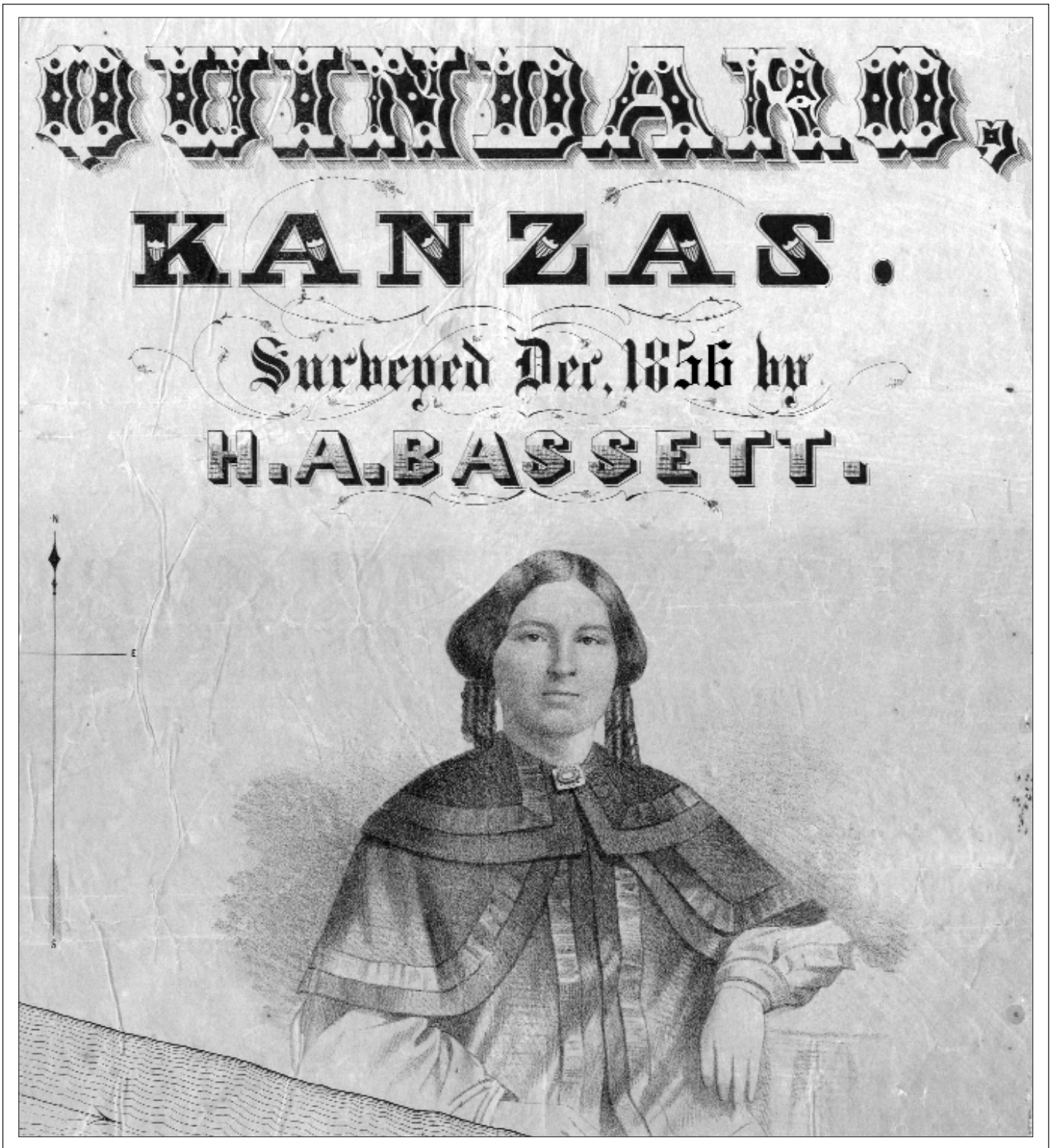


Illustration from an 1856 plat of Quindaro. (Image retouched.)

a year or two. In Iowa, land speculators earned more than 20 percent annually for most of the decade; in some years they earned more than 60 percent. Migrants to Kansas expected to earn equally large profits, and increasing migration in the late 1850s fueled this expectation. Plans for Quindaro had begun in late 1856, at the crest of the economic boom and at the height of sectional turmoil. A massive wave of immigrants inundated Kansas Territory in the spring of 1857—just as Quindaro was founded—pulled by dreams of instant riches and by a desire to secure the territory for Northern free labor. According to historian Allan Nevins, one thousand settlers arrived each day in April 1857, adding to the frenzy of land speculation, town promotion, and dreams of easy profits that gripped the territory. Quindaro's promoters hoped to cash in on this boom. If the founders of Quindaro could convince a railroad to pass by their town it would assure the success of their venture, since cheap transportation brought settlers and drove up land prices.²

Quindaro was founded three years after the territory had been opened to settlement. On May 30, 1854, President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas–Nebraska bill, formally opening the territories to immigration. Congress had battled for months over the legislation, which ultimately repealed the Missouri Compromise's ban on slavery in the northern portion of the Louisiana Territory and introduced the concept of "popular sovereignty," allowing territorial residents to settle the slavery issue.³

In October 1854 Governor Andrew Reeder arrived to organize a government. He ordered a census and scheduled an election for the territorial legislature. The census found that Kansas had 8,601 residents and that 2,905 were eligible to vote. On election day, March 30, 1855, however, thousands of Missourians, eager to defeat the antislavery invaders, flooded into Kansas. These "border ruffians" gave the proslavery forces an overwhelming victory.⁴

2. Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln*, 156–59; Jeremy Atack and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History: From Colonial Times to 1940* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 269; Paul W. Gates, *The Farmer's Age, 1815–1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 70–71; Peter Temin, "The Anglo–American Business Cycle, 1820–1860," *Economic History Review* 27 (May 1974): 208; Paul W. Gates, "Land and Credit Problems in Underdeveloped Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 31 (Spring 1965): 47–49; Kenneth Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 217. In fact, this movement was so great that historian Allan Nevins compared the Kansas immigration with the great Puritan migration to Massachusetts in the early seventeenth century.

3. Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln*, 156–59; Stampp, *America in 1857*, 217.

4. Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854–2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 48–56; Alice Nichols, *Bleed-*

The complex story that is the history of Kansas Territory can be traced to this fraudulent balloting. Claiming Southerners had stolen the election, free soilers demanded a new vote and ignored what they called a "bogus legislature." Land-hungry and mostly proslave, Missourians resented the influx of Northerners and regarded the immigrant Yankees who competed with them for the best land as invaders. In turn, Northerners considered the Missourians to be half-savage barbarians who had stolen the best land. Thus, the Kansas conflict was an extension of land hunger driven by western migration and an economic boom, as well as an extension of the sectional ideological conflict over the territories.⁵

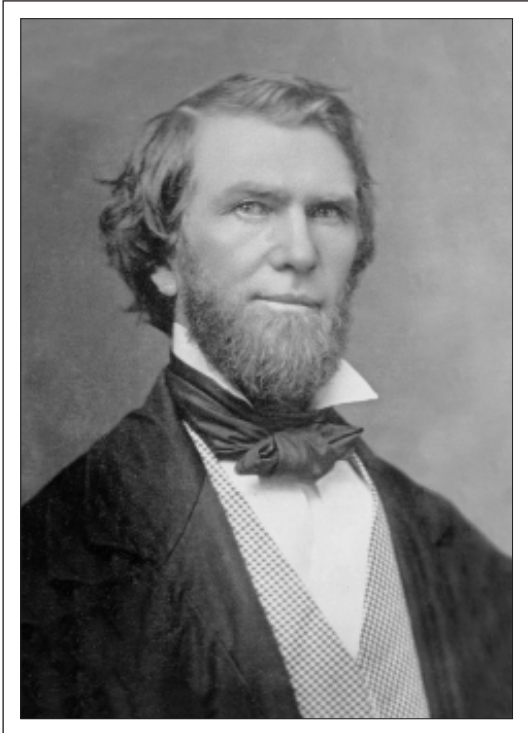
When the bogus legislature met, it expelled antislavery members and passed a repressive series of measures designed to protect slavery. Antislavery forces began to organize their own government and drafted a free-state constitution. Thus, at the start of 1856 Kansas had two territorial governments: a proslavery one at LeCompton and an unofficial antislavery government at Topeka that actually represented the territorial majority. The spring of 1856 brought the onset of violence in Kansas. A proslavery mob attacked Lawrence in May 1856, burning its hotel and plundering the town. The "sack of Lawrence" enraged abolitionist John Brown, who retaliated with the murder of five proslavery settlers in what became known as the Pottawatomie Massacre. Nearly sixty men died as a result of the political battles during Kansas's territorial conflict. Thirty-eight of these killings took place in 1856. Against this background of economic boom and sectional conflict, Quindaro was founded.⁶

Dozens of new towns sprang up in Kansas Territory during the 1850s—seventeen along the western bank of the Missouri alone. Both profits and ideology played key roles in motivating the promotion and settlement of these

ing Kansas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 22–28; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 167–72, 200–1.

5. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 204–5; Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas*, 28–29; Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State*, 56; James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: Bleeding Kansas and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1969), 12–15, 79–81, 257–65. Rawley's work stresses the role of racial prejudice in the settling of the territory.

6. Allan Nevins, *The Ordeal of the Union, 1852–1857* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 306–21, 434–37, 471–86; Rawley, *Race and Politics*, 133–34; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 199–224; Nichols, *Bleeding Kansas*, 40–57, 80–81, 105–10, 129, 149–55; Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State*, 57–73; Dale E. Watts, "How Bloody Was Bleeding Kansas? Political Killings in Kansas Territory, 1854–1861," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Summer 1995): 118–24.



Abelard Guthrie (left) had come to the Quindaro area in the 1840s, a decade before he helped select the site on the Missouri River that would become Quindaro. He named the new settlement after his wife, Nancy Quindaro Guthrie (right).



towns. Towns were planned along the main rivers—the Missouri and the Kansas—since both waterways provided transportation into the territory. Organized town promotion by settlement companies—such as the New England Emigrant Aid Company that sponsored free-soil migrants from the Northeast—heightened the competition between rival townsites and led to the concentration of ideologically motivated settlers in places such as Lawrence or Topeka. Leavenworth, settled twelve days after the opening of the territory, emerged as the leading proslavery town in Kansas in late 1854, but others on the Missouri River, including the proslavery town of Atchison, soon became political and economic rivals.⁷

Proslavery forces had the initial advantage since Missourians could simply walk across the border with Kansas and stake a claim. When migration increased in 1856 and 1857, as the sectional conflict escalated, free-soil forces organized and planned new towns such as Quindaro and

7. John W. Reys, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 425–30; Perl Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911), 102–5.

Sumner to aid in migration. The town of Sumner, about forty miles up the Missouri River from Quindaro and just south of Atchison, began construction in 1856. Organizers expected Sumner to provide a free-soil port that would compete with Atchison. One of Quindaro's boosters was Charles Robinson, a Massachusetts native who had come to Kansas with the New England Emigrant Aid Company's first party. He and other free-soilers had founded Lawrence in 1854 and battled the proslavery population ever since. Robinson had been a delegate to the Topeka free-soil convention and was elected "governor" in 1856. Robinson approached Abelard Guthrie, an immigrant who had come to the area a decade before and had married into the local Wyandot tribe, about a townsite. Guthrie had been a federal land registrar on the Wyandot Reserve in Ohio in the early 1840s and when the tribe was relocated to open lands for white migrants, he followed.⁸ He had been a delegate to the free-state convention in 1855, and his free-soil beliefs helped motivate him to become involved in the Quindaro

8. Guthrie had been elected territorial delegate to Congress by the Wyandots in 1852. See William G. Cutler and Alfred T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), 1:83.



Beginning in late 1856, land sales in Quindaro boomed, with some lots selling for as much as twelve hundred dollars. The above certificate records a sale to missionary John G. Pratt and is signed by town company treasurer Charles Robinson.

Town Company. The tribe owned land on the west bank of the Missouri River, and the two antislavery men developed plans to found another free-state port. Late in 1856 Robinson and Guthrie selected a site on the river and named it Quindaro, after Guthrie's wife, Nancy Quindaro Guthrie. Guthrie used his tribal connections to convince the Wyandot Indians to sell him the townsite, and the two town promoters immediately began to advertise for settlers and businesses.⁹

The new town sat on the west side of the Missouri River three miles northwest of Wyandotte City and about twenty miles down river from Leavenworth. Roads connected these three cities to each other, and additional roads ran west to Lawrence. The Quindaro townsite was "very

9. Nevins, *The Ordeal of the Union*, 481; Larry J. Schmits, "Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River," *Missouri Archaeologist* 49 (December 1988): 89–95; Abelard Guthrie Journal, December 16, 1858, Guthrie Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; New England Emigrant Aid Society Collection, *ibid.*; Reys, *Cities of the American West*, 430–41; Don W. Wilson, *Governor Charles Robinson of Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975), 30–38, 58–60; Homer E. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 81–86; Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People*, 103. The *Kansas City Kansan* published an article about Guthrie on February 12, 1967, erroneously reporting that Guthrie moved to Kansas in 1844 after service in the Mexican War (which began two years later).

hilly," rocky, and tree covered. Kansas Avenue, the town's main street, ran to the top of the hill from the waterfront and intersected Main Street, which ran parallel to the river, near the waterfront. Reminiscing in 1882, one settler said that Quindaro "was situated at the mouth of a deep ravine, flanked by high hills, and looked just like a mining town in a canyon." A natural levee on the river provided steamboats with an excellent stopping place. "It was the best landing on the river," recalled one man nearly fifty years later.¹⁰ Owen A. Bassett, a free soiler from Iowa who was elected to the territorial legislature in 1857, made the town's original plat map in December 1856. It deceptively showed the townsite as level and treeless and neatly divided it into even blocks running for a mile along the river. Nevertheless, construction began on January 1, 1857. The first building, a temporary office for the town company, soon was joined by other businesses, most of which centered near the town's two main streets, one hundred yards from the river and part way up the hill.¹¹

From the beginning Quindaro's town founders wanted not only a free-state port on the Missouri but also a place to make profitable speculative investments.¹² Abelard Guthrie wrote in his journal that "should this enterprise succeed Quindaro will be the great city of the West, and it is believed that with my present property I will be a rich man." While Guthrie did not describe his investments in detail in his diary, there is some extant evidence that he

10. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 29, 1895; *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, March 3, 1882.

11. Kansas State Historical Society, "Quindaro Townsite Acquisition Study, 1988," National Register file, Cultural Resources Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Mary A. Killam to aunt, August 27, 1859, Misc. Collections, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Larry Schmits, "Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River," 108–9; O. A. Bassett, Plat map, December 1856, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:332, 339. Bassett worked as a lawyer and a surveyor and served in a local militia company before the Civil War.

12. Joel Walker was president, Guthrie vice president, and Robinson and S. N. Simpson were treasurers. For an outline of Quindaro history, see Larry Hancks, "Quindaro and the Western University Historic District," 49, National Register; see also updates to document at Kansas City, Kansas, Landmarks Commission, Kansas City, Kans.

made large profits early on. He sold or exchanged seven lots on January 22, 1858, for a profit of \$450. Two months later he sold four lots for \$400 more. His diary hints at extensive property ownership in and around the town. Another early settler, Alfred Gray, purchased five lots for \$600 in April 1857. However, how much he sold these plots for is unknown. Gray, a twenty-seven-year-old New York native, had practiced law in Buffalo before coming to Kansas in early 1857 to make his fortune. He eventually owned nearly one thousand acres in both Kansas and Missouri. Samuel C. Pomeroy, agent for the New England Emigrant Aid Company, bought and sold dozens of lots in towns such as Quindaro, Lawrence, and Atchison. A letter from April 26, 1857, showed that he made nineteen hundred dollars in one day. This was at the high tide of the Quindaro boom. Business lots on the levee, reported the *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, sold for one thousand to twelve hundred dollars in mid-1857. Prices continued to spiral upward as the town grew, and its inhabitants furiously bought and sold property.¹³

Some years later the *Kansas City Star* reported with some exaggeration that Quindaro “was the wildest boom that ever struck the West. It was a species of town-building madness.” The first store opened in March and the Quindaro House hotel and a sawmill opened in April. Workmen started to grade the streets of the town and improve the wharf. By early May the town newspaper reported that between thirty and forty houses had been built and occupied, including sixteen businesses and a schoolhouse that doubled as a church on the Sabbath. Steamboats began to visit in the spring, bringing settlers, businessmen, immigrants, and speculators, all of whom looked to make their fortunes. The town company promoted the “Quindaro, Parkville and Burlington Railway,” which would connect the town with Hannibal and St. Joseph. Not much resulted from such talk, but a route was surveyed for another possible railroad from Lawrence to Quindaro. A ferry operated just north of town to help migrants make their way westward into the territory. Many residents bought lots at outrageous prices and then sold them at even more exorbitant ones. In mid-May thirty-six steamboats landed in one week, and stagecoaches

13. *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 1857, June 12, 1858; *Wyandotte Commercial Gazette*, December 30, 1881, March 3, 1882; Samuel C. Pomeroy, letters, April 26, May 18, July 24, August 6, 17, 1857, Samuel C. Pomeroy Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Alfred Gray, Letter copying book, 1857–1865, Alfred Gray Collection, *ibid.*; Guthrie Journal, April 9, 1858; Alfred Gray ledger, Gray Collection; Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People*, 253–54.

left for the six-hour trip to Lawrence every morning. On May 13, 1857, the town’s newspaper, the *Quindaro Chindowan*, published its first edition.¹⁴

James M. Walden, an antislavery editor from Ohio, ran the paper. Only twenty-six years old, he had been a teacher and a journalist in Illinois and Ohio before moving to Kansas Territory in 1855. Walden’s strong religious beliefs—he had been converted by a Methodist circuit rider around 1850, according to one source—fueled his free-soil activism, and immediately he involved himself in Kansas politics. He served as a delegate to the free-state convention at Topeka in 1855 and campaigned for John C. Frémont, the Republican Party’s 1856 presidential candidate. Because of his activism, Walden was invited by the town company to operate the paper as a promotional mouthpiece and as an antislavery organ. “Chindowan,” wrote Walden in his first issue, “is a queer name for a paper . . . Chindowan is a Wyandott word, meaning ‘Leader,’ and will, we hope, answer the purpose to which we have appointed it.” Quindaro, he continued, “is also a Wyandott word that some interpret by the adage ‘In union there is strength.’” Walden went on to outline the historical background of the crisis in Kansas, stating that “the founding of Quindaro was the result of necessity” because “Free State men found themselves hemmed in by their foes . . . for there was not a town on the river which was not under the dominion of the Pro-Slavery men.” But Walden admitted, “few towns or ‘cities’ started in the Territory that were not originated for the purpose of making money, and very few persons become interested in a town enterprize through any other motive.” The *Chindowan* predicted that “in a few years there will be some city west of St. Louis, in Kansas, and on the Missouri, that will hold the same commercial relation to the western portion of the Missouri Valley that Cincinnati does to the eastern.” Walden, the town company, and its speculators and investors all hoped that this town would be Quindaro.¹⁵

14. *New York Tribune*, June 19, 1857; *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 1857, June 12, 1858; *Herald of Freedom* (Lawrence), January 10, 21, 1857; *Kansas City Star*, August 27, 1905; Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:182–85.

15. Correspondence and papers, John M. Walden Misc. Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; *Dictionary of American Biography*, centenary ed., s.v. “Nichols, Clarina”; *Appleton’s Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, s.v. “Nichols, Clarina”; *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 1857; *Herald of Freedom*, January 10, 1857; Alan W. Farley, “Annals of Quindaro: A Kansas Ghost Town,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Winter 1956): 307.

Walden's assistant editor at the *Chindowan* was Clarina Nichols, a feminist reformer who first migrated to Kansas in October 1854. Nichols, a member of one of the first emigrant aid groups sent to the territory, had been a teacher and a journalist at the *Windham County Democrat* in Vermont. When her editor husband fell ill in 1844 she took over the paper and turned it into an early champion of women's rights and other antebellum reforms such as abolitionism and temperance. Her campaign was instrumental in influencing the Vermont legislature to pass laws that gave women inheritance and limited property-ownership rights in the late 1840s. She agitated for woman suffrage in her columns, petitions, and speeches and became one of the most vocal and important women's rights activists in New England. A friend and ally of Susan B. Anthony and other prominent suffragists, Nichols did not appear at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, but she lectured widely and gave addresses at national women's rights conventions in New York. And she moved to Kansas hoping to create a new, free state with equal rights for women. Her husband's death kept her from accepting an invitation to attend the free-state convention at Topeka in 1855, but she came to Quindaro in early 1857, eager to reengage the issues of her day.¹⁶

The *Chindowan*, the main source of information on Quindaro, provides an excellent introduction to how antebellum Northerners viewed the sectional dispute, and it sheds light upon important aspects of antebellum American social and cultural history. The paper contended that in the territory, "the people are divided into two parties, differing radically from each other in their sympathies, opinions and aims . . . the one entertaining a devotion to those institutions which foster Free Labor, the other for those which uphold slave labor." Walden further argued: "We are in favor of making Kansas a Free State. We wish, now, to see its soil consecrated to Free Labor by the voice of the people . . . not revoked in partisan strife." Northerners believed free superior to slave because, "by viewing the condition of the free and slave states, we find that in everything that elevates, the former transcend the latter; because our fathers once set it apart to Freedom; because we think that man, in no government capacity, has any in-

16. Joseph G. Gambone, "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas: The Papers of Clarina I. H. Nichols, 1854–1885," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1973): 12–22. For letters about her experiences in Quindaro, see *Wyandotte Gazette*, March 9, December 22, 29, 1882.

herent right . . . to plant slavery on any soil." The paper also attacked the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and argued that the Kansas–Nebraska Act violated the Compromise of 1820 by allowing the spread of slavery.¹⁷

The *Chindowan* made clear the threat posed by the economic and political power of the slave South. "In politics, as in morals, there is a clear and broad distinction between Right and Power, which is often overlooked." Political power often dispossessed man of his inalienable rights, Walden wrote. Thus, "whenever and wherever Power infringes upon these sacred prerogatives, it is the duty of the oppressed to band themselves against it." The territorial legislature, proslave in a majority free-state territory, was "unjust" and had "no binding moral force." Men had "rights, God-given and inalienable rights" that were "based upon the fundamental principles of a republican government." Here, Walden expressed the widespread Northern opinion that the slave South sought to impose its social and economic system upon the whole nation. This "Slave Power" thesis was based upon the belief that the South had too much political power during the antebellum period. Northerners believed that the South had far more influence than it deserved and feared that Southerners would subvert majority rule and Northern freedoms. Walden and Nichols espoused a free-soil ideology, which contained both political and commercial elements. They demonstrated the increasing distance between Northern and Southern interpretations of individual rights, whether it be the opportunity to freely own slave property or to limit its expansion.¹⁸

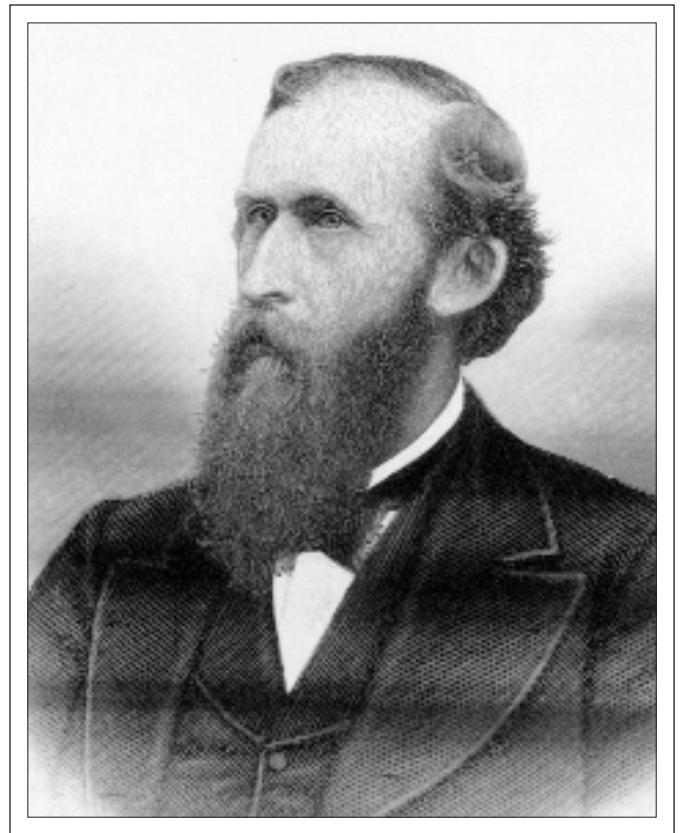
By May 1857 Quindaro contained two hotels, two dry goods stores, commission houses, carpenter shops, several land agents and attorneys, a surveyor's office, a doctor, a brickyard, and a saw mill. Two churches, one Methodist and the other Congregationalist, also had

17. *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 23, 1857. For an excellent analysis of Northern fears of the "Slave Power," see Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

18. *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 23, 1857. For Clarina Nichols's views on education and the advantage of free labor, see "What is Implied in Free Institutions as Opposed to Slave Institutions?" *ibid.*, July 4, 1857. The *Chindowan* denounced President Buchanan weekly, as well as Chief Justice Taney, the "bogus" legislature, "debauched democracy," "Slave Power," the Dred Scott decision, and the Fugitive Slave Law at various times. (All of these were staples of antebellum Republican Party politics.) See *Quindaro Chindowan*, September 5, October 10, 17, 1857.

been established. James Walden sometimes preached at the Methodist church. Many free-soil immigrants—probably several thousand each month—stopped in the town on their way overland to Lawrence or Topeka. Such migrants found housing, food, or transportation in the town. Some stayed to try to make their fortunes, contributing to the rapid growth of Quindaro. The dozens of steamboats working the Missouri River also brought a vast array of goods to the town. These consumer goods showed how the expanding capitalistic market had tied the frontier West to the industrial East. Everything from paint to glass and sugar was for sale at the dry goods store, while the Quindaro Market sold goods such as flour, apples, hams, butter, raisins, molasses, coffee, and a variety of manufactured products such as utensils, clocks, and clothing. As spring progressed into summer, and as steamboats brought supplies and settlers, Quindaro's growth continued.¹⁹

By mid-August 1857 the *Quindaro Chindowan* reported that the town had a population of six hundred people and more than one hundred buildings, and the editor took satisfaction in refuting rival river towns' denunciations of Quindaro as a "paper town" and a "gigantic speculation soon to be abandoned." The Quindaro House hotel was four and a half stories high and had forty-five rooms, the paper boasted. The sawmill—the largest in Kansas—and brickyard provided the materials for the town's growth. A reprinted article from the *Boston Journal* in August celebrated the town's "fashionable restaurant" that served ice cream and soda twice a week. Nevertheless, as Quindaro approached the peak of its boom, the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company—in reality an important eastern bank—suspended payment to its depositors and set in motion a financial crisis that brought the long national economic expansion to an abrupt halt. The Panic of 1857 soon began to pull down stock prices, trigger bank failures, and spread bankruptcy in the East.²⁰ But Quindaro's growth



Alfred Gray came from New York to Kansas in 1857 to make his fortune. Quindaro's first and only mayor, Gray amassed large land holdings in the area but was forced to sell portions of his property when Quindaro's value plummeted in 1858.

19. *Ibid.*, May 13, 23, June 27, August 1, 15, 22, 1857; Farley, "Annals of Quindaro," 307–9; Stampp, *America in 1857*, 213–25; Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:581, 2:1223; Hill P. Wilson, *Biographical History of Eminent Men in the State of Kansas* (Topeka: Hall Lithographics Co., 1901), 189; Daniel C. Fitzgerald, *Faded Dreams: More Ghost Towns of Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 17; Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People*, 102, 189, 261.

20. *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 23, June 27, August 1, 15, 22, 1857; Farley, "Annals of Quindaro," 307–9; Stampp, *America in 1857*, 213–25; Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:581–82, 2:1223; Fitzgerald, *Faded Dreams*, 17; Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People*, 102, 189, 261.

continued in the face of these ominous signs, reaching a population of eight hundred by January 1858.

As Quindaro grew, its citizens sought to re-create the social and cultural institutions that they knew back east. Town residents tried to blunt the rough edges of frontier life by building churches, schools, and a library and by publishing a paper and founding a literary society and a temperance organization.²¹ These social and cultural institutions exemplified the moralistic, middle-class, and optimistic values common in the antebellum North. The same spirit that motivated Americans to fight drunkenness and

21. See C. Robert Haywood, *The Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), xii–xiii, 10–15, 275–76; *Quindaro Chindowan*, January 23, 1858.

QUINDARO HOUSE,
Nos. 1, 3 and 5, Kansas Avenuc.
QUINDARO, KANSAS.
COLBY & PARKER, - - Proprietors.
A line of Hacks starts every morning for Lawrence, connecting there-with routes to every part of the Territory.
May 4, 1857.

One of the first businesses in the new settlement of Quindaro, the Quindaro House hotel, opened in April 1857. The four-and-a-half-story business boasted forty-five rooms.

the expansion of slavery inspired them to fight for elementary education and other reforms. The library association amassed two hundred books by the start of 1858, and the literary society, whose goal was to promote "the intellectual culture, moral development, and social happiness of its members," debated questions such as "Should Colored Children be admitted to the Day and Sabbath Schools of Quindaro, on equal terms with Whites?" Although this question remained unresolved (two women debated its merits on each side), the townspeople obviously had made their decision by establishing separate schools for black and white children. While residents decided that segregation was necessary, Alfred Gray, who had been elected mayor of Quindaro, said on February 20, 1858, that "it would be manifestly unjust to deny them [black children] the advantages of education."²²

22. *Quindaro Chindowan*, June 20, 27, July 25, August 15, 1857, January 23, 1858; Schmits, "Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River," 97–99; Farley, "Annals of Quindaro," 311–12; *Wyandotte Gazette*, December 22, 1882. The *Chindowan* does not provide any further information about the segregated schools, but black children probably were educated, if it all, by their parents or in church. An article in the *Kansas City Star*, November 5, 1999, entitled "The Forgotten Feminist," erroneously claimed that Clarina Nichols helped slaves escape to freedom, ran an integrated school in Quindaro, and helped edit a radical abolitionist newspaper.

A very active temperance society, seemingly led by Clarina Nichols, urged the town to search out and destroy the "few doggeries covertly operated." Nichols wrote that "Intemperance is the deadliest foe to all that is good in man . . . its dens and agencies are already in our midst, degrading manhood and destroying the hope of home prosperity." Nichols circulated a petition to the women of the town in mid-June asking them to sign it and take a stand against drink by "casting out the vile demon." Twenty-eight women signed Nichols's brief essay "to the men of Quindaro." It outlined the evils of drink and urged that a vigilance committee search out and destroy such corruption. The next day the vigilantes assembled, went looking for the "creature to punish,"

and found "liquor kept for sale in three places." They poured out forty gallons of whiskey and six of brandy at one location. The committee also destroyed a full keg of whiskey, part of another barrel, and dug up another cask. "Only whiskey, brandy and such liquors were doomed," the committee later reported. They did not "persecute" beer or ale, and "persons engaged in this nefarious traffic" offered no resistance. Twenty-five years later Nichols proudly wrote to the *Wyandotte Gazette* that "To its last expiring breath it [Quindaro] was never so dense as to consent to the sale of intoxicating liquors."²³

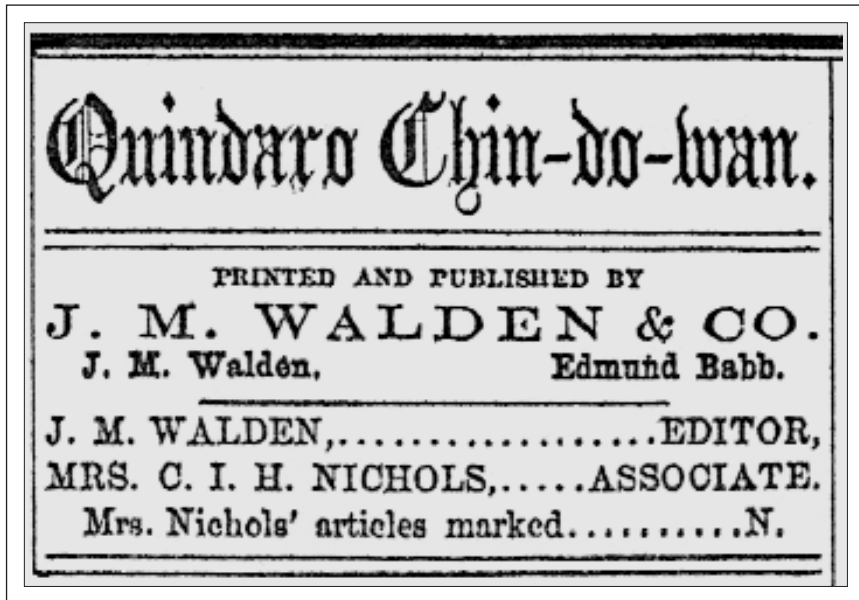
Quindaro's antislavery newspaper, as well as its temperance, library, and literary associations, exhibited the ideal of individual improvement that existed in the antebellum United States. Reformers such as Nichols and the women of Quindaro's temperance union wanted to trans-

23. *Quindaro Chindowan*, June 20, 27, July 25, August 1, 15, 1857, January 23, 1858; Schmits, "Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River," 97–99; Farley, "Annals of Quindaro," 311–12. For the essay "to the men of Quindaro," see *Quindaro Chindowan*, June 20, 1857; for Nichols's letter, see *Wyandotte Gazette*, December 22, 1882. For a good summary of antebellum reform ideology, see Mayor Alfred Gray, speech, *Quindaro Chindowan*, February 20, 1858. Nichols announced her resignation as assistant editor of the *Chindowan* on August 1, 1857.

form the nation's social, economic, and political structure. They had confidence in progress and formed voluntary associations—such as those that attacked the evils of drink—in an attempt to eliminate the sins of American society. But this reform ideology only went so far.

In contrast to the mythology of Quindaro—which argues that the town was founded by abolitionists and that it was a major station on the underground railroad—the town was populated mostly by free-soil, antislavery Northerners who were more interested in making money than abolishing slavery. On August 8 the *Chindowan* ran a long article entitled “Quindaro, that Abolition Hole!” about the “ill feeling cherished towards our unpretending town.” Here Walden defended the town’s integrity against the “Pro-slavery propagandists” who applied “without good cause, that most approbrious title ‘Abolitionists’ . . . synonymous with negro-stealers . . . calculated to inflame the minds of Missourians and others against our town.” Indeed, the town’s inhabitants escorted Southern sympathizers throughout Quindaro to demonstrate that they were not aiding escaped slaves.²⁴

The vast majority of antebellum Americans—from both the North and South—abhorred the idea of abolition because they did not view blacks as equals. They believed that the abolition of slavery would upset the social order that supported white American superiority. White Americans also feared that free blacks would undermine the economic opportunities available to them by driving down wages or by increasing the competition for land. Northerners believed that the Northerners had a sacrosanct right to economic independence; this belief was based, in large part, upon the ability of free white men to own property. This ideal of economic independence—called the free-labor ideology—was tied directly to Northern political ideals of antislavery, which protected the opportunities of



The Quindaro Chindowan, whose first issue appeared in May 1857, was published by James Walden, an outspoken freestater. “Chindowan,” Walden explained, is a Wyandot word meaning “leader,” and “will, we hope, answer the purpose to which we have appointed it.”

white Americans by opening up the West to settlement. Thus, the free-labor ideology united with antebellum reform to produce a society opposed to the expansion of slavery but often inclined to exclude all blacks—slave and free—from the territories.²⁵

But in the late 1850s this quest for economic independence could be elusive. The long economic expansion of the 1840s and 1850s came to a sudden end in late 1857, and events beyond the control of Quindaro residents ended the boom. “The glory of Quindaro soon began to depart,” reported one resident.²⁶ The collapse of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company provoked a financial panic in New York later in the year. Financial pressures overwhelmed the fragile U.S. banking system as depositors, who feared for their savings, rushed to withdraw money.

24. “Quindaro, that Abolition Hole!” *Quindaro Chindowan*, August 8, 1857. Walden’s personal papers make clear his opposition to abolitionism. See Walden Collection; Rawley, *Race and Politics*, 12–15, 48–66. An Internet search of “Quindaro” turns up dozens of web sites propagating the Quindaro mythology. These well-meaning distortions of the truth have been long encouraged and supported by erroneous books and articles, which are cited in footnote 41.

25. Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), ix, 3–33, 77–91. For articles against slavery, see *Quindaro Chindowan*, May 13, 23, 1857. See also C. H. I. Nichols, “What is Implied in Free Institutions as Opposed to Slave Institutions?” *ibid.*, July 4, 1857. For an excellent explanation of the ideology of free labor, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

26. *Wyandotte Gazette*, March 3, 1882.

Banks called in their loans to cover the withdrawal of hard currency, forcing the sale of stocks and bonds that the loans had financed. The stock market then fell. Many banks, which had overextended their credit, could not meet their obligations and suspended payment to depositors. The Bank of Pennsylvania failed on September 25, and in October there was a run on New York banks. On October 13 half of the cash reserves in New York banks was paid out and banks in the city began to close their doors. The panic quickly spread throughout the nation's financial community, and the economic bubble burst. Banks in New England suspended payment, followed quickly by those in the South and West. With the banking system in chaos, economic expansion came to a sudden halt. Credit was curtailed, business confidence fell, and many railroad and financial corporations went bankrupt. The end of emigration crippled railroads since their profitability—and survival—depended upon the continual influx of settlers. Overproduction and the end of the Crimean War pushed agricultural prices down drastically. Land speculation plummeted as westward migration fell to a trickle. Farmers who had mortgaged their farms or gone deeply into debt—in the expectation of continued high wheat or corn prices—lost their farms when debts overwhelmed them. The panic spread across the country like wildfire, burning consumers and producers alike, throwing the economy into a two-year recession. The collapse of currency circulation, railroad construction, and migration doomed the hopes of Quindaro's founders.²⁷

By early 1858 the financial crisis caused by the Panic of 1857 had hit the West hard. Alfred Gray, Quindaro's first and only mayor, wrote on March 1, 1858, that "every thing in the Territory at present is dull—no money—no sales—no nothing at a fair value. But as the time for Spring Emigration is near at hand, we hope money will soon be more plenty." Abelard Guthrie, a town founder who had made thousands of dollars in early speculations, also complained of slowing business and a lack of money. In February he wrote, "A pleasant day has this

27. Charles W. Calomiris and Larry Schweikart, "The Panic of 1857: Origins, Transmission and Containment," *Journal of Economic History* 51 (December 1991): 816–23; Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, 192–93; George W. Van Vleck, *The Panic of 1857: An Analytical Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 74–79; James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 15–29; Stamp, *America in 1857*, 222–26; Peter Temin, "The Panic of 1857," *Intermountain Economic Review* 6 (Spring 1975): 1–12.

been—nobody has duned me for money nor have I duned anyone!" He spent his days trying to avoid his creditors and trying to find a way to pay his bills. Two months later Guthrie's difficulties had increased. On March 29 he had no money for flour. "Such is the scarcity of money and the universal distrust that merchants no longer trust the best of men," he wrote modestly. In February and March the *Chindowan* ran a series of articles, encouraging emigration, that boasted of high wages in the town. Masons could earn \$3.00 to \$5.00 per day, carpenters \$2.00 to \$3.00 dollars each day, and unskilled laborers from \$1.25 to \$1.50, all very good wages for the 1850s. But the emigration season was poor. Guthrie reported at the end of March that "several of our citizens are returning home who went East to spend the winter and get money and it is rumored they come back poorer than they went away. The times are indeed extremely hard." On June 1 Alfred Gray wrote that "every body has been disappointed in the amount and character of emigration for this season." As the financial crisis worsened in mid-1858 and emigration ground to a halt, people began to leave town, business slowed, and debts increased. The *Chindowan* ceased publication in June, and Walden returned to Ohio in September.²⁸

In September 1858 Guthrie confessed in his journal that "The condition of Quindaro is anomalous and most discouraging. . . . now for the first time my confidence in its triumphant success is wavering." He complained of being in desperate straits by December and borrowed more money. On December 31 he wrote, "the year now closing has been the most painful and gloomy of my whole existence." Mary Killam, who (along with her husband) took over the Quindaro Hotel in March 1859, wrote to an aunt of "the anxieties I have undergone in Kansas. These are hard times in Kansas, thousands are hardly even [surviving]." In June 1859 Alfred Gray wrote, "every one hoping for more prosperous times. . . . am fearful that we shall not see better times." In a different letter to a friend in Columbus, Ohio, Gray confessed, "I can see no hope." His assessment unfortunately was correct. The Panic of 1857 had turned into a western economic depression that had devastated Quindaro's economy. By August 1860 the sheriff forced Gray to sell portions of his property, and by the end of the year, thirty-one civil cases involving the compa-

28. Guthrie Journal, February 11, March 29, April 9, 1858; Gray, Letter copying book, March 1, June 1, 1858; *Quindaro Chindowan*, February 20, 27, March 13, June 12, 1858; *Dictionary of American Biography*, 330–31.

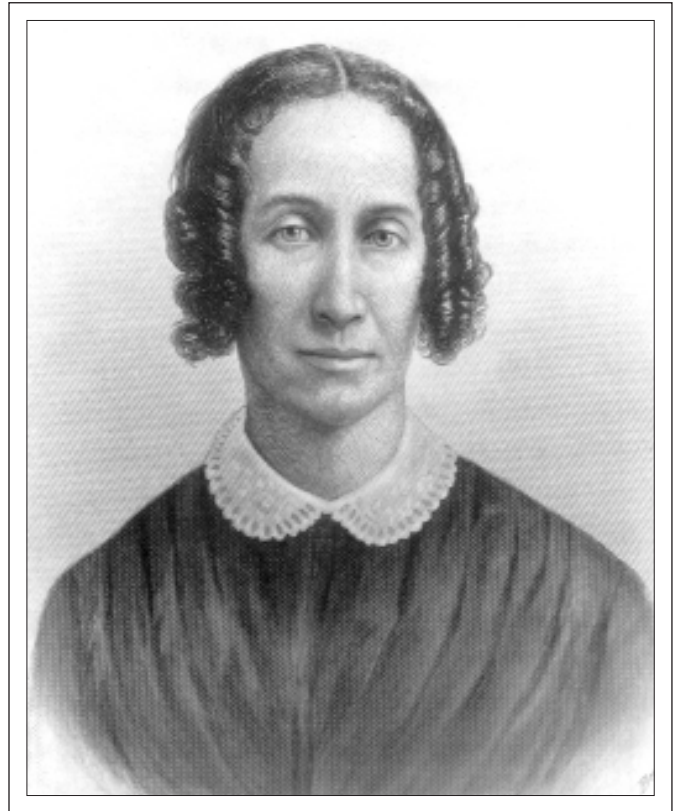
ny or its partners surfaced as members of the town company sued each other when their debts became overdue. Guthrie was ruined by these lawsuits, and his diary reflects his bitterness at Charles Robinson, who survived the economic downturn in much better financial shape. He wrote on July 1, 1862, that he had been “entirely ruined by the villainy of Charles Robinson.”²⁹

Such personal and economic difficulties were not the end of Quindaro’s problems, however. By the end of 1858 Kansas had won its battle against the expansion of slavery, and free-soil forces controlled the territorial legislature. Antislavery Northerners heavily outnumbered Southern loyalists in the territory, and most of the towns and ports on the river had been opened to immigration and commerce. Thus, Quindaro became an unnecessary town, as many points of entry existed for migration into Kansas. Almost as devastating was the fact that Wyandotte City—not Quindaro—became the county seat in 1859 when Wyandotte County was organized. A harsh drought settled on the Midwest in the late 1850s as well, and agricultural failures further hurt the city’s waning fortunes. Most of its remaining inhabitants left in 1859 and 1860, and when railroads chose other places to cross the Missouri River, Quindaro ceased to have any reason to exist.³⁰

Even though Quindaro failed, many of its residents stayed in Kansas. Some of the town residents or promoters became political or military leaders in the state. James Walden returned to Ohio to become a minister and bishop in the Methodist Church and helped raise several regiments to fight in the Civil War. But Charles Robinson remained and became the first governor of the new state of Kansas; he later served as a state senator and president of the Kansas State Historical Society. Like Robinson, Abelard Guthrie and Alfred Gray remained in Kansas, but neither found quite as much fame or success as did Robinson (a fact that must have especially incensed Guthrie). Gray served as quartermaster for three different Kansas regiments during the Civil War and spent the last two decades of his life in Kansas as a farmer in Wyandotte County, serving as president of the State Board of Agriculture in the

29. Guthrie Journal, December 31, 1858; Mary A. Killam to aunt; Gray, Letter copying book, June 1, 1859; Stamp, *America in 1857*, 223–30; Farley, “Annals of Quindaro,” 314–15.

30. Farley, “Annals of Quindaro,” 314–15; Schmits, “Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River,” 99–101; Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People*, 107, 114–15. The first railroad reached Kansas City in 1865. See *ibid.*, 114.



Clarina Nichols, a feminist reformer who migrated from New England to Kansas in 1854, became the Chindowan’s assistant editor. Signing her articles simply as “N,” she agitated for a free state with equal rights for women.

1870s. Guthrie lived out the remainder of his life in relative obscurity in Wyandotte County, at odds with the Wyandotte tribe and those he thought had cheated him when Quindaro collapsed. He died in Washington, D.C., in 1873 seeking to recover his lost fortune.

George Veale, one of the town’s first settlers and manager of the Quindaro Dry Goods store, helped raise the Fourth Kansas Cavalry and became colonel of the unit. He also served as a state senator and in the state house of representatives intermittently from the 1860s to the 1880s. He died sometime in the 1910s in Topeka, after having served a term as president of the Kansas State Historical Society.³¹

31. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors*, 83–86; *Dictionary of American Biography*, 330–31; Walden Collection; Gray, Letter copying book; Morgan,

STONE CUTTING AND MASONRY!

FREDERICK KLAUS,

HAS OPENED A

STONE YARD IN QUINDARO,

And is prepared to furnish all kinds of
CUT STONE FOR BUILDING PURPOSES,

—MADE OF—

Material of a *Superior Quality* from a quarry which he has opened near this place. A sample of it may be seen in his residence, No. 13, O St. He will also contract for buildings at reasonable rates, and is prepared to execute promptly, and in good style, all work entrusted to him.

Quindaro, May 1st, 1857.

1tf

By May 1857 Quindaro's growth had spiraled to include a number of businesses; attorneys', surveyors', and doctors' offices; two churches; and several civic organizations. A stone yard and a saw mill quickly set up business to accommodate the town's rising building needs. By late 1858, however, many residents had abandoned Quindaro. Business slowed, then halted altogether as the economy collapsed.

QUINDARO STEAM SAW MILL CO.

The citizens of Quindaro and vicinity are hereby informed that the Saw Mill belonging to the above Company is now in operation and that Lumber can be furnished on the most accommodating terms.

Quindaro, May 14th, 1857.

1tf

Owen A. Bassett, the surveyor who made the first map of the Quindaro townsite, moved to Lawrence sometime in the late 1850s. Like many veterans of the Quindaro affair, Bassett fought for the Union during the Civil War, serving as lieutenant colonel of the Second Kansas Cavalry. Subsequently, he served as a judge in Douglas County.

The most prominent woman in Quindaro, Clarina Nichols, continued to agitate for women's rights in Kansas. She fought for suffrage at the territory's Wyandotte Constitutional Convention in 1859, achieving significant gains in women's property and personal rights. But despite Nichols's struggle, statehood did not bring equal voting rights for women. Nichols remained in Kansas until 1863, when she moved to Washington, D.C., to work on a variety of charitable causes. In 1867 she returned to fight for ratification of an amendment to the Kansas Constitution that would have given women full suffrage. Following the amendment's defeat, and suffering from poor health, Nichols retired from her lifelong campaign and moved to California to be with her children, where she died in 1885.³²

The *Western Argus*, a newspaper published in Wyandotte County, is the best information source on the Quindaro area after the *Chindowan* ceased publication in mid-1858. In August that year the Quindaro postmaster reported in the *Argus* that forty-two people had letters waiting for them. These residents evidently had left town. Sheriff's sales and "notices in attachment" for unpaid debts and taxes appeared in the advertising of the *Argus* in the spring of 1860. In March 1860 the *Argus* published the "Wyandott County Delinquent Tax List," which carried 97 names, and 114

History of Wyandotte County and Its People, 106, 150, 191, 253-54, 261; Wilson, *Biographical History of Eminent Men in the State of Kansas*, 189; Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:219; Hancks, "Quindaro and the Western University Historic District."

32. Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 1:182, 237; Gambone, "The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas," 21-28.

people in the county sold their property to pay back taxes in 1859. The one surviving issue of the *Kansas Tribune*, published briefly in Quindaro in September 1860, also contains listings of sheriff's sales and bankruptcies. Only nine Quindaro businesses advertised in the *Tribune*, one-quarter the number that had existed in the town at the start of 1858. Robert Robitaille took out a "public notice" stating: "I will not be responsible for any debts contracted by my children or wards without order from me." There also was an advertisement for a book entitled "Everybody's Lawyer & Counselor," which promised assistance to people who had problems with debt collection, creditors, liens, wills, and partnerships. At the bottom of one page the paper optimistically wrote to its debt-ridden readers: "Virtue ennobles man. Pay your debts." In 1860 a majority of Quindaro properties paid none of their assessed taxes. Speculators seemed to have abandoned their nearly worthless land rather than pay taxes in a dying town.³³

About twenty-six hundred people lived in Wyandotte County in June 1860 when the federal census was taken.³⁴ The census provides an intriguing picture of the lives of the 609 residents of Quindaro city and township. About one-third of the remaining population had immigrated from the Midwest, while one-sixth had come from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states such as New York and Pennsylvania. About one-sixth claimed Kansas as their birthplace or home. Thus, two-thirds of the people living in and around Quindaro in mid-1860 came from Northern antislavery states, including Kansas. One-sixth had come from the South, with about half this number coming directly from Missouri. The remaining one-sixth, about one hundred residents, were foreign born, mostly from Ireland and Germany. Thus, the European immigrant population of the township actually outnumbered those who had come from the American South.³⁵

33. *Western Argus* (Wyandott City), August 12, 1858; *Western Weekly Argus* (Wyandott City), June 18, 1859, January 21, March 14, 1860; *Kansas Tribune* (Quindaro), September 20, 1860.

34. The exact number is 2,609.

35. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census: Population, 1860*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), xxix–xxxiv. More than four million Europeans immigrated to the United States in the 1840s and 1850s, and most came to the North. Nearly two hundred thousand immigrants lived on the antebellum frontier in Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa. The residents of Quindaro Township listed 140 occupations; 49 people claimed to be farmers and 36 called themselves laborers. The remaining 55 occupations, possibly urban, lend support to the contention that several hundred people may have lived in Quindaro.

The total population of Wyandotte County in 1860 reflected the patterns found in Quindaro Township. About two-thirds of the county residents were born in free Northern and Midwestern states, including Kansas. European immigrants outnumbered those who had moved from the South, and the largest immigrant group in the county, with about half of the total, came from Germany. The next largest group was from Ireland. But, Quindaro Township had a larger proportion of African Americans than the county as a whole, claiming more than half the total black population but only about a quarter of the total Indian population.³⁶

Minority populations were represented heavily in Quindaro Township. Thirty African Americans and twenty-eight American Indians lived in the area, nearly 10 percent of the population. Most of these people were free and listed their occupations as laborers. There were three native families, four individuals who lived with a white family and one woman who could have been a servant living with another white family. One Indian family of nine who said they were farmers—as opposed to laborers—even claimed to own ten thousand dollars in property. (This was quite possible, as the Wyandot tribe had received allotments from the federal government.) Another Indian family of fourteen members claimed to own one thousand dollars in land. Five black families—the Drakes, the Masons, the Harrises, the Taylors, and the Popes—lived in the township. Almost all had been born in the South, so it is possible that they had escaped from slavery or, less likely, had purchased their freedom. One lone black woman lived with a white family; she may have been a servant. All these nuclear families seemed to be independent and free, except for the Popes, a family of eleven, ranging in age from ten to fifty-six years, who were

36. *Ibid.* The total number of European immigrants in the county was 506. More than 40 percent were German, about 25 percent were Irish and about 20 percent were from Britain or Canada. Twenty individuals came from elsewhere in Western Europe. Nearly four hundred residents were from Southern states, with Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee the most common states of birth. The census listed 129 Native Americans, several living in mixed marriages with whites, and 55 African Americans, of which only one family of eleven was slaves (presumably). However, the Eighth Census reports that only two slaves lived in Kansas and neither lived in Wyandotte County. *See ibid.*, 160. The individuals in the remainder of the county's population (1,759) were from Northern states, with Ohio, Pennsylvania, and (inexplicably) Kansas the most common states of birth. Note that these figures exceed the total county population, as some persons could be double-counted (that is, both "African American" and "born in Kentucky").

37. *Ibid.* This fifty-six-year-old woman did not seem to be married at the time, as no black man close to her age lived with the family. It is possible he may have died or that she may have been the mother of the children, along with a Mr. Pope (no first name), who was about her age.

Sheriff's Sale.

James C. Zane }
 vs. } Execution.
 Abelard Guthrie. }

BY virtue of an Execution to me directed issued by the Clerk of the Third District Court of the territory of Kansas in and for Wyandott county, against Abelard Guthrie and in favor of James C. Zane, bearing date November 30th, A. D. 1859, I will,
On Saturday, the 28th day of January,
 A. D. 1860,

between the hours of ten and four o'clock of that day, at the Court House door in the city of Wyandott, Wyandott county, Kansas territory, expose at public sale to the highest bidder for cash in hand, all the right, title and interest of Abelard Guthrie in the following described property, to wit:

Lots No. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 65, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, with saw-mill and fixtures and all improvements and appurtenances thereto belonging—appraised at six hundred and twenty-five dollars; also Block No. twenty-one (21) with improvements thereon, appraised at one thousand dollars; also Block No. nineteen (19) with improvements thereon, appraised at six hundred and fifty dollars, and levied on as the property of Abelard Guthrie, lying and being in the township of Quindaro, Quindaro city, Wyandott county, and territory of Kansas.

Given under my hand at the Sheriff's office in the city of Wyandott, this 23d day of December, A. D. 1859.

S. E. FORSYTH,
 Sheriff of Wyandott county.

dec 24

The national Panic of 1857 caught up with Quindaro a year later, causing property values to plunge, forcing businesses to close, and causing many land owners, including Abelard Guthrie (named in the above notice), to sell their holdings to pay mounting debts.

from the Deep South.³⁷

Many of the boom towns across the territory experienced the same fate as Quindaro. Most of the river towns completely failed and left only the shells of empty buildings behind, while larger, more established places, such as Atchison and Leavenworth, survived as small cities serving local manufacturing and trade needs. Lawrence prospered and grew, aided by early settlement, continued migration, and by an eventual railroad link to the East. Topeka, of course, became the state capital and also benefited from early settlement and railroad links. Sumner suffered practically the same fate as its counterpart, Quindaro: economic recession, the virtual end of immigration, drought, a tornado, and a plague of grasshoppers. Sumner eventually was abandoned and its buildings torn down and used for wood in other nearby river towns.³⁸

The final blow was delivered by the Civil War. Many of Quindaro's remaining men left to join the Union army, and while stationed in Quindaro from January to March 1862, the soldiers of the Second Kansas Cavalry tore up the town's unoccupied buildings for firewood. For the most part, they left only ruins behind.³⁹

C. M. Chase, who visited the nearly abandoned town in 1863, found only one family living in Quindaro. Some buildings still stood, but all were empty, and cottonwood trees had begun to grow in the middle of the streets. Later that year the Kansas legislature repealed the act that had incorporated Quindaro. Ten years later Chase visited again and found only taller cottonwood trees among the ruins. Quindaro, a former resident said, had "died a borning [sic]."⁴⁰

But Quindaro's story did not end with the death of the town. A Freedmen's University was founded on the townsite after the Civil War. It grew into Western University, an all-black college that educated midwestern African Americans for decades and provided a crucial

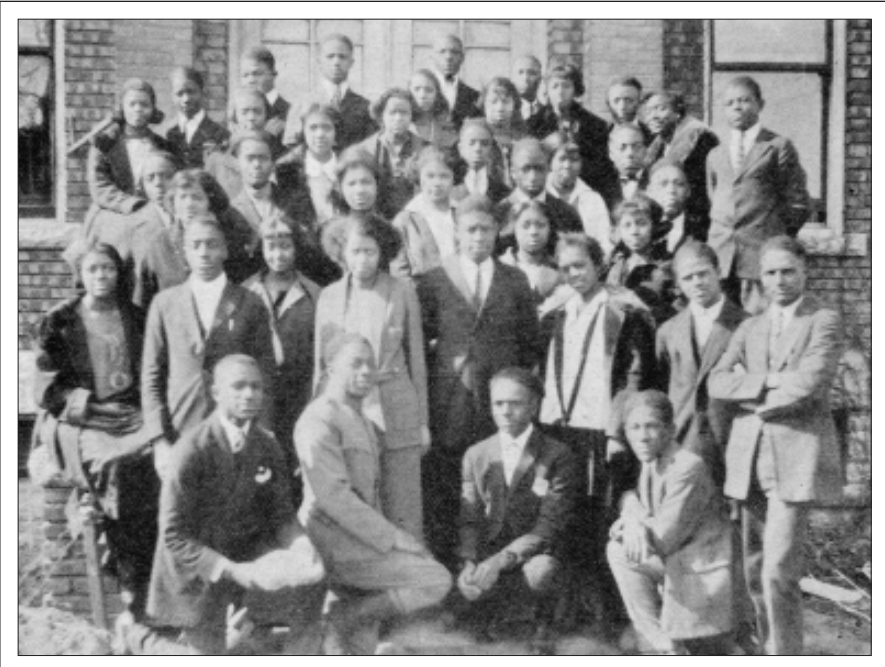
38. Daniel C. Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas: A Traveler's Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 20–22; Frank Wilson Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopaedia of State History*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 528–30; Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County and Its People*, 102, 202; Reps, *Cities of the American West*, 429–30, 436–41, 450.

39. Schmits, "Quindaro: Kansas Territorial Free-State Port on the Missouri River," 100–2; *Wyandotte Gazette*, December 22, 30, 1882; *Kansas City Star*, August 27, 1905; Reps, *Cities of the American West*, 429–30.

40. C. M. Chase to *True Republican and Sentinel* (Sycamore, Ill.), Charles M. Chase Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas*, 20–22; Blackmar, *Kansas: A Cyclopaedia of State History*, vol. 2, 528–30.

foundation for the Kansas City black community. Around the ruins of Quindaro evolved an independent African American community, with its own black-run and supported schools, churches, a college, and a hospital. Unfortunately, territorial Quindaro's mostly mythical connection to the underground railroad has focused too much attention upon the town's early history, one in which Anglo Americans played the major role. Thus, the important role that Quindaro's institutions—educational, religious, and medical—played for the African American community in Kansas City and the Midwest in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been overshadowed, and previous authors have avoided detailing African American efforts to uplift themselves and their communities in the decades after the Civil War.⁴¹

While many may prefer the fiction of viewing Quindaro as an idealistic abolitionist base, full of reformers such as Clarina Nichols and James Walden, the reality behind its story reveals much of the hard truth about American capitalism and racism. The settling of Quindaro and Kansas Territory was as much motivated by the desire for land and wealth as by antislavery politics. Profits and speculation—based upon a free-labor ideology that wanted to exclude slavery for the benefit of free white Northerners—



Following the Civil War, a Freedmen's University was founded on the Quindaro site. It grew into Western University, an all-black college that educated midwestern African Americans for decades and provided a crucial foundation for the Kansas City black community. This photo depicts a group of academic students attending the university in the 1920s.

41. For examples of such mythology, see *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 6, 1933; *Kansas City Star*, July 2, 1905, April 25, 1915, June 17, 2003; *Kansas City Call*, January 10, 2003; Farley, "Annals of Quindaro"; "Historical Statement of Western University," Western University, *Twenty-Sixth Biennial Report, 1932* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1932), 3–7; Susan D. Greenbaum, *The Afro-American Community in Kansas City, Kansas: A History* (Kansas City, Kans.: 1982), 12; Hancks, "Quindaro and the Western University Historic District." For more information on post-Civil War Quindaro, see Jeff R. Bremer, "From an 'Abolition Hole' to the 'Tuskegee of the West': Quindaro, Kansas, 1856–1945," National Register file. Countering the myths that John Brown and Abraham Lincoln were in Quindaro are Stephen Oates, *To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); and David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

drove migration and settlement in Kansas. The town never operated as a abolitionist base, and its traditional role as such a place can be mostly discounted as fiction and legend. The importance of the territorial history of Quindaro has been exaggerated for decades, as its historic role as an entrance port for immigrants faded by late 1857 when free soilers flooded into the state. Quindaro was neither as crucial to the success of the free-state cause nor as important to the history of the underground railroad as many have claimed, but free African Americans built a thriving community near its ruins during the late-nineteenth century. It is this history that is the glory of Quindaro. Although the small, free-soil boomtown failed in the late 1850s, it laid the foundation for the creation and survival of African American institutions that nourished a marginalized and persecuted minority and helped them prosper during the long, twilight struggle for racial equality.