

Review Essay Series

RELIGION IN KANSAS

Gary R. Entz

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Few would deny the centrality of spiritual or religious beliefs, or the lack thereof, to the essence of who we are as human beings. Our motivation, conduct, values, indeed our entire world view, always have been determined in large part by what we profess in this regard. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons historians, with a few notable exceptions, have been reluctant to deal seriously with the religious history of Kansas and the West; and yet religion was and continues to be, perhaps more than ever, a critical factor in the political, social, and cultural life of our state. Thus, Gary R. Entz's assessment of the state of the state's religious history is especially significant and timely.

Spirituality was, of course, a central feature in the lives of the region's indigenous peoples centuries before they made first contact with Europeans, who brought with them very different ideas about the here and now as well as the hereafter. All too often this was a source of conflict—between non-Christians and Christians, or among Christians of dif-

In his 1902 essay on religion in Kansas, Ernest Hamlin Abbott compared religious convictions in the state to those found in other parts of the Southwest and commented, "In Kansas religious life is marked by dogmatism also; but it is not doctrinal, but moral." Abbott held that Kansans expressed their strongest religious feelings in moral legislation rather than religious doctrine. Political scientist James A. Morone conveys a similar sentiment regarding religion in America at large with the quip that nothing "stirs the people or grows their government like a pulpit-thumping moral crusade against malevolent dastards." One need look no further than journalist Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* to realize that Morone's idea of a moral crusade, what Frank calls the "Great Backlash," is alive and well among Kansas evangelicals.¹

While the irascible political mores of the evangelical subculture may be among the most recent manifestations of religion in Kansas, the stream of religious thought in the state runs significantly deeper and is far more nuanced.

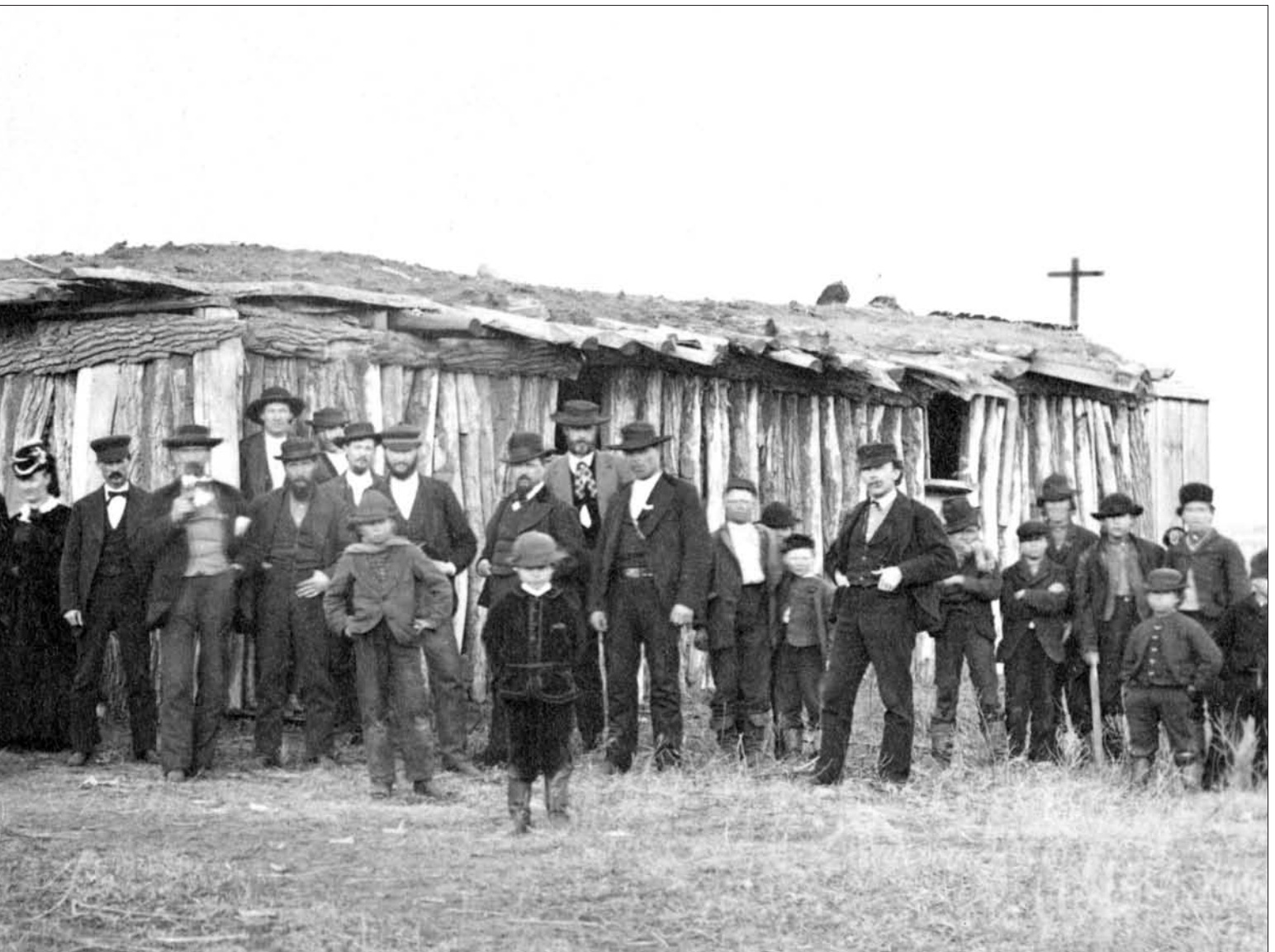
Gary R. Entz earned his Ph.D. in American history from the University of Utah and teaches history at McPherson College. He studies extensively the many colonies that settled in Kansas. His "Zion Valley: The Mormon Origins of St. John, Kansas" appeared in the summer 2001 issue of *Kansas History*.

The author is grateful to reader Ocie Kilgus and thanks Ray Santee, Susan Taylor, and the staff of McPherson College's Miller Library.

1. Ernest Hamlin Abbott, "Religious Life in America VIII—Kansas," *Outlook* 70 (April 19, 1902): 968–69; James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 3; Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2004), 5.

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 28 (Summer 2005): 120–145.





Religion has always played an important role in Kansas. Here members of the First Episcopal Church in Wichita gather outside their primitive structure, ca. 1869.

Whether conservative or progressive, traditional or new age, religion is ubiquitous in the American West. Whether visually manifest as a rural church built in the prairie gothic style, an urban synagogue, or the sacred space of Native America, religion and religious imagery permeates the physical and cultural landscape of Kansas. Religion predated the arrival of peoples of European descent, played a major role in the political formation of the state, and has retained a significant influence over private and public spheres. Nevertheless, while historians of the American West routinely analyze questions of race, class, and gender,

similar investigations of religion remain relegated to the periphery. Historian Ferenc M. Szasz believes that religious pluralism is the primary reason for the marginalization of religion. According to Szasz, "While the other dimensions of the Western experience share a universal quality, that of religion clings stubbornly to sectarian boundaries."² Szasz's observations hold for Kansas. Many local and de-

2. Ferenc M. Szasz, "Religion in the American West: An Introduction," *Journal of the West* 23 (January 1984): 3-4.

fering faith backgrounds. From those earlier times to the present, religion has been a driving force in Kansas society, for good and sometimes for ill. "One need look no further than journalist Thomas Frank's [recent] *What's the Matter with Kansas?*" writes Professor Entz of McPherson College, to realize that the traditional Kansas idea of a moral crusade, "what Frank calls the 'Great Backlash,' is alive and well among Kansas evangelicals"—throughout the twentieth century Kansans expressed their strongest religious feelings in moral legislation rather than religious doctrine.

Today it seems that the "political mores" of this "evangelical subculture" are the primary "manifestations of religion in Kansas," but "the stream of religious thought in the state runs significantly deeper and is far more nuanced. Whether conservative or progressive, traditional or new age, religion is ubiquitous in the American West." And it is past time for historians to move it from the periphery to a more central position in their efforts to better interpret our past. "The religious history of Kansas is incomplete," Entz concludes, and it "will be fully understood only after historians examine all of its variegated patterns." His thorough and effective contribution to *Kansas History's* review essay series certainly enhances our understanding of the historiographical issues and makes a significant contribution to the literature in its own right. It should serve as an effective call to scholars in search of a fertile, vitally important field of study.

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nominal histories are extant, but a comprehensive synthesis of the state's religious history has never been written.

Apart from the predominant influence of Mormonism in Utah and Catholicism in New Mexico, religious diversity in Kansas resembles many other parts of the West. Kansas is the easternmost of the western states and shares a number of religious traits with both the West and Midwest. Historian D. Michael Quinn wrote, in comparison to the rest of the nation, "the West as a region has the lowest attendance (36 percent) in church or synagogue." In looking at Kansas as part of the Midwest, theology professor Philip Barlow added that "44 percent of the population of Kansas is religiously unaffiliated—by far the highest proportion of all the Plains states." The sheer number of unchurched within the state would seem to contradict the simplistic image of Kansas as a land peopled by religious ideologues. However, the story is not so easily unsnarled because many unchurched are believers too. Quinn cited a Gallup poll stating, "In fact, with a few variations, the unchurched claim the same turf as the church—except they are not attending, supporting, or belonging to a congregation of the visible church." Historian Brian Dippie affirmed that any study of religion in the West would reveal an underlying culture of conservatism.³ Kansas is no exception. Whether church or unchurched, many modern Kansans openly embrace the austere Protestant ethics of evangelistic holiness sects. These so-called rural middle-class values encourage conformity through a simple, thrifty lifestyle, denial of luxuries and pleasure, and a judicious, common-sense approach to life.

Nevertheless, since Kansas is located at a historic crossroads where Northerners, Southerners, immigrants, and Native Americans found access to the West, it is difficult to religiously pigeonhole the state. Philip Barlow noted that in the neighboring states of Missouri and Oklahoma, Southern Baptists traditionally have maintained a dominant presence. In the Northern Plains, Lutheranism is among the predominant religions. In Kansas Southern Baptists represent a majority only in Montgomery County, and overall 12 percent of Kansans claiming church affiliation find solace in the Baptist Church. The Lutheran dominion ends in Nebraska and only McPherson, Russell, and Smith Counties count the Lutheran Church as the leading denomination. In the remainder of the state's counties the Methodist Church is either the largest or second largest denomination. Methodists account for 14 percent of residents aligned with a formal religious body. Kansas has a lower percentage of Roman Catholics than the entire Midwest as a region, yet Barlow still finds that 27 percent of religiously affiliated adherents in the state are Catholic. There are more Anabaptist, Mormon, and Pentecostal groups in Kansas than in other parts of the Midwest but fewer Muslim, Jewish, and Reformed groups. Kansas holds a strong African American religious heritage, several independent megachurches, and a small percentage of Eastern religious faiths.⁴

3. D. Michael Quinn, "Religion in the American West," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1992), 158–59; Philip Barlow, "A Demographic Portrait: America Writ Small?" in *Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator?* ed. Philip Barlow and Mark Silk (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2004), 39; Brian W. Dippie, "American Wests: Historiographical Perspectives," in *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, ed. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 121.

4. Barlow, "A Demographic Portrait," 38–39.

Clearly, as geographer James R. Shortridge wrote, “any effort hoping to come to grips with American religion cannot overlook the sheer numbers of different religious bodies present. The country is unrivaled in religious diversity.” Religiously Kansas is a microcosm of America. In fact, variation within the state is great enough that Shortridge dismissed efforts to include it within America’s so-called Bible Belt. Shortridge’s demographic observations pointed out that “Jackson, Mississippi, could perhaps be called the ‘buckle’ of the Bible Belt, but Oklahoma City is definitely marginal, and Kansas is not in it. Perhaps the Great Plains association with the term has been formed because this natural region connects two of the more religiously conservative portions of the country.”⁵ Although Shortridge placed Kansas outside of



Kansas’s religious makeup represents many denominations, with the Methodist Church usually constituting among the largest affiliations in many counties. Photographed here are parishioners of the First Methodist Church in Oswego, ca. 1900.

the conservative Bible Belt, given the state’s tangled history with such religiously charged issues as prohibition, evolution, and abortion, to name just a few, only a minority of writers would be inclined to categorize the state as doctrinally liberal. Most modern detractors would agree with Thomas Frank’s epigram that the state “has trawled its churches for the most aggressively pious individuals it could find and has proceeded to elevate them to the most prominent positions of public responsibility available, whence these saintly emissaries are then expected to bark and howl and rebuke the world for its sins.” Frank is correct in pointing out the inchoate faith some Kansans place in sanctimonious politicians, but his observation must be taken as a generalization. For example, in 1997 Governor Bill Graves issued a proclamation honoring the Muslim month of Ramadan in Kansas and reiterated in his 1999 inaugural address the ideals of moderation and tolerance. “We are a diverse state,” said Graves. “We are diverse in geography, in culture, in race, in creed and in philosophies. We should celebrate that diversity and ensure that Kansans live in a state where all are treated with fairness and where a common-sense balance directs the process of governance.”⁶

5. James R. Shortridge, “A New Regionalization of American Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 16 (June 1977): 144; Shortridge, “Patterns of Religion in the United States,” *Geographical Review* 66 (October 1976): 427.

6. Frank, *What’s the Matter With Kansas?*, 68–69; Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Now Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 2001), 353–55.

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Even so, the contributions of religion and religious institutions have had an impact upon Kansas’s history that goes beyond political proclamations. Historian Robert P. Swierenga agreed that among rural Americans “voting, at least in the nineteenth century, was an expression of the deepest values and beliefs of the electorate concerning what constituted the good society.” Nevertheless, Swierenga looked beyond politics and wrote that if religion can explain voting patterns then it also can explain agricultural activities. Rural and small-town churches often had a centering effect on a community and likely influenced farming behavior. He posited that farming constitutes “a way of life, a ‘calling,’ an expression of ultimate commitments.” In this regard farming becomes “an act of faith, and one’s religion is practiced through farming as much as through gathering for Sunday worship.” While not everyone feels “called” to their profession, religion and spiritual beliefs may have had a demonstrable influence on the actions of urban laborers and businessmen as well. If so, Swierenga’s thesis would hold for a comprehensive history of religion in Kansas, one inclusive of Native Americans. As anthropologists Douglas R. Parks and Waldo R. Wedel wrote, “The earth is a fundamental religious symbol for American Indian peoples,” both horticultural and hunting tribes alike.⁷ However intriguing the idea may be, because Kansas as a political entity was founded on the ideals of a religious jeremiad it is the moral reform narrative that thus far has dominated histories touching on religion in the state. Within this context, the first peoples seen as needing to learn the lessons of religious responsibility were the region’s aboriginal peoples.

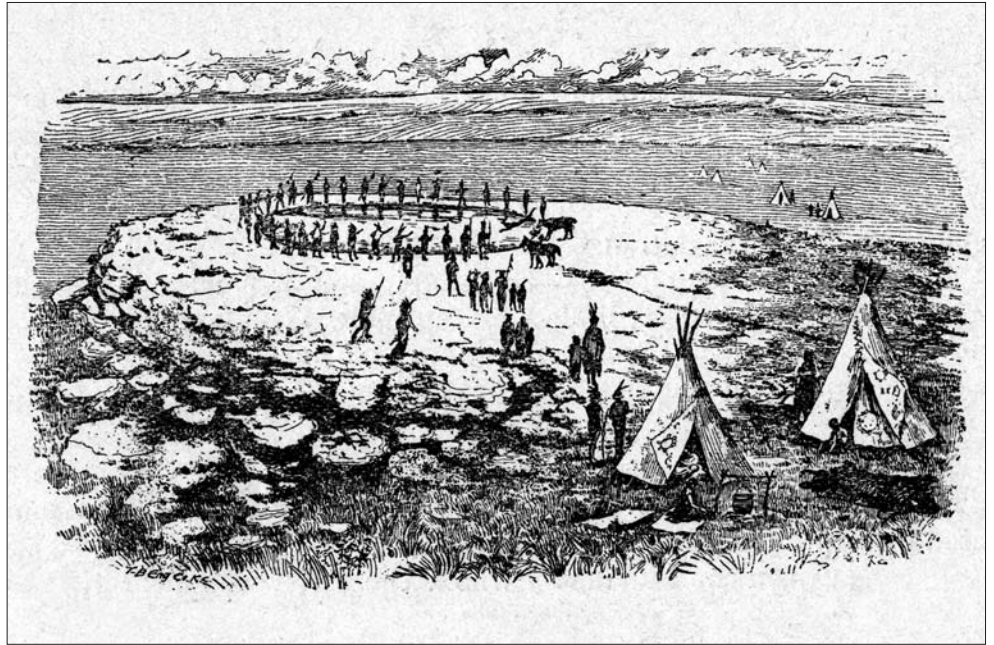
Many historians have been wont to treat Native American beliefs and practices as if they were *sui generis*, distinct and therefore separate from other religions that came later. Such attitudes stem from the basic philosophical truth that Western religious beliefs separate God from the world, whereas in native religions the physical world is inseparable and intimately connected to all things spiritual. Anthropologist Linea Sundstrom explained, “Place assumes a primacy in Indian religions that has no parallel in the major Western religions.” Religious studies scholar Robert S. Michaelson added that because of the distinctive differences Western faiths often misunderstand and are frequently inimical to Indian beliefs. At the same time, however, Michaelson emphasized the importance for historians to recognize the unique role that Native American religions have played in the American experience.⁸ Such an understanding is equally true for any study of religion in Kansas because in addition to modern religious activities many parts of the state hold remnants and reminders of Native America’s spiritual past.

According to Parks and Wedel, Spring Mound, a sacred site of the Pawnees, was revered “as the location of an important animal lodge where mysterious powers were reputedly bestowed on individuals.” The Pawnees called this place

7. Robert P. Swierenga, “The Little White Church: Religion in Rural America,” *Agricultural History* 71 (Fall 1997): 421; Douglas R. Parks and Waldo R. Wedel, “Pawnee Geography: Historical and Sacred,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Summer 1985): 143.

8. Linea Sundstrom, “Sacred Islands: An Exploration of Religion and Landscape in the Northern Great Plains,” in *Islands on the Plains: Ecological, Social, and Ritual Use of Landscape*, ed. Marcel Kornfeld and Alan J. Osborn (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 260; Robert S. Michaelson, “‘We Also Have a Religion’: The Free Exercise of Religion among Native Americans,” *American Indian Quarterly* 7 (Summer 1983): 111–12; Robert S. Michaelson, “Red Man’s Religion/White Man’s Religious History,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (December 1983): 675.

kicawi:caku, but it is more familiarly known by the Kansa name of Waconda, meaning “spirit water” or “Great Spirit Spring.” Although located within territory controlled by the Pawnees, many tribes venerated the natural spring and in accordance with religious rituals would deposit within the waters small articles of value as a sacrifice to the gods. Sundstrom referenced an Arapaho belief to posit that the reason for surrendering valued items was to show proper respect for the spirits dwelling within the waters and “to ensure safe crossing and sweet drinking water.” Waconda Spring qualifies as a sacred island on the plains “in the sense of being distinct from other parts of the environment but not in the sense of being isolated. Rather than a set of isolated places separated by difficult barriers such as water or desert, sacred sites



Considered a sacred island on the plains, Waconda, also known as “Great Spirit Spring,” was once a gathering place for religious rituals for many native tribes.

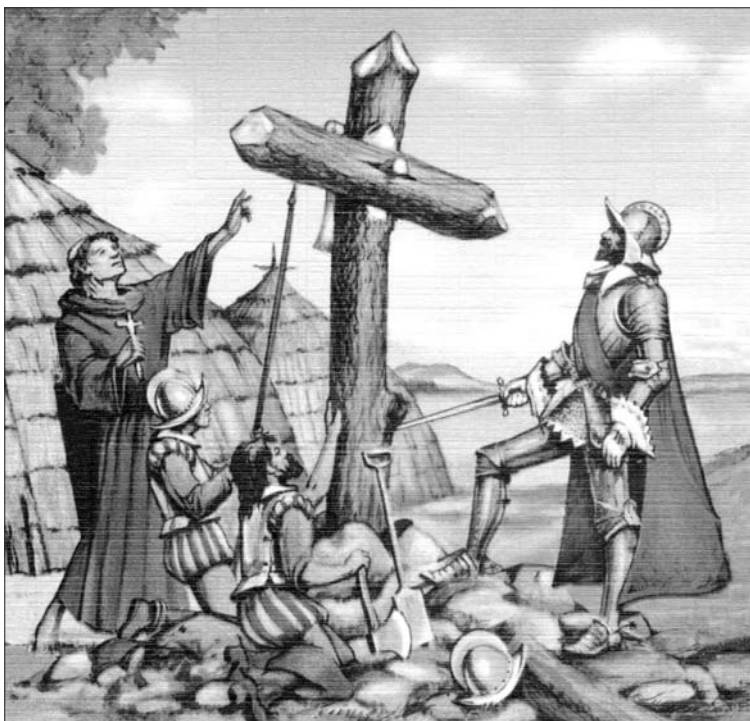
form a web on the landscape. Streams, trails, or sightlines form the strands of the web, and sacred sites are points where the strands intersect.” Surviving intaglios in Kansas, one of which is near present Waconda Lake, may at one time have been part of such a network and even if completely separate had religious symbolism in their own right.⁹ On the surface modern churches may seem entirely different, but geographer Robert Ostergren posited that they too act as sacred places, the spires of which serve as sightlines forming a web on the open landscape.¹⁰

Located below the North and South Forks of the Solomon River Waconda Spring was in what is today Mitchell County. It was a natural artesian spring that Parks and Wedel believe was “almost unique in Kansas.” There is no evidence that the Pawnees or any other Plains tribe ever abandoned their reverence for Waconda Spring, but as native peoples were pushed onto reservations white settlers saw little beyond the market value of the artesian waters. In 1968 the Bureau of Reclamation completed work on Glen Elder Dam, and today the sacred spring lies submerged beneath the waters of the reservoir.¹¹ Even if enacted earlier, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 and the Archaeological Re-

9. Parks and Wedel, “Pawnee Geography,” 155–58; Sundstrom, “Sacred Islands,” 259–62; Beccy Tanner, “Figures Carved into Prairie are a Story of Ancient Beliefs,” *Wichita Eagle*, December 19, 2004.

10. Robert C. Ostergren wrote, “How then was the church a symbolic place and structure on the landscape? Part of the answer is evident to anyone who has traveled the backroads of the region. With the possible exception of the grain elevator, the church is the dominant structure on the rural landscape. Its presence is visible for miles. In fact, in many parts of the region, the spires of the churches serving neighboring communities can be seen from points along their common boundary.” See Ostergren, “The Immigrant Church as a Symbol of Community and Place in the Upper Midwest,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 1 (Fall 1981): 228–29.

11. Parks and Wedel, “Pawnee Geography,” 155.



Christianity came to Kansas in 1541 with the arrival of the Spanish empire. This idealized sketch depicts explorer Coronado and Franciscan missionary Father Juan de Padilla erecting a cross. Renowned for his missionary zeal, Padilla later became the first Christian martyr in Kansas.

sources Protection Act of 1979 may not have been enough to preserve Waconda Spring from inundation. Because land and water resources are interpreted as a commercial rather than a moral issue, Kansans tend to be indifferent toward the sacred space of Native America. Michaelson pointed out that the sacred sites of most Western religions are in other countries while Americans are “a nation of movers and hence do not generally invest particular areas with lasting sacrality.”¹²

Christianity came to Kansas in 1541 with the arrival of the Spanish empire. Don Francisco Vázquez de Coronado traveled north from Mexico on a reconnaissance mission to the Great Plains in search of the legendary Quivira. While missionary work was not Coronado’s primary goal by most accounts he enlisted the aid of Father Juan de Padilla of the Franciscan Order, whose work among the Wichita tribe marks him as the first missionary to offer firm discipline in an attempt to save the Native peoples from their own “sinful ways.” In the *Kansas Historical Collections* George Morehouse wrote that “Fray Padilla was kind and gentle in his demeanor, yet he was full of energy, and punished all moral evildoers who tried to make things unpleasant in Coronado’s camp.” Punishing perceived moral evildoers is not an approach that would have worn well with the Indians. When Coronado’s expedition failed to find riches the conquistador despondently returned to New Mexico, but Padilla was undaunted. As historian William Unrau indicated, Padilla was “imbued with missionary

zeal” and returned in 1542 hoping to establish a mission in Kansas. Although initially Padilla found a peaceful welcome, his impatience inevitably provoked an aggressive reaction. He was killed, allegedly at the hands of a hostile tribe. Morehouse speculated that the Wichitas themselves may have killed Padilla, possibly for reasons of jealousy.¹³ Regardless, Padilla became the first Christian martyr in Kansas and today two monuments, one in Council Grove and one in Lyons, stand to memorialize the perceived sacred space of his sacrifice.

The Spanish made few inroads into Kansas after Coronado and certainly made no attempts to plant a mission after Padilla. This left the Plains region open to other European explorers, and the French soon stepped in to exploit the opportunity. Unlike the Spanish and their thirst for mineral wealth, imperial France sought trading opportunities with the Indian tribes. The French had been skirting

12. Michaelson, “We Also Have a Religion,” 133. For a discussion of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and the commercial exploitation of sacred lands, see Steve Talbot, “Desecration and American Indian Religious Freedom,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 12 (Winter 1985): 1–18.

13. George P. Morehouse, “Padilla and the Old Monument near Council Grove,” *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1907–1908 10 (1908): 473. Scholars question whether Padilla actually accompanied Coronado in 1541. See “Bypaths of Kansas History: Catholic First Things in Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 8 (May 1939): 208–9; William E. Unrau, *Indians of Kansas: The Euro-American Invasion and Conquest of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1991), 25–26.

the edges of Kansas since 1673, but in 1724 Etienne Véniard de Bourgmont led an expedition from Fort Orleans deep into central Kansas. Legal scholar Charles E. Hoffhaus argued that “Father Mercier, the post missionary at Fort Orleans, went far across Kansas with Bourgmont and upon returning to the post, chanted the first ‘Te Deum’ on the Missouri.” This point is in dispute, and Catholic historian Gilbert J. Garraghan flatly stated that Father Mercier remained behind at Fort Orleans. Nevertheless, Hoffhaus went on to say that the “Kansa always spoke reverently of the ‘black robes’” but offered no further detail of any religious activity that took place at Fort de Cavagnial during its twenty years of existence. Built in 1744 Fort de Cavagnial, near present Fort Leavenworth, undoubtedly served either as a base of operation or resting point for French Jesuits, but Hoffhaus said only that “some day we may learn something of their successors, if any, at Fort de Cavagnial.” Perhaps, as religious and architectural historian Peter Williams intimated, “The log cabin of a fur company’s agent, for example, served as the first Catholic chapel in Kansas.”¹⁴

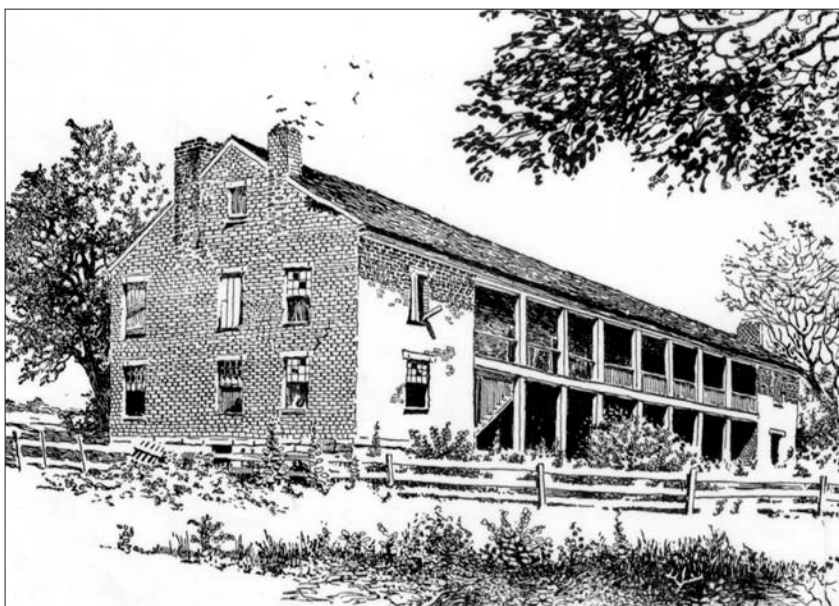
Imperial France abandoned Kansas after 1763, although the Catholic Church did not. The Reverend Charles De La Croix became the first missionary to visit the Osage tribe in southeastern Kansas and, wrote Catholic historian M. Lilliana Owens, in 1822 earned the distinction of performing the “first Christian baptism of which there is a record in the present state of Kansas.” Although Garraghan questioned whether De La Croix actually performed any baptisms, what is not in dispute is that Catholic missionaries continued regular visits to Kansas until 1838 when the church established a permanent presence with the founding of a mission to the Potawatomi tribe in northeastern Kansas. In 1847 the Catholics enlarged their undertaking with a permanent mission to the Osage tribe in southeastern Kansas.¹⁵

American expeditions that began exploring the Great Plains after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase felt no obligation toward towing representative clergymen along. During this time Indian religious life on the plains, like all other aspects of tribal life, either confronted or adapted to the bison-hunting culture made possible by the arrival of the horse but was not yet fully transformed when white settlement east of the Mississippi began forcing eastern tribes to relocate to the West. Eastern tribes had been a focal point of Protestant jeremiads for a number of years, and as the eastern tribes either voluntarily or forcibly migrated west the missionaries followed. In 1824 the United Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian, Reformed Dutch, and Associated Reformed churches founded Neosho Mission to the Osages, the first permanent Protestant mission in Kansas. Although Neosho Mission had little lasting impact and failed within five years, legal scholar T. F. Morrison asserted that it “pointed the way to the estab-

Although Neosho Mission had little lasting impact and failed within five years, it “pointed the way to the establishment of other missions.”

14. Charles E. Hoffhaus, “Fort de Cavagnial: Imperial France in Kansas, 1744–1764,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1964): 444–45; see “Bypaths of Kansas History: Catholic First Things in Kansas,” 209; Peter W. Williams, *Houses of God: Region, Religion & Architecture in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 212.

15. M. Lilliana Owens, “The Early Work of the Loretines in Southeastern Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 15 (August 1947): 263–76, quotation on 264; see “Bypaths of Kansas History: Catholic First Things in Kansas,” 209. See also James A. Burke, ed. “Early Years at St. Mary’s Pottawatomie Mission: from the Diary of Father Maurice Gaillard, S.J.,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (August 1953): 501–29; M. Evangeline Thomas, “The Role of Women Religious in Kansas History, 1841–1981,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 4 (Spring 1981): 59–60.



Because Indians who had been relocated to Kansas were dependent on the white culture for supplies, Indian agents and missionaries were able to force assimilation on the tribes. Late in 1830 Reverend Thomas Johnson established Shawnee Methodist Mission in present Johnson County. Above is a sketch of the mission's North Building.

lishment of other missions." Historian Willard Hughes Rollings gave less credit to the Christian missions and argued instead that the Osages tenaciously clung to their traditional faith while successfully resisting both Protestant and Roman Catholic entreaties.¹⁶

In 1825 William Clark, superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, negotiated a treaty with the Kansa and Osage peoples allowing for the cessation of tribal lands in the Plains to the federal government. Congressional passage of the Removal Act of 1830 gave the president the power by way of executive order to set aside ceded western lands in exchange for tribal lands in the eastern states and territories. The land set aside in the new Indian Territory was to be guaranteed to the Indians forever. In retrospect, the Removal Act comes across as an appalling violation of human rights, but at the time Christian missionaries largely praised it as an act of humanitarian kindness. Historian George A. Schultz indicated that because of the onrush of white settlers, wars, and the demoralizing effects of the liquor trade, missionaries sincerely believed that the only way to save the native peoples of the Old Northwest was to re-

move them from the debilitating influence of immoral white settlers while laboring to transform the Indian into missionary Isaac McCoy's vision of "a farmer, a citizen of the U.S., *A Christian*." A member of the Baptist Church and leading proponent of Indian colonization, McCoy imagined Kansas "as a Promised Land for the American Indian."¹⁷

Missionary endeavors began in earnest after passage of the Removal Act. Late in 1830 Reverend Thomas Johnson established Shawnee Methodist Mission, and in 1831 Isaac McCoy and Johnston Lykins founded Shawnee Baptist Mission. The Indians relocating to Kansas were refugees in every sense of the word. They desperately needed supplies to survive but, as historian Stephen A. Warren wrote, this need allowed Indian agents and missionaries to force assimilation and stamp out tribal culture. "The missionaries and agents who worked with the Shawnees believed that the tribe would become extinct if they did not give up communal land holding and Shawnee religious practices and become a part of white society." However, the sheer acrimony of the denominational rivalry between the Baptists and the Methodists along with the missionaries' exploitation of precious resources on the reservation stirred visiting Quakers in 1834 to protest the situa-

16. T. F. Morrison, "Mission Neosho: The First Kansas Mission," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 4 (August 1935): 234; Willard Hughes Rollings, *Unaffected by the Gospel: Osage Resistance to the Christian Invasion, 1673–1906* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 7.

17. George A. Schultz, *An Indian Canaan: Isaac McCoy and the Vision of an Indian State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 22–23, 26, 100.

tion to the federal government. The Shawnees clearly felt ill-used and “requested that the missionaries and all other Indians also be removed from the reservation.” Warren concluded that the “Baptists offered Christian education, not the food, clothing, and agricultural assistance the tribe so badly needed.” At the same time, the Methodists “operated for the benefit of only those Shawnees who were willing to give up their tribal affiliation.”¹⁸

In 1837 the Quakers and Presbyterians established missions of their own in Kansas. Historian Kevin Abing found that unlike the Baptists and Methodists, “the Quakers took a less aggressive approach to evangelizing the Shawnees. They did not actively proselytize; rather, they relied on schooling and the sheer force of the Friends’ lifestyle to civilize the Indians and direct them down the path of righteousness.” Still the Quakers were no more successful in Christianizing the Indians than had been the Baptists and Methodists, and the continuing denominational strife did nothing to alleviate the situation. Abing argued that “Spirituality was an integral part of traditional Shawnee society, one from which the Shawnees could not divorce themselves easily.” As with the Plains tribes, the physical world was inseparable and intimately connected to all things spiritual. “Because every facet of Indian life affected the spirit world, only a compelling reason could sway an individual essentially to deny his or her very ‘Indianness’ and accept Christianity.” The missionary efforts acerbated existing tribal factions but “the majority of the Shawnees rejected conversion and did not yield up their national identity.” Historian Joseph Herring agreed that Native Americans resisted conversion but emphasized that maintaining their cultural identities should not be taken as an indication that the tribes were ignorant of political realities. Near the Presbyterian Mission leaders of the Iowa and Sac tribes fully realized that whites would inevitably dominate the continent. Herring reasoned that tribal members willingly modified some of their customs in order to achieve peace but tenaciously clung to their religious faith as a means of preserving their identity as a people.¹⁹

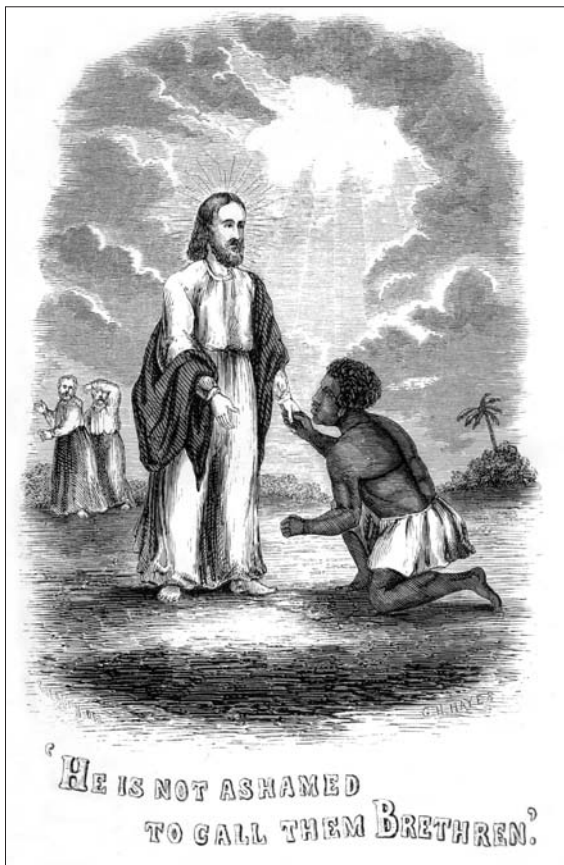
The persistence of Native religions was an unending source of frustration to the missionaries in Kansas, and George A. Schultz found that on the Kickapoo Reservation the prophet Kennekuk manipulated Protestant and Catholic desires for converts while establishing his own syncretistic religion. William Unrau concurred with Schultz and added that through his religious teachings Kennekuk achieved a level of moral reform that easily outshone the neighboring Christian missions. While other missions watched helplessly as the federal government failed to enforce its own laws against the alcohol trade in Indian Territory, the Kickapoo drove out the whisky peddlers and successfully developed a self-sufficient agricultural economy.²⁰ Despite the model success of the Kickapoo, by the 1840s the religious struggle in Kansas began to shift from a focus on Indian tribes to reforming the political economy of slavery.

“Spirituality was an integral part of traditional Shawnee society, one from which the Shawnees could not divorce themselves easily.”

18. Stephen A. Warren, “The Baptists, the Methodists, and the Shawnees: Conflicting Cultures in Indian Territory, 1833–1834,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 17 (Autumn 1994): 150, 160–61.

19. Kevin Abing, “A Holy Battleground: Methodist, Baptist, & Quaker Missionaries among Shawnee Indians, 1830–1844,” *ibid.* 21 (Summer 1998): 127, 135–36; Joseph B. Herring, *The Enduring Indians of Kansas: A Century and a Half of Acculturation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 76–83.

20. George A. Schultz, “Kennekuk, the Kickapoo Prophet,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 3 (Spring 1980): 44; William E. Unrau, *White Man’s Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country, 1802–1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 71–72.



The issue of slavery split several religious denominations in Kansas Territory. While some groups believed slavery did not oppose church teachings, others, such as New England abolitionists, believed it was “a gross violation of ‘higher law.’”

In 1844 the slavery issue led the Methodist Church to split into Northern and Southern factions, and in 1845 the Baptist Church divided over the same dispute. Although the Baptist Mission was fractured internally, Isaac McCoy chose to remain independent of the sectional divide.²¹ Shawnee Methodist Mission, however, aligned itself with the proslavery faction of the church, which provoked the Baptists and the Quakers to charge that “slavery should have no place among those doing ‘God’s’ work.” It would seem as if the strongly abolitionist Quakers were correct when they asked if the use of slaves to civilize the Indians was not “the climax of inconsistencies.” The Presbyterian Church underwent a similar struggle and split in 1861. Other missions in Kansas were seemingly quiet on the issue. While historian John T. McGreevy indicated that the Catholic Church’s position on slavery was that it “did not violate either the natural law or church teaching,” it is unclear from the secondary literature whether either of the Catholic missions in pre-territorial Kansas utilized slaves. Regardless, the slavery issue had tainted religion in Kansas. In the words of Kevin Abing, “preachers who were meant to be men of peace propelled the controversy to a more violent stage that eventually precipitated the most destructive conflict in American history.”²²

The Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854 politically defined Kansas Territory, nullified the Missouri Compromise, and opened the region to settlement through the doctrine of popular sovereignty. The intent of popular sovereignty was to defuse sectionalism in American politics, but instead it exacerbated the sectional dispute over slavery. As Southern slave owners moved to make Kansas a slave state, moral alarms went off in the North. Evangelical abolitionists had come to the conclusion, as historian Gunja SenGupta demonstrated, that slavery was “a gross violation of ‘higher law’ than the nation’s constitution.” To redeem society the political economy of the nation had to be reformed, “and the faithful’s calling to realize it by working toward the societal expiation of all sins combined to lay the evangelical foundation for immediatism in American antislavery thought.” The evangelistic urge that prompted the New England Emigrant Aid Company and others to respond to the Kansas–Nebraska Act by sending abolitionist settlers to Kansas did not include members of the liturgical churches. McGreevy noted that in the eyes of “Catholics, constantly defending themselves against accusations of meddling in politics or taking orders from Rome, the fact

21. Schultz, *An Indian Canaan*, 202. Isaac McCoy died in 1846. In 1855 his American Indian Mission Association entered into a formal relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention. See Emory Lindquist, “Religion in Kansas During the Era of the Civil War—Concluded,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 25 (Winter 1959): 411.

22. Kevin Abing, “Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844–1854,” in *Territorial Kansas Reader*, ed. Virgil W. Dean (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 2005), 32, first published in *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24 (Spring 2001): 58–59, 70; John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2003), 49.

that three thousand antislavery Protestant ministers (Catholics preferred 'political parsons') signed a protest against the act smacked of hypocrisy."²³

Despite the evangelical crusade to reform American society, frontier ministers found that settlers in Kansas Territory often left much to be desired. In 1854 the Reverend Samuel Young Lum dejectedly remarked: "In reference to the character of the emigration as a whole, I hardly know what to think—many there are who come here with a noble purpose. They are willing to be martyrs in the cause of Religion & Liberty & yet I am compelled to think that the number of such is small in comparison to those who have some selfish or mercenary end to gain."²⁴ In his two-part study of religion in Kansas during the territorial and Civil War years, historian Emory Lindquist found that frontier ministers faced "a variegated pattern of good and evil." Some were heartened by what they saw and commented about finding men of good character, but a more common observation was that "Kansas had people who were 'full of all kinds of radical ideas.'" Lindquist explained, "'The unsettled character of the population' destroyed the stability so necessary for effective congregational life. While there were many professors of religion, it was necessary 'to go around and hunt them up with a torch.'" Hunting up new settlers is exactly what a number of itinerant ministers did. To take one example, many Catholics coming to Kansas during the territorial period were German and Irish immigrant laborers hired in 1853 and thereafter to construct Fort Riley and other such places. To care for the growing need of Catholic settlers and soldiers in Kansas, in 1859 the Catholic mission at St. Mary's dispatched Father Louis Dumortier as a circuit rider to organize congregations in the region.²⁵ Protestants utilized circuit riders as well but also relied heavily on revivals and camp meetings. Still, the economic hardship of life on the plains contributed to the instability of Catholic and Protestant congregations alike, but in the larger social setting religion and religious thought became indelibly politicized during the territorial period. Of all the western states and territories, only Mormon Utah became more religiously politicized than Kansas.

The territorial period and Civil War left deep scars on many religious denominations and, as Lindquist detailed, altered Kansas's religious backdrop. The Methodist Episcopal Church became the leading Methodist sect in the state after 1861 when most ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church South were compelled to end their Kansas ministries. However, because of Thomas Johnson's long tenure with Shawnee Methodist Mission and his subsequent association with the M.E. Church South, in 1865 the M.E. Church South received title to the mission property in Kansas. In 1861 the Southern Baptist Convention similarly was forced to terminate its Kansas missions. Unlike the Southern Methodists, the Southern Baptists did not resume work in Kansas until 1910. By terms of an 1867 treaty, the Baptist missions in Kansas went to the American Baptist Home Mission. While the Presbyterian Church experienced a split between the proslavery

The territorial period and Civil War left deep scars on many religious denominations and altered Kansas's religious backdrop.

23. Gunja Sengupta, *For God & Mammon: Evangelicals and Entrepreneurs, Masters and Slaves in Territorial Kansas, 1854–1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 11; McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 61.

24. Quotation in Emory Lindquist, "Religion in Kansas During the Era of the Civil War," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 25 (Autumn 1959): 313–14.

25. Lindquist, "Religion in Kansas," 319; M. Evangeline Thomas, "The Rev. Louis Dumortier, S.J., Itinerant Missionary to Central Kansas, 1859–1867," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (November 1952): 258.

TEMP'RANCE MEETING

Mrs. L. O. ROBINSON,

Who has been conducting the re-
vival services at the Methodist Church,
will lecture on Temperance,

FRIDAY EVENING,

at 7:30 o'clock, at the new M. E. Church.

Likely nothing was as important to the temperance movement as evangelical religion. The Methodist Church particularly supported abstinence. According to the above flyer, this temperance meeting was being held in a Methodist church (likely in Topeka), ca. 1880.

Old School and the antislavery New School, the sectarian strife had minimal impact in Kansas. The Catholics and Quakers, both of whom had a sizeable presence in pre-territorial Kansas, experienced no national division over slavery. Other churches, such as Lutheran, Episcopalian, Disciples of Christ, and Congregational, arrived in large numbers during the politically charged territorial period with a strong antislavery position and, in most instances, temperance attitudes.²⁶

The temperance movement was second only to slavery as a national religious issue, and many settlers accustomed to the "Maine Law" of the New England states brought to Kansas the ideological baggage of temperance reform. Historian Robert Smith Bader found that temperance, along with freedom, religion, and education, was one of the four principle reasons cited by the New England Emigrant Aid Company for venturing into Kansas. Lindquist agreed that temperance had a significant influence on early religious settlement but observed that once in Kansas many ministers frequently were vexed to discover that the frontier character did not always measure up to their sober-minded expectations. In 1856 Reverend Charles Blood remarked that "in this new territory one of the greatest obstacles to the spread of the gospel is the alarming prevalence of intemperance." In that same year the Methodists made the battle against strong drink part of their annual convention. Other evangelical groups followed suit, and by April 1861 abstinence-leaning Kansans formed the Kansas State Temperance Society. All of its founding members were associated with evangelical sects, and one of the society's first resolutions was to "look to the churches of our state for earnest cooperation in the work of temperance." The boundary

lines between religion and politics often are imprecise but rarely have been as blurred as they were during the temperance movement. Bader categorically stated that nothing was as important to the movement as evangelical religion and that "religion served as the *sine qua non* for the Kansas movement throughout its history." When Kansans went to the polls in 1880 to vote on the state prohibition amendment, counties with a strong evangelical presence favored the amendment while counties with a strong Roman Catholic or German Lutheran population opposed it.²⁷

Western counties still involved in the cattle trade also stood in opposition to the prohibition amendment. Popular and academic histories written about the cattle towns of Kansas tend to focus on gunslingers rather than gospel singers, but religion was present all the same. In his seminal study of Kansas cattle towns, historian Robert Dykstra revealed that local clergymen tended to eschew pressing moral reform issues until such time as popular opinion would support them. The

26. Lindquist, "Religion in Kansas—Concluded," 408–12.

27. Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 15, 25, 30, 60; Lindquist, "Religion in Kansas," 322–23.

cattle towns were too financially dependent on the Texas cattle trade, and most pastors recognized that it was useless to criticize issues of vice until the economic situation changed. Nevertheless, the immoral reputation of the cattle towns should not imply that cowboys, although largely unchurched, were an irreligious group. Circuit riding ministers often found an earthy religiosity present on the cattle trails, but more interesting was the eclectic level of religious beliefs. In looking at religion and spirituality among cowboys, historian John E. Baur detailed how many trail riders had a serene acceptance of the natural world and of a controlling “universal spirit” that was remarkably similar to American Indian beliefs. Baur asserted that “the cowboy’s outdoor existence seems to have stimulated, as it did in a parallel manner, in the Indian, an identification of the individual as a harmonious part of Nature and not its antagonist and inevitable conqueror.”²⁸

Baur specifies that while many cowboys may have adopted religious world views that were reminiscent of Native America, the cattle towns that lured cowboys to Kansas were products of nineteenth-century commercialism, technology, and the westward advancing railroads. It was the technological advance of the railroads across the western plains that made settlement of central and western Kansas possible, and immigrants inveigled to the region through the siren song of railroad touts permanently altered the state’s religious landscape. African Americans, for example, had been present in Kansas since the early days of the Indian missions, but their overall numbers remained small throughout the territorial period. During the Civil War the white First Congregational Church established the Freedmen’s Church as a mission to Topeka area African Americans, but historian Thomas Cox found that established Kansas religious organizations like Congregationalism held few attractions for black adherents. It was only after 1865 and continuing through the Great Exodus of 1879–1880 that African Americans came to Kansas in increasing numbers. During this time black Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches as well as other forms of community organization became firmly established in Topeka and other regional communities. These churches went on to become leaders in local campaigns against discrimination. Studies show an indirect correlation between the development of the railroads and the growth of black communities and black churches because, wrote Cox, “There was no discontinuity in territorial and Reconstruction themes; ideology remained a servant of enterprise.”²⁹ With little assistance coming from Kansas officials, African Americans sought their own path on the plains.

Migrants followed the path blazed westward by railroads. Benjamin Singleton used the biblical rhetoric of religious deliverance to gather followers in Tennessee, but in 1877 and 1878 he relied on the railroads rather than God to assist in the transport of blacks to proposed colonies in eastern Kansas. African Americans from Kentucky followed the railroads deep into western Kansas to found Nicodemus and other black communities. The initial success in planting these early settlements led to talk of a “promised land” in Kansas and the subsequent mass Exoduster movement. Political and economic forces in the South certainly were

Black churches became firmly established in regional communities and went on to become leaders in local campaigns against discrimination.

28. Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 241; John E. Baur, “Cowboys and Skypilots,” in *The American West and the Religious Experience*, ed. William M. Kramer (Los Angeles: Will Kramer Publisher, 1975), 45, 65.

29. Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865–1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 19–20, 24, 31.



African Americans from Kentucky founded such early black communities as Nicodemus. These settlers and those of the subsequent Great Exodus of 1879–1880 developed many black churches throughout the state. Choir members of the First Baptist Church in Nicodemus are pictured here in ca. 1944.

leading factors pushing the migration while the idea of free land in Kansas provided a significant pull. Nonetheless, historian Robert G. Athearn found that the movement also contained religious undertones. Word spread throughout the South, wrote Athearn, “that the day of reckoning was near at hand, that the Lord had answered black prayers with the offer of deliverance in a western Eden.” Historian Nell Irvin Painter concurred that the Great Exodus contained religious connotations and went so far to say that it was a mass millenarian movement. Painter interpreted the Exoduster movement as the embodiment of a collective act of religious faith. The entire state took on a symbolic sanctity for African Americans, and those who believed and acted on their faith “would realize true freedom in the Free State of Kansas.”³⁰ The dream proved elusive,

but black churches accompanied the migrants every step of the way and changed the spiritual dynamic of many Kansas communities. Wichita, for instance, received its first African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1875, and by 1883 the city had three African American churches.³¹

Painter asserted that the railroads often worked to discourage blacks from leaving the South, but such was not the case with European immigrants looking toward Kansas. Olof Olsson, who spearheaded Swedish Lutheran migration into central Kansas, originally was inspired by the perceived need to establish missions for African Americans settling on the plains. Strongly pietistic, the evangelical Lutherans opposed the state church of Sweden and in 1869 joined with fellow Swedes already in Illinois to obtain land from the Kansas Pacific Railroad in Saline and McPherson Counties. Their reasons for coming to Kansas, stated Emory Lindquist, included the “missionary impulse, the quest for religious freedom, [and] the adventure of building a religious community of a distinctive character.” Strong economic factors also pushed them out of Sweden, and of course the lure of the railroads pulled them in. By making land available and by supplying the necessary link to eastern markets the railroads were crucial for the successful establishment of immigrant religious communities, but it was the church

30. Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879–80* (Lawrence: Regent’s Press of Kansas, 1978), 6; Nell Irvin Painter, “Millenarian Aspects of the Exodus to Kansas of 1879,” *Journal of Social History* 9 (Spring 1976): 332.

31. Gretchen Cassel Eick, *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954–72* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 17.

that held ethnic communities together after arrival. The Swedish Agricultural Company of McPherson County insisted that each member be, among other things, “a believing Christian” and “adhere to the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran church.” In addition to evangelical Lutherans, Swedish immigrants planted Mission Covenant, Baptist, and Methodist churches in Kansas.³²

The largest religious immigration into Kansas began in 1874 with the arrival of the first wave of Germans in a chain migration from southern Russia. Unlike other groups, religion often is the primary focus of historical studies looking at the migration of Mennonites into central Kansas and largely Catholic Volga Germans into western Kansas. The underlying reason is that their faith defined them as a people and set them apart from other Germans already in the state. The popular story behind the German migration, particularly the Mennonite migration, is that they left Russia to avoid military conscription, which was a violation of the Anabaptist doctrine of nonviolence. However, land reform issues in Russia combined with inducements laid out by the Kansas Pacific and Santa Fe railroads had a greater influence. In fact, historian Norman Saul observed that most of the immigrants who arrived in Kansas were not of military recruitment age. Overall, five different Mennonite groups relocated to Reno, Harvey, Marion, and McPherson Counties in central Kansas, while small numbers of German Lutherans and German Baptists joined the Catholic migration to Russell, Rush, and Ellis Counties in western Kansas. The importance of the migration in terms of the state’s religious history rests firmly with the altered demographic and spiritual landscape. The tightly knit immigrant communities demonstrated a determination to stay for the long term and provided much needed stability for developing counties. This, insisted Saul, was their gift to Kansas. “They brought families, invested all their resources, and immediately began the construction of substantial houses and churches, whole communities, many of which have survived for a century.”³³

As with earlier religious groups, Kansas’s new religious migrants invested in hospitals, parochial schools, and higher education. In point of fact, most of the state’s institutions of higher learning can trace their origin to religious organizations. However, the religious groups that founded many of the colleges and universities in eastern Kansas during the 1860s came to the state eager to advance the cause of education. In contrast, many of the religious colleges founded in the 1880s and 1890s were established by insular religious bodies that maintained a historic distrust toward the liberal arts. Historian William Ringenberg, for instance, found that prior to the 1887 founding of McPherson College many members of the Church of the Brethren believed that high schools and colleges were “worldly places where the young will at best puff up with proud knowledge and at worst desert the church.” Nevertheless, the same railroads that enabled the immigrants to find land, homes, and religious refuge in Kansas also made it possi-

The largest religious immigration into Kansas began in 1874 with the arrival of the first wave of Germans in a chain migration from southern Russia.

32. Emory Kempton Lindquist, *Smoky Valley People: A History of Lindsborg, Kansas* (Lindsborg, Kans.: Bethany College, 1953), 8–10; Lindquist, “The Swedish Immigrant in Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 29 (Spring 1963): 18.

33. Norman E. Saul, “The Migration of the Russian–Germans to Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Spring 1974): 42, 61; James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 22.

*In 1874 a splinter
Mormon group
from Pennsylvania
selected a site in
Stafford County to
become Zion Valley,
believing that God
had called them
to build a Zion
in Kansas.*

ble for their children to seek opportunities elsewhere. Consequently, many church leaders came to the reluctant conclusion that rather than lose their young people to a secular institution, it was better to provide a church college with a curriculum defined by their own religious values.³⁴ Not all attempts succeeded, but a number of the small colleges that still serve central Kansas are the intellectual heritage of the nineteenth-century religious immigrants.

One of the more noteworthy religious migrations to Kansas occurred during the 1880s with an international “Back to the Soil Movement” designed to restructure Jewish economic life on farming settlements. Starting in 1882 Jewish migrants established seven different agrarian colonies in western Kansas, which historian Robert A. Goldberg contended was second only to Dakota Territory (North and South) as “the most active western site for Jewish colonization.” Goldberg argued that for Jewish immigrants a return to agriculture in Kansas and other parts of the West was intended to “bring Jewish spiritual and physical revival, restore a sense of dignity, free Jews from the economic uncertainties of the sweatshop, and demonstrate to Christians the Jews’ stake in their new homeland.”³⁵ The earliest and most heavily studied of Kansas’s Jewish settlements was Beersheba, founded in Hodgeman County under the auspices of the Hebrew Union Agricultural Society (UAS) of Cincinnati. Another agency that sponsored Jewish colonies in Kansas was the Russian Am Olam group. Beersheba lasted a mere four years, but its collapse as a viable colony was not due to religious differences or shortcomings of the Russian Jews. The common story is that inexperience, the harsh environment, and poor support from the UAS and Am Olam combined to drive off the Jewish settlers. However, historian Lipman Goldman Feld maintained that the Russian Jews of Beersheba were welcomed by locals and supported as fellow immigrants on the western plains. Feld did not deny that problems existed, but he stressed that the Jews “soon began to view their stay in Beersheba as nothing more than a stepping stone for another future.” After a period of acculturation they willfully chose to move to Dodge City, Garden City, Wichita, and other urban areas. The move to the cities, posited historian Donald Douglas, is the legacy of Kansas’s Jewish colonies because a number of Jewish families descended from the settlements joined with other Jewish immigrants to become prominent merchants in Wichita and Kansas City.³⁶

Much work remains to be done with religious immigration in nineteenth-century Kansas. Beyond the larger and better-known organizations, smaller religious groups attempted to plant cooperative colonies in Kansas, some successful and others not. For example, in 1871 a Congregationalist group originally heralding

34. William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Christian University Press, 1984), 100–1.

35. Robert A. Goldberg, “Zion in Utah: The Clarion Colony and Jewish Agrarianism,” in *Jews of the American West*, ed. Moses Rischin and John Livingston (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 82; Goldberg, “Building Zions: A Conceptual Framework,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 57 (Spring 1989): 166–67.

36. Lipman Goldman Feld, “New Light on the Lost Jewish Colony of Beersheba, Kansas,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60 (December 1970): 168; Donald M. Douglas, “Forgotten Zions: Jewish Agricultural Colonies in Kansas in the 1880s,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 16 (Summer 1993): 119. Feld’s assertion that Jewish immigrants were welcomed in Kansas is consistent with other studies finding that anti-Semitism was relatively absent in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American West. See John Livingston, “Introduction,” in *Jews of the American West*, 21; Hal Rothman, “‘Same Horse, New Wagon’: Tradition and Assimilation among the Jews of Wichita, 1865–1930,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1995): 83–104.

from the Hampshire Colony Congregational Church of Northampton, Massachusetts, arrived in Kansas by way of Princeton, Illinois, and founded the Memorial Colony in Nemaha County. Their settlement was named to memorialize the anniversary of the Pilgrims' landing in North America. In 1874 a splinter Mormon group from Monongahela, Pennsylvania, selected a site in Stafford County to become Zion Valley. This group of largely English immigrant coal miners believed that God had called them to build a Zion in Kansas from which they could send missionaries into Indian Territory. And in 1879 members of the Church of the Brethren in Montgomery County, Iowa, relocated to Kansas and founded the Maple Grove Colony in Norton County. Maple Grove was seen as a place where members could find both physical and spiritual renewal. Zion Valley has been examined in some detail, but the Memorial and Maple Grove Colonies, like many other religious experiments, await academic study.³⁷

As noteworthy as religious immigration into Kansas may be, historian Joanna Stratton correctly pointed out that the new religious groups remained in the minority and were outnumbered by mainstream Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Baptists. In sparsely populated townships all across Kansas where members of these sects settled individually it usually was not possible to build a church, let alone find a minister for every represented denomination. Nonetheless, Stratton wrote that for widely strewn settlers "religion not only served to stabilize their own individual lives, but fostered, against the prairie distances, a firm sense of community." Scattered families regardless of denomination would come together for shared services where the individual members would lead in group worship. Ferenc Szasz concurred with Stratton on the prominent role religion held on the plains and added that when these scattered communities did obtain the services of an ordained minister, it was an itinerant making one of many stops while riding a circuit. As communities grew, the people slowly collected their meager funds until the time came when they could build a simple church. Church buildings were constructed at great sacrifice and often without sufficient funds remaining for a full-time pastor. But when completed the church edifice served as a source of pride and the visible center of the community.³⁸



An 1880s movement brought a number of Jewish migrants to Kansas to establish agricultural settlements. While these experiments did not succeed, many Jewish people chose to remain in Kansas, moving to larger cities, where they established synagogues such as Temple Beth Shalom (above) in Topeka.

37. *Seneca Weekly Courier*, May 19, 1871; Gary R. Entz, "Zion Valley: The Mormon Origins of St. John, Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24 (Summer 2001): 98–117; Elmer L. Craik, *History of the Church of the Brethren in Kansas* (McPherson, Kans.: E. L. Craik, 1922), 43.

38. Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 172–79; Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Protestant Clergy in the Great Plains and Mountain West, 1865–1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 73.

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One commonality all newcomers to Kansas experienced was the difficulty in adapting to life on the Great Plains. New crops, new technologies, drought, and economic depression followed by debt combined to make settlement in the state more arduous than many had anticipated. Communal groups such as the Mennonites came to Kansas with the spirit of cooperation firmly entrenched within church doctrine and collectively coped better than most. For other groups and individuals it was different, and by the late 1880s many religious bodies had fallen short in satisfying their expected spiritual and social responsibilities. As historian Peter H. Argersinger stated, during this time “religion failed to fulfill its social role and for many did not respond to its religious role. The churches, failing to develop during the plush boom years, entered a period of retrenchment with the onset of hard times, leaving many Kansans without religious service or solace.” For Argersinger, therefore, Populist politics became a “functional alternative” to organized religious activity. Historian Leland Lengel took this argument one step further and maintained that while Kansans involved in the Farmers’ Alliance and Populist movements felt betrayed by the narrowness of sectarian churches that supported the status quo, they nonetheless retained “close ties to religious ideas and institutions.” Although Populism normally is studied for its political impact, Lengel reasoned that in Kansas the Populists “clearly preferred a religious and theological orientation centered about social concerns and based upon a fundamental interest in human welfare.”³⁹ The problem was not with the basic ideals of Christianity. Rather the Populists excoriated organized religion because of the perception that mainstream churches had become inured toward their traditional role of defending the downtrodden.

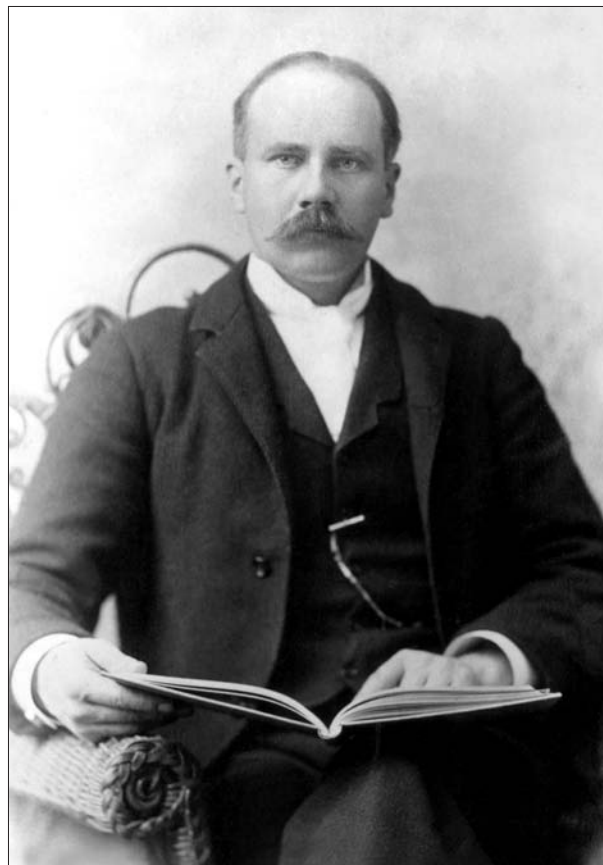
Not all mainstream preachers fell into disrepute, and Lengel noted that even before writing the best selling novel *In His Steps* Charles Sheldon of Topeka had attained near folk-hero status among the Populists. A proponent of the social gospel and influential advocate on behalf of Topeka’s African American community, Sheldon at the turn of the twentieth century transcended local religious concerns, and for a brief time he became, said religion scholar Timothy Miller, “the most prominent and popular figure in American religious life.” Despite the national fame he attained for coining the still recognizable question “what would Jesus do” if placed in modern social and moral situations, Sheldon shunned the limelight and rejected the charismatic revivalism popularized by contemporaries Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday. Instead Sheldon practiced what he preached. He lived a simple life, pushed for local moral reform issues such as prohibition, and continued working through Topeka’s Central Congregational Church until his retirement. Nonetheless, *In His Steps* has never gone out of print and continues to inspire conservative evangelicals across the nation. But Sheldon was no conservative. Miller pointed out that “Sheldon managed to stay out of the bruising fray between liberals and conservatives throughout his lifetime” but would best be defined as a “Pious liberal.”⁴⁰

39. Peter H. Argersinger, “Pentecostal Politics: Religion, the Farmers’ Alliance, and the Gospel of Populism,” *Kansas Quarterly* 1 (Fall 1969): 24; Leland L. Lengel, “Preachers of a New Religion,” *Prairie Scout* 1 (1973): 75; Lengel, “Radical Crusaders and a Conservative Church: Attitudes of Populists toward Contemporary Protestantism in Kansas,” *American Studies* 13 (Fall 1972): 57.

40. Timothy Miller, *Following In His Steps: A Biography of Charles M. Sheldon* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), xiii, 186–87, 196–97.

While Sheldon remains beloved among modern evangelicals, Charles Parham languishes in relative obscurity. Yet at the beginning of the twentieth century Parham had more direct influence over the nascent split between evangelical and mainstream Protestantism than Sheldon ever did. Sickly as a youth, Parham as an adult embraced faith healing and rejected denominationalism. He began evangelistic work through independent holiness congregations and preached sanctification of the individual as a “second definite work of grace.” In Topeka late in 1900, Parham and his followers determined that the indisputable proof of true apostolic baptism lay in the ability to speak in tongues. Ferenc Szasz remarked that since its Kansas origins, the concept of *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues, has become the central concept behind the Pentecostal movement. Strongly anti-intellectual in outlook, the Pentecostals advocated a lifestyle that in part presaged Kansas’s negative twentieth-century image. Szasz wrote that the distinct theology of the Pentecostals led them to adopt a nearly puritanical lifestyle of “plain dress, no alcohol or tobacco, no card playing, no jewelry, and no movies.”⁴¹

Pentecostalism’s major growth as a religious faith did not occur until the interwar years. In the meantime Kansas began to recover from the economic difficulties of the late nineteenth century, and after 1900 issues of progressive reform dominated. Robert Smith Bader remarked that “Kansas became a foremost champion of Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement—a political philosophy that William Allen White characterized as ‘profoundly spiritual.’” Although the Progressives targeted political, economic, and social issues, prohibition and concerns of moral uplift were always at the fore. It was this sort of moralistic fervor that in 1910 led Carl Becker to declare the “fundamental characteristic of Kansas individualism is the tendency to conform; it is an individualism of conformity, not of revolt.” Thus while political men like White may have felt spiritually fortified during the Progressive era, the push for moral conformity inevitably led to religious conflict in Kansas. In 1902, for example, the Southwestern Kansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church tried one of its most prominent Kansas ministers on charges of heresy. Granville Lowther had dared to preach “evolution as a philosophy” from his central Kansas pulpit and as a consequence was expelled from the ministry and soon left the state. Lowther’s views have since found acceptance within the mainstream Methodist Church.⁴²



*Topeka’s Congregational minister Charles M. Sheldon was a prominent and most popular figure in American religious life. His *In His Steps* continues to inspire conservative evangelicals although Sheldon himself was no conservative.*

41. James R. Goff Jr., “Charles F. Parham and His Role in the Development of the Pentecostal Movement: A Reevaluation,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Autumn 1984): 228–29; Ferenc Morton Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), 82–83.

42. Robert Smith Bader, *Hayseeds, Moralizers, & Methodists: The Twentieth-Century Image of Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 13; Carl Becker, “Kansas,” in *What Kansas Means to Me: Twentieth-Century Writers on the Sunflower State*, ed. Thomas Fox Averill (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 28; Ina Turner Gray and Phillip E. Chastain, “Granville Lowther—Heretic or Herald” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 1 (Autumn 1978): 180, 187.

*Kansas, which
had been a
national leader in
liberal Protestant
ideals, started
down the road of
conservatism
and in the
1920s embraced
fundamentalism.*

By 1917, as the United States entered into the First World War, the conformist legislation of the Progressives gave way to intolerance as irrational fears of internal subversion entered the national psyche. Mennonite farmers, who just a few decades earlier had been welcomed into the state, suddenly became the objects of scorn and suspicion because of their German heritage and religious doctrines prohibiting any participation in or support of violence and war. Historian James Juhnke illustrated how patriotic passions led to narrow-minded prejudice and instances of extralegal violence against the Mennonites in central Kansas. Local patriotic committees targeted individual Mennonite families in McPherson, Butler, and Harvey Counties and forced them to purchase Liberty Bonds to financially support the war while discounting the fact that many Mennonite men had willingly volunteered for alternative civil service work. When families resisted, the mobs resorted to tarring and feathering, painting persons and property with yellow paint, and physical destruction of private property. "The Kansas mob violence in 1918 had a conservative bias," wrote Juhnke. "It was initiated, for the most part, by respectable citizens who were out to preserve the status quo." In a related study, historian Cecil Currey learned that members of the Society of Friends also sought alternative service options during the war years. However, unlike the Mennonites, the Quakers were wavering in their commitment to non-violent resistance and sent just as many young men to war as to alternative service assignments. Kansas had far fewer Quakers than Mennonites, and as a result Currey related no stories of mob violence against the Friends.⁴³

The legal persuasion of the Progressives had fully succumbed to reactionary conformity during World War I, and Ferenc Szasz contended that the mainline denominations took years to recover from the shock of the war. The war had raised numerous moral dilemmas, and the fundamentalists readily stepped in to answer them. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy had been festering for years. It varied between denominations but according to Szasz largely revolved around four points of contention. First of course was "acceptance or rejection of the higher criticism of the Scriptures." Fundamentalists believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible. Second was "the relationship of the social gospel and the need for a conversion experience." The third involved internal struggles between liberal and conservatives over control of a denomination's resources. The fourth point is one that Kansans still debate, "the truth or falsity of the theory of evolution."⁴⁴ Kansas, which heretofore had been a national leader in liberal Protestant ideals, started down the road of conservatism and in the 1920s embraced fundamentalism.

While difficult to pinpoint exactly where the fundamentalist debate against evolution first erupted, by 1924 it was clearly at Southwestern College in Winfield when Professor William Marion Goldsmith authored a pamphlet entitled *Evolution or Christianity?* Essentially handled as an internal affair, the debate nonetheless shook the foundations of the small Methodist college. Goldsmith had in fact been trying to reconcile the Bible with evolutionary theory and continued to teach at Southwestern after members of the Southwest Kansas Conference of the

43. James C. Juhnke, "Mob Violence and Kansas Mennonites in 1918," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 43 (Autumn 1977): 346; Cecil B. Currey, "The Devolution of Quaker Pacifism: A Kansas Case Study, 1860-1955," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 6 (Summer 1983): 132.

44. Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West*, 71-72.

Methodist Episcopal Church met and found a resolution to the crisis. Nevertheless, while the Methodists were able to reach an understanding, the fundamentalist debate was far from over. In 1925, as the Winfield imbroglio was cooling down, Gerald Burton Winrod called a meeting in Salina of roughly one hundred fundamentalist leaders to discuss modernism's alleged assault on religion. Based out of Wichita, Winrod was a radical evangelist. Severely anti-intellectual, he had no formal religious schooling and never became a member of any mainstream denomination. However, after meeting with fellow fundamentalists for the "united defense of the Christian faith," in 1926 Winrod launched the Defender organization. According to historian Clifford R. Hope Jr., Winrod adopted an uncompromising position designed to oppose modernism, the ecumenical movement, and the Catholic Church. He staunchly rejected scholarship on evolution and sought to restate the Christian faith as he understood it in the light of biblical prophecies. Winrod became extremely popular among Kansas evangelicals, and historian Leo Ribuffo demonstrated that Winrod used that esteem to cultivate support from the conservative Mennonite community while building the Defenders into a political organization wielding considerable regional clout. A believer in the coming Armageddon, Winrod in the 1930s and 1940s became an ardent anti-Semite and fascist sympathizer. Although personally discredited during World War II his fundamentalist religious beliefs and those of his Defender organization, said Hope, continue to this day.⁴⁵

Kansas's mainstream churches took another blow with the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression. Kansas agriculture suffered tremendously during the 1930s and in western counties the Dust Bowl only compounded the problems. Churches customarily have taken on a charitable role during times of need, but historian Pamela Riney-Kehrberg found that churches "were conspicuously absent from the lists of primary aid-giving institutions and organizations in southwestern Kansas during this period." Churches struggled because rural farming communities did not have enough money to support themselves, let alone a local church building and ministry. Extreme poverty and weather led to a drop in attendance, and many churches were forced to limit their services. Church organizations did provide emotional support through the hard times, but beyond that they had little to offer. Riney-Kehrberg did not specify whether western Kansans felt betrayed by mainstream religious bodies as they had in the late 1880s, but it is interesting, she noted, that several Pentecostal Holiness sects established new

45. Ina Turner Gray, "Monkey Trial—Kansas Style," *Methodist History* 14 (July 1976): 235–51; Clifford R. Hope Jr., "Strident Voices in Kansas Between the Wars," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 2 (Spring 1979): 55, 59, 64; Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 88–89.

A RISING STAR IN KANSAS

**THE REV. GERALD WINROD GAINS
POLITICAL IMPORTANCE.**

As Probable Candidate for Republican Nomination for United States Senator, He Has Party Leaders Wondering.

(By a Member of The Star's Staff.)

WICHITA, KAS., Jan. 21.—Another breeze is blowing across Kansas, which has experienced many strange political storms in the past.

The Rev. Gerald B. Winrod, a native-born Kansas preacher, is raising his eyes to the senate of the

Gerald Burton Winrod, a radical Wichita evangelist, tried to restate the Christian faith as he understood it. In the 1930s he became an ardent anti-Semite and fascist sympathizer and was discredited during World War II. The above article about his candidacy for U.S. senator appeared in the Kansas City Star, January 21, 1938.

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congregations in western Kansas during the height of the suffering. Historian Brad Lookingbill touched upon contemporary allusions to the Dust Bowl as divine punishment for sinful behavior and suggests that this, in part, led to calls for reclamation projects such as the development of the Ogallala Aquifer for increased irrigation.⁴⁶ The hardships accompanying the Great Depression provided vindication for evangelicals opposed to the social gospel of mainstream Protestantism, who believed that the land was intended for mankind to use and gave little support to sustainable land management or conservation programs.

In 1940 Christian Winkelmann was named Bishop of Wichita, the diocese that included the Dust Bowl areas of southwestern Kansas. Catholics viewed sound economic planning rather than increased economic growth as the rational response to the depression. Thus on the advent of Winkelmann's taking office the Catholic Church had emerged as a leading voice for environmental protection in Kansas. Catholics argued: "It must be emphasized and re-emphasized that the very ground the farmer breaks, the very earth he plows, ultimately belongs to God; that the farmer is only the trustee, the guardian thereof, and must one day render an account of his stewardship to the Divine Harvester." The Dust Bowl may have been prevented, argued historian Jerry Marlett, had farmers adhered to these deep-seated religious principals. Winkelmann clearly thought little of schemes for the development of the Ogallala aquifer and ruefully commented that the land of Kansas had already taken a merciless beating. He wrote that "synthetic, inorganic fertilization, get-rich-quick, one-cropping, large-scale, mechanized land-bleeding, not to mention absentee ownership, long ago ridiculed to oblivion any meager attempts to bring about true ruralism." For Winkelmann and the Catholic Church, "true ruralism" implied a reverence and respect for the land along with an avoidance of a materialistic lifestyle and its concomitant spiritual poverty.⁴⁷

Whether openly stated or not, liberal intellectuals in Kansas agreed with the Catholic Church's position on land stewardship and took steps to strengthen ties between agriculture and rural churches. In 1941 Dr. Francis D. Farrell, president emeritus of Kansas State College, initiated in Manhattan an annual Town and Country Church Conference designed to build "strong aggressive churches" that would provide leadership in rural communities. Church pastors met each January "to learn how to raise crops, how to conserve the soil, how to feed livestock, and how to increase farm tenure." The goal was to extend agricultural education into western Kansas while helping ministers become "better counselors for their rural people." The conference was a true ecumenical movement as organizers cooperated with the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and took pains to invite representatives from all denominations in Kansas. Farrell in particular understood that rural churches performed religious, social, and agricultural functions that were equal in magnitude. Religion, he believed, "often helps to

46. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 17, 63–65, 127; Brad D. Lookingbill, *Dust Bowl, USA: Depression, America and the Ecological Imagination, 1929–1941* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 70–72.

47. Quotation in Jeffrey Marlett, *Saving the Heartland: Catholic Missionaries in Rural America* (DeKalb: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2002), 25; McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 153.

make clear the deep significance of agriculture as well as to sustain farm families in their efforts to be good farmers and good citizens." The rural church's social role was to educate young Kansans and teach them that "God gave us the earth to tend." Rural churches also could fulfill their agricultural role by opening their doors as a community center and "sponsoring 4-H clubs, soil conservation clubs, home demonstration units, and other rural organizations."⁴⁸ Regardless of liberal religious efforts at conservation and rural education, it did not slow the economic development of mass irrigation systems or the growth of agribusiness in Kansas.

Farrell had known Woodrow Wilson and was one of the last to push for progressive-style reform in rural religion. Despite his efforts, by the early 1950s his era had ended. The Cold War and anti-Communist fears were adding fuel to the fire of conservative evangelicalism in Kansas and Americans wanted massive agricultural output to upstage the Communist Bloc. Historian Patrick Allitt asserted that American religious bodies "were among the most enthusiastic anti-Communists." He also noted that the issue was particularly welcomed by Catholics who embraced it as an opportunity to finally prove their true Americanism. Kansas was no different. In his study of Lawrence during this time period, historian Rusty Monhollon found that the "Christian religion became yet another indicator of who was and was not an American." However, for evangelicals in the state what was worse than the thought of atheists lurking about the area or Reds employed within the universities was the Supreme Court's 1963 decision that prohibited compulsory prayer and Bible study in public schools. Some Kansans were shocked and believed that a court sympathetic to communism had willfully handed the public schools over to atheism.⁴⁹ Evangelicals in the state have never been able to reconcile themselves with this decision and continue their fight against secular humanism into the twenty-first century.

The Civil Rights Movement also contributed to the beginnings of a backlash from the religious right in Kansas. In her examination of Wichita during the Civil Rights era historian Gretchen Cassel Eick argued that black churches were not the primary leaders of the movement. Many "provided a communications channel and some activist clergy" but were not as critical as African American churches in the South. Regardless, congregations with an activist clergy tended to be more involved in Wichita's civil protest organizations than were other congregations. Monhollon revealed a similar situation in Lawrence during the same period but believes that black churches were

48. E. M. Kelly, "The Rural Church Strengthens Agriculture," *Better Farming Methods* (October 1951): 16, 18; F. D. Farrell, "Rural Churches are Important," *Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Biennial Report 39* (Topeka: 1956): 78-79.

49. Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 22; Rusty L. Monhollon, "This is America?" *The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 36-37.

Prayer Ban Doesn't Halt Belief in God

Banning the Lord's Prayer and Bible reading as opening exercises in public schools does not make the schools godless; Dr. Lawrence Shepoiser, superintendent of Wichita Public Schools, said Monday.

The basic question before the Supreme Court was whether readings from the Holy Bible and recitations of the Lord's Prayer conducted by public schools in opening daily exercises is essentially a religious devotional exercise, thus constituting an "establishment of religion," Dr. Shepoiser said

A more critical issue for evangelicals than atheism or communism was the Supreme Court's 1963 decision that prohibited compulsory prayer and Bible study in public schools. Above is one of several articles that appeared in the Wichita Eagle on June 18, 1963, the day following the court's decision.

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central to the struggle. African American clergymen were prominent leaders within the movement, and Lawrence's Ninth Street Baptist Church served as the local headquarters of the NAACP.⁵⁰ Nevertheless by 1964, just as the U.S. war in Vietnam was heating up, many within the Civil Rights Movement began to shift away from nonviolent protest in favor of a more militant approach. While anti-war and Civil Rights protests in Kansas never reached the level of violence experienced in the other parts of the nation, a number of evangelicals interpreted the unrest as signifying a continuing deterioration of the country's moral values. The result was to help move evangelicals toward organizing as a political bloc.

While no one single event can really define the religious transformation, it is impossible to deny that America's religious values underwent a significant shift during the 1960s and early 1970s. Ferenc Szasz asserted that starting sometime around 1975 "the mainline denominations watched helplessly as parishioners left by the thousands" only to find solace in the conservative evangelical movement. Since the 1980s a group of lobbyists and evangelical ministers known as the New Christian Right has become increasingly involved in politics, and by 1994 conservative evangelicals in Kansas had seized control of the state Republican Party. They did so, as James Juhnke demonstrated in a recent article, by running stealth campaigns that fit "the state and national pattern of conservative religious insurgence." Thomas Frank asserted that it was Operation Rescue's 1991 Summer of Mercy campaign against Wichita abortion clinics that provided evangelicals a final mobilizing push, a point in time that Juhnke also found relevant. In Frank's words, "This was where the Kansas conservative movement got an idea of its own strength; this was where it achieved critical mass."⁵¹

That is where Kansas stands today. The modern story, however, seems incomplete. Despite the political triumph of conservative evangelicals, religion in Kansas has greater degrees of distinction and is more diverse than the current political environment indicates. While Troy Newman and Operation Rescue West, the successor of Randall Terry's Operation Rescue, continues to make headlines in Wichita, the interfaith Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice has been there as well. While Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka continually raises eyebrows across the nation with his virulent anti-homosexual protests, organizations such as the New Jerusalem Missions, an ecumenical ministry located north of Wichita, offers care and assistance for HIV/AIDS sufferers. Self-righteous moralists make for colorful history because their actions frequently elicit controversy, but religion in Kansas embodies much more than the political protests and moral indignation of the evangelical subculture. It also embraces compassion, and historians must look for the larger view before coming to a complete understanding of the state's religious heritage.

In a recent article written for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Stanley Fish made a case for religion being due to replace theories of "race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in academe."⁵² Perhaps it is, but if so, Kansas's histo-

50. Eick, *Dissent in Wichita*, 56, 216; Monhollon, "This is America?" 56–57.

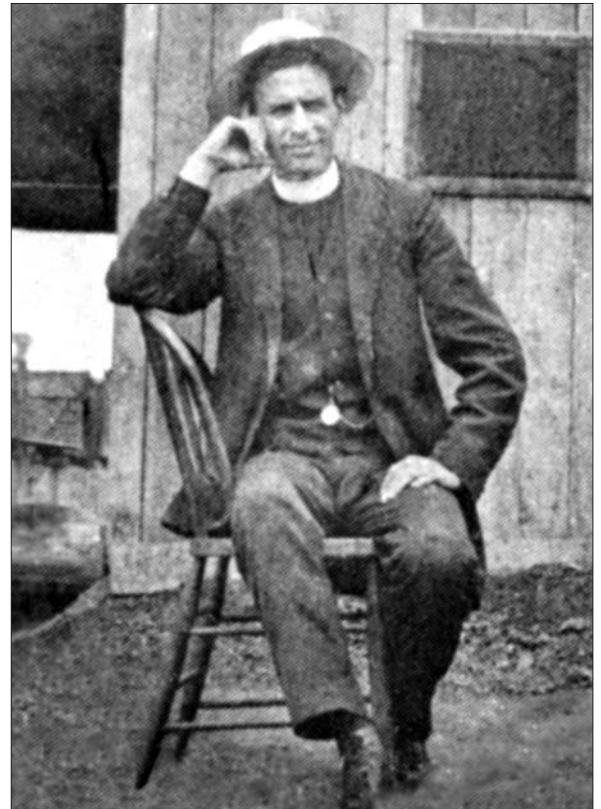
51. Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West*, 128; James C. Juhnke, "Moderates, Mennonites, and the Religious Right: A Hot Contest in the Seventy-fourth House District, 1994," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Autumn 2004): 182, 192; Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas*, 92–93.

52. Stanley Fish, "One University, Under God?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51 (January 7, 2005): C1, C4 (emphasis in original).

ry is not ready. What then needs to be done with the history of religion in Kansas? Religion in the nineteenth century thus far has received far more attention than the twentieth. In fact, historians have only begun to scratch the surface of religious activities in Kansas during the twentieth century, with most of what has been produced revolving around political movements. Still even the religious history of nineteenth-century Kansas is far from complete. Ferenc Szasz has produced some fine regional histories of religion in the American West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while historians such as Frederick Luebke and D. Aidan McQuillan have done outstanding work with ethnicity in the West. Even so, a comprehensive religious history of Kansas is still needed and would be welcomed.

In addition to a comprehensive history, historians must look beyond religion as politics. Religion shapes communities and defines how people view land and water resources, and an environmental history of religion in Kansas would prove quite useful. Architecturally religious structures distinguish communities and define skylines. In his study of American religious architecture, Peter Williams wrote that the Great Plains region “can be characterized negatively for our purposes as one which, though humanly interesting, has produced little distinctive or noteworthy architecture.”⁵³ It seems that a thorough study of Kansas’s religious architecture might take issue with Williams’s statement. Numerous religious groups have called Kansas home and many remain unstudied, particularly twentieth-century religious organizations and ecumenical movements. Hispanics have been migrating into southwestern Kansas as railroad workers, agricultural laborers, and meatpackers for more than a century at this point, yet no one has examined their impact on the larger Catholic Church in Kansas. Muslims, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists have found homes in Wichita, Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City, but to date their religious faith in Kansas and the response of long established churches to their presence remains unstudied. Kansas’s nineteenth-century Jewish colonies have received attention, but modern Judaism in the state awaits academic study. The religious history of Kansas is incomplete and will be fully understood only after historians examine all of its variegated patterns.

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Historians have only begun to scratch the surface of religious activities in Kansas during the twentieth century. Among areas needing study is the Hispanic impact on the Catholic Church in Kansas. Photographed above in ca. 1914 is the late Father Hilary Hernandez, a longtime priest of Dodge City’s Hispanic parish Our Lady of Guadalupe.

53. Williams, *Houses of God*, 210.