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## Constellation of Liberty

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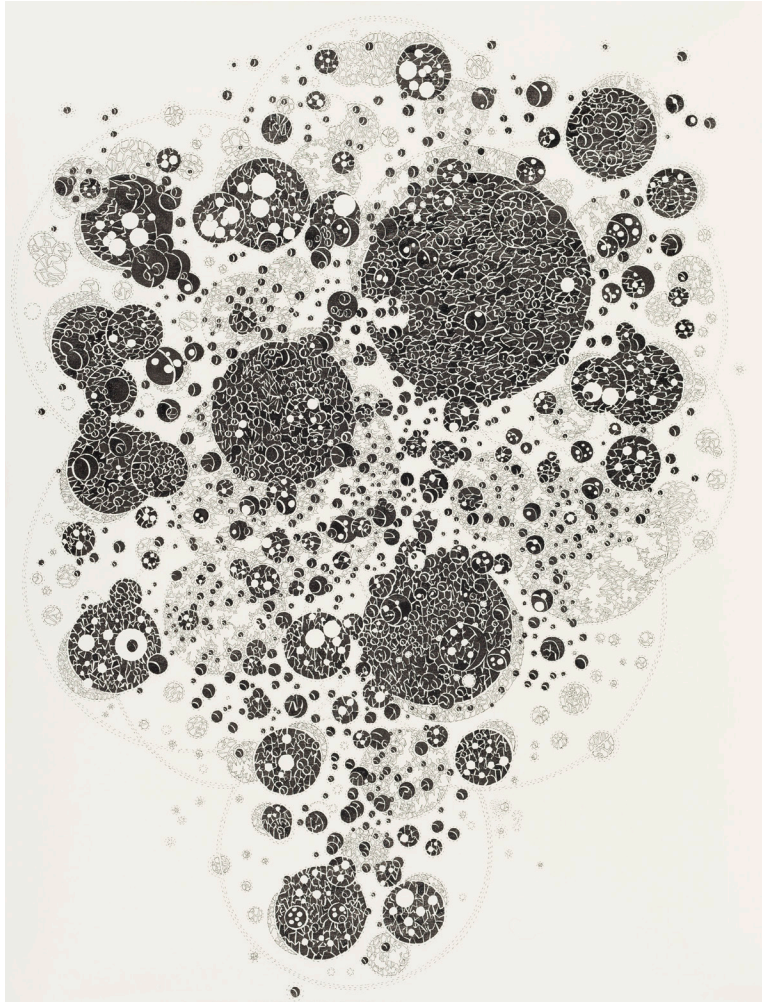
### Recommended Citation

Davis, Christy (2019). "Constellation of Liberty," *Symphony in the Flint Hills Field Journal*.  
<https://newprairiepress.org/sfh/2019/aspiration/9>

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The Field Journals are made possible in part with funding from the Fred C. and Mary R. Koch Foundation.

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*Fractal Eclipse 32*  
Fiona Ross

## CONSTELLATION OF LIBERTY

*Ad Astra Per Aspera.* By the time John J. Ingalls first inscribed these words on the Kansas Seal in 1861, the new state had endured seven years of territorial hell. Just two weeks after Governor Charles Robinson in his first state of the state address called for the creation of a state seal, Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter, an act that would thrust the nation into four years of Civil War.

John J. Ingalls was just twenty-four years old when he disembarked a steamboat at the Missouri River settlement of Sumner in October 1858. But the fledgling town, founded in 1856, looked nothing like the widely distributed lithograph that had enticed him and 2,000 fellow New England free-staters to this place. What Ingalls found was a nearly inaccessible bluff on an inlet the French had called “The Grand Detour” of the Missouri River. According to legend, his first words on Kansas soil were “Behold the home of the future senator of Kansas.” But he soon realized what was clear to most Kansans at the time: achieving their dreams in this forbidding place would not be easy.

Perhaps the one advantage of the geography of Sumner was that its nearly inaccessible steep banks offered some protection from marauders from Atchison, then known by New Englanders as “the most violent pro-slavery town in the territory.” Although Sumner promoters had conveniently omitted Atchison from the map in the promotional lithograph, these two towns, just three miles apart,

were at the center of a battle that would lead the country to Civil War.

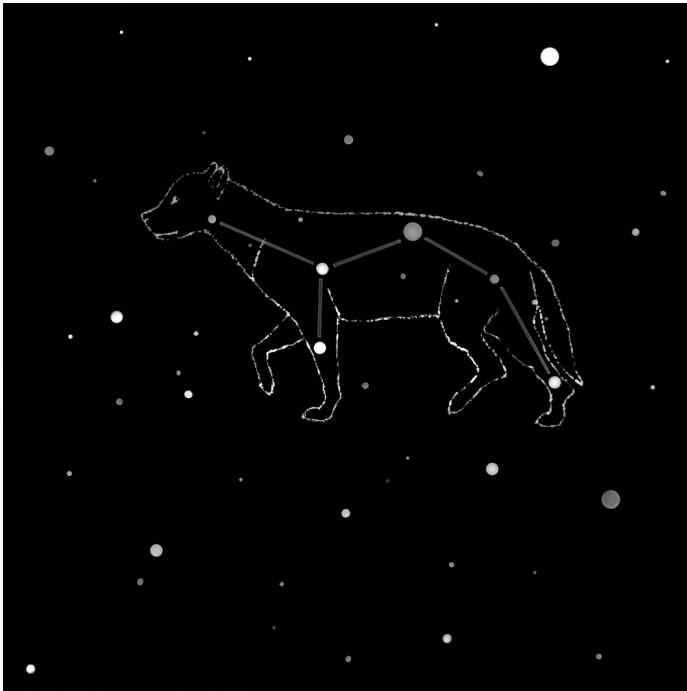
Just a year after his arrival, Ingalls was already a force on the front lines of freedom’s frontier. His impressive oratory and writing skills caught the attention of his senior colleagues, who elected him Secretary of the Territorial Legislature. As Chairman of the Committee on Phraseology and Arrangements at the Wyandotte Convention in 1859, the young Ingalls played a crucial role in writing the Kansas Constitution.

As the nation’s eyes turned toward Bleeding Kansas in the 1850s, Kansans like Ingalls showed that the pen was as mighty as the sword. Both sides filled the territory with printing presses that cranked out propaganda. And creative editors and orators often used celestial metaphors in their impassioned speeches and articles. Would the star on the American flag representing Kansas be a part of the northern or southern constellation? On April 3, 1855, Atchison’s southern newspaper *Squatter Sovereign* prematurely declared victory: “We have battled down all opposition, and Kansas now stands as one of the Southern constellation.”

Just a few months later, on September 5, 1855, the free-state paper *Kansas Herald* proclaimed, “The union and harmony ... will give the American galaxy another star, which will ultimately be the brightest in the constellation—one which will not be dimmed in the least by the foul stain of slavery.”

By the time Ingalls’ adopted town of Sumner was hit with a devastating drought in 1859 and tornado in 1860, the most ardent pro-slavery folks had been “driven out of the country.” With no need to segregate themselves from their political rivals, the residents of Sumner abandoned their outpost nearly overnight. Like most of his neighbors, Ingalls moved to the better-situated town of Atchison, where his newspaper *Freedom’s Champion* ministered to the new free-state majority.

This Puritanical attorney so vehemently subscribed to the Sumner town motto “Pro Lege et Grege” (for the law and the people) that the official seal was one of the few possessions he brought with him to Atchison. Perhaps his devotion to the seal portended Ingalls’ role in the battle of celestial words. While serving as Secretary of the Kansas Senate, Ingalls was



Phlaocyon Constellation  
Genevieve Waller

assigned the task of designing the state seal. His design was simple: an image of the thirty-fourth star rising to join the “great constellation” of states accompanied by the motto “Ad Astra Per Aspera.” By the time the seal came to a final vote, his simple concept had suffered the fate of design by

committee. But the motto, “Ad Astra Per Aspera,” remained.

It was the star of Kansas, which entered the Union as a free state in 1861, that shined the light on the nation’s divisions and precipitated the Civil War. By 1861 Atchison’s newspaper the *Weekly Champion*



declared, “A cure for the madness of secession—Rap those smitten with it on the head until they are enabled to see thirty-four stars in the constellation of Liberty.” (*Weekly Atchison Champion*, 6 July 1861)

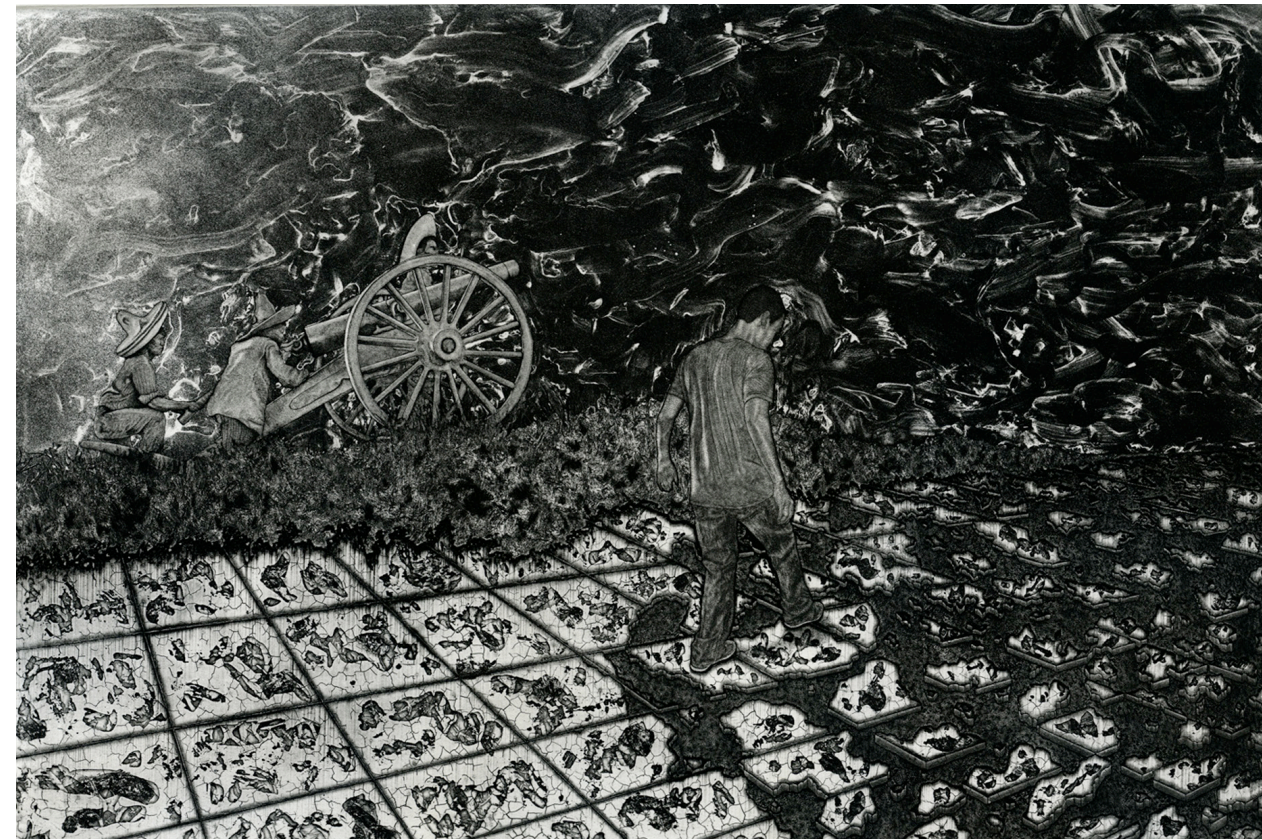
Ingalls himself witnessed unspeakable acts of violence during the war, including the aftermath of Quantrill’s first raid of Lawrence August 1863, which forced its homeless, hungry, and “half-clad” masses to huddle at the ferry landing in the pouring rain. When Quantrill raided Lawrence again in January 1864, the *Kansas State Journal* compared him to “an evil star” returning “from his winter trip to the southern constellations” (28 January 1864). But despite the state’s sacrifice for the Union cause, the *Leavenworth Times* declared in October 1864 that “not a star must be blotted from the grand constellation.” And none were.

When the war finally came to a close in early 1865, the Union, however imperfect, was reunited. But the celestial references continued. In a piece entitled “Astrological,” the *White Cloud Chief* noted that “The Confederacy tried to read its future in the Southern Cross—but the constellation that decided Jeff Davis’s

fate, was Bootes.” Here, “Bootes” had a double meaning. It was both a northern constellation and a reference to ousting the Confederacy.

In tribute to the man who gave Kansas its motto, J. D. Bowersock said, “As the gray and melancholy rain to the sailor, as the desert to the Bedouin, as the Alps to the mountaineer, so is Kansas to those who love her.” Ingalls, who had devoted his early years to an uphill battle for Freedom, loved Kansas. He once said, “the aspiration of Kansas is to reach the unattainable; its dream is the realization of the impossible.” For Kansans, Ingalls’ words have come to hold great meaning. *Ad Astra Per Aspera*. Anything worth having, however impossible, is worth fighting for. And so, we fight for our Home on the Range.

Christy Davis, Executive Director,  
Symphony in the Flint Hills.



*El Viaje*  
Marco Hernandez



*The stars fading from view on the morning of Henrietta Leavitt's birth,  
July 4, 1868, Lancaster, Massachusetts*  
Anna Von Mertens, courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery



*The stars returning into view on the evening of Henrietta Leavitt's death,  
December 12, 1921, Cambridge, Massachusetts*  
Anna Von Mertens, courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery