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(Laurie J. Hamilton, Editor)

Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area

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Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area

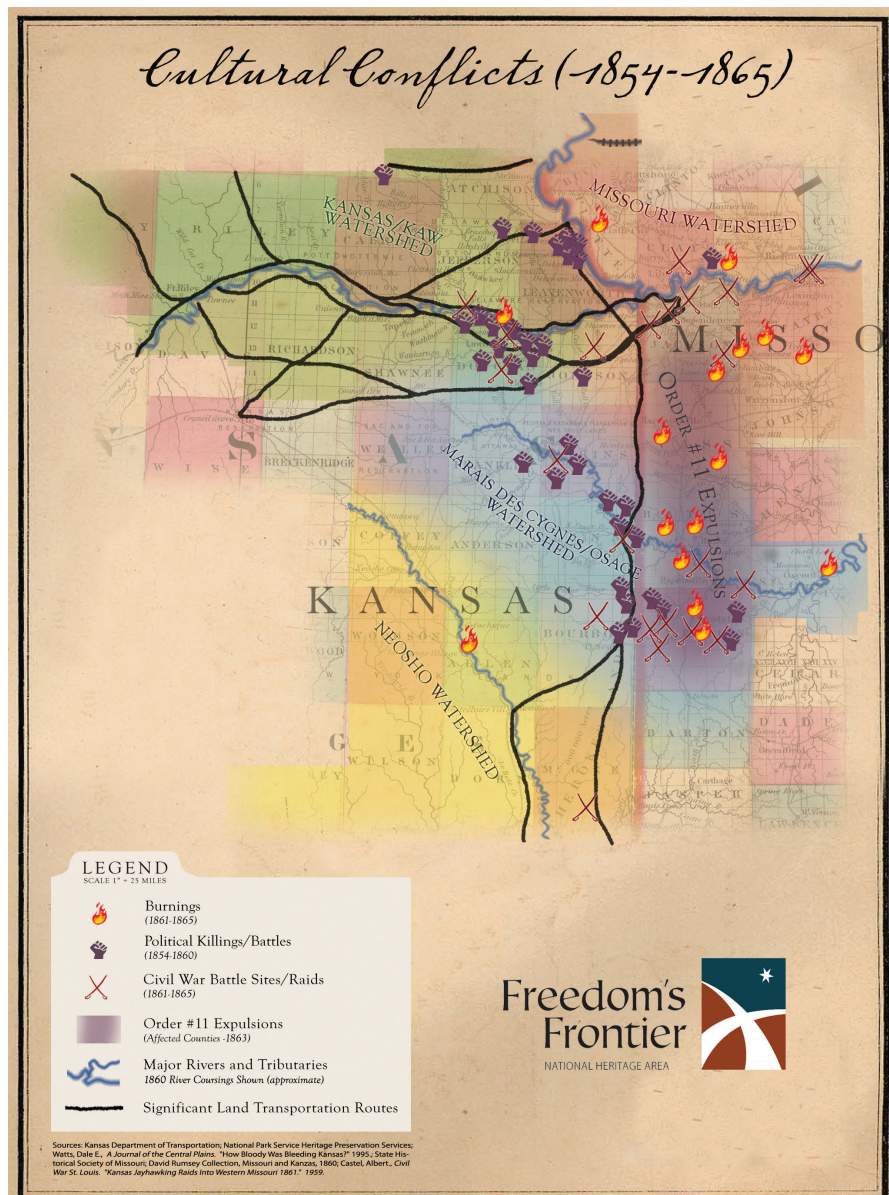
Freedom's Frontier is a “story ecosystem.” The power of the stories does not arise from a specific place or point in time, but is formed by an understanding of how the area's landscapes, individual stories, and perspectives were connected.



Stretching over four river valleys and parts of two states, the region was the epicenter of conflicts, partly stemming from the Missouri Compromise and westward expansion, that defined American values and the struggles to achieve them. The repeated, forced movement of Native American nations and the inspiring resilience of those nations in the face of oppression, the voluntary immigration of settlers along the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails, the abolition of slavery, the arduous treks and tenuous settlements of African-American “Exodusters,” and the final resolution of racial segregation in our public schools a century later—all of

these stories belong in the larger context of Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area.

Over two centuries and thousands of square miles, the landscape of rivers, plains, and forests had a critical effect on the location of trails, settlements, towns, and points where people with differing definitions of freedom would come into contact. By connecting our stories with the land, we help visitors and residents understand the importance of natural history and ecology in shaping human events. There are 55 sites with individual stories, but we have provided six of these historical sites for the reader within this Field Journal.



Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area
Go to www.freedomfrontier.org for more information and sites.

Frontier Trails Museum

The National Frontier Trails Museum in Independence, Missouri is a museum, interpretive center, and research library dedicated to telling the rich history of the three major western trails that left a lasting impact on American history: the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California Trails. Independence was the principal starting point for all three.

An award-winning film gives an excellent historical overview. Introductory exhibits showcase the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the fur trappers who followed them to explore and map the West. Other museum exhibits use murals, covered wagons, trail artifacts, and actual diary quotes to portray the excitement, expectations, hardships, adventures, dangers, and perseverance that were part of the trail experience. In the hands-on activity room, kids can enjoy packing a miniature wagon for a journey.

The Santa Fe Trail, begun in 1821, was an overland foreign trade route between Missouri and Mexico, with thousands of freight wagons carrying millions of dollars of goods on the trail for five decades until the expansion of the railroads.

The Oregon and California Trails were primarily migration routes for people who wanted to establish new homes on the Pacific coast. Free, rich farmland in Oregon and the discovery of gold in California spurred hundreds of thousands of people to make the difficult trip to their “Promised Land.”

The museum also has the largest public research library in the nation focused on the overland trails, with over 3,600 first person accounts. Nearby, visitors can hike a walking trail and view grass covered wagon ruts, or “swales,” worn into the earth 175 years ago. www.nationalfrontiertrails.org.



OREGON TRAIL
Kansas State Historical Society

Mt. Mitchell Heritage Prairie



MT. MITCHELL
Anne Gagel
Courtesy of Mount Mitchell Prairie Guards

A memorial prairie park has been created that ties Wabaunsee County to one of the most dramatic and critical chapters of American history, the prelude to the Civil War known as “Bleeding Kansas.”

This 45-acre hilltop prairie is located three miles south of Wamego on

Mitchell Prairie Lane, south of the junction of highways K-18 and K-99.

The park is dedicated to Captain William Mitchell and the Connecticut Kansas Colony. This famous company of New England emigrants came to Kansas in April of 1856 to assure the territory’s entry into the Union as a free state. They became known as the “Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony” because of the notoriety of their departure from the East armed with Sharps rifles and Bibles.

Walking trails allow visitors to experience this tallgrass prairie remnant of remarkable biological diversity with its stunning views of the Kaw River valley.

A military road called the “nearest and best route between Ft. Riley and the Eastern part of Kansas” descended from the Flint Hills uplands into the river valley on the east flank of Mt. Mitchell. John Fremont used this route in his 1843 expedition to the west. Ruts from that trail can still be seen today in the northeast corner of the property. Between 1857 and 1860, fugitive slaves used this road on their journey to freedom in Canada. This heritage site has been created through the efforts of the Mt. Mitchell Prairie Guards and Audubon of Kansas.

www.mountmitchellprairie.org

The Burnt District Monument

Citizens living near the Missouri/Kansas border during the Civil War too often found the violence to be personal, unexpected, and unjust: a war on civilians.

Four days after Quantrill's raid on Lawrence, Kansas, Brigadier General Thomas Ewing issued Order Number 11 on August 25, 1863. The order mandated the complete evacuation within 15 days of the civilian population of Jackson, Cass, Bates and northern Vernon counties with the exception of a few urban areas where those of proven loyalty could remain. The objective was to create a neutral zone to reduce the violence and bloodshed.

Under a sweltering September sun and clouds of dust, some 20,000 residents began their exodus. The roads were filled mostly with women, children, and old men. The good horses, wagons, and buggies had already been stolen by Kansas "redlegs" and jayhawkers, Federal soldiers, or southern bushwhackers. So, most refugees walked or led old wagons.

Federal units unleashed a whirlwind of violence, plunder, and destruction not to be forgotten resulting in the leveling of 2,200 square miles, the burning of at least 2,000 homes, and the murder of countless men.

Near the end of the war, a Kansas businessman traveling from Kansas City to



BURNT DISTRICT
BACK HOME, APRIL 1865
Cass County Historical Society

Pleasant Hill noted: "Now and then you could see a lone house, but as far as the eye could reach in every direction you could see lone chimneys standing singly and in pairs, all that was left of good homesteads." This was how the region gained its name "The Burnt District."

The Battle of Black Jack

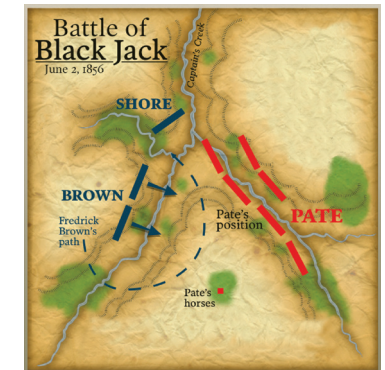
The Battle of Black Jack took place in southeastern Douglas County on June 2, 1856. Though not a large battle by Civil War standards, it was the first time that two armed militias on opposing sides of slavery fought in open battle.

The Free State forces, led by John Brown and Samuel Shore, attacked those of Henry Clay Pate at the headwaters of Captain's Creek. This culminated a series of violent events that had occurred earlier. On May 21st, Proslavery militias from Missouri sacked the Free-State town of Lawrence. It was burned to the ground and all the newspaper presses smashed. In retaliation, Brown led the Pottawatomie Massacre near present-day Lane, Kansas, which resulted in the killing of five Proslavery men on May 24-25.

Pate set out to capture Brown. As Pate marauded through the countryside near Palmyra, now Baldwin City, he was surprised by Brown and Shore at his encampment. After a three-hour gunfight, Pate surrendered.

Though outnumbered by Missouri opponents, Brown was able to convince Pate that he was surrounded by a larger force. Pate also believed that re-enforcements for Brown were on the way from Lawrence. Pate's forces were taken prisoner. But two days later, dragoons from Ft. Leavenworth, under the command of Col. Edwin Vose Sumner and Lt. J.E.B. Stuart, released Brown's prisoners.

Among the war souvenirs Brown kept was Pate's Bowie knife. He later used this as the model for the 1000 pikes he intended as arms for the freed slaves after the Harpers Ferry Raid.



BATTLE OF BLACK JACK
Lawrence Journal World

Constitution Hall - Lecompton



CONSTITUTION HALL -
LECOMPTON
Margaret Whittemore

Constitution Hall, the oldest wood-frame building remaining in Kansas today, has stood for 154 years in the historic city of Lecompton, the official capital of Kansas Territory from 1855 to 1861. Constitution Hall was the site of significant and important events in American as well as territorial Kansas economic and political history.

Douglas County Sheriff Samuel J. Jones built Constitution Hall in late

1856 as a private business venture. The first floor served as the federal land office in the territory where hundreds of land-hungry settlers filed their claims for new Kansas lands. More importantly, it was here in 1857 that proslavery delegates to the Lecompton Constitutional Convention convened on the second floor, and drafted an unpopular, divisive slave state constitution for Kansas. Although this document was ultimately rejected by Kansas voters, it was the cause of extreme and rancorous national debate.

The Lecompton controversy splintered the national Democratic Party into southern and northern wings, catapulted Abraham Lincoln onto the national political stage and into the White House, and hastened the Civil War. By 1861 and statehood for Kansas, Lecompton was abandoned by the new government in favor of the Free-state capital of Topeka. The building continued to be used by the public in a variety of ways.

In 1974, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated Constitution Hall as a National Historic Landmark, and, in 1986, the Kansas State Historical Society acquired the building as a state historic site. It opened to the public as a museum on June 24, 1995.

Constitution Hall-Topeka

Just a year after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, 40 Free-staters met for three weeks beginning Oct. 23, 1855. Topeka was barely a year old with a population of 350. These delegates wrote the Topeka Constitution in hopes of Congressional approval. The result would be immediate Kansas statehood which would overrule the proslavery territorial legislature.

The Topeka Constitution's line, "There shall be no slavery in this state," was a bold statement considering that the proslavery movement 17 miles away in Lecompton had made it illegal to write or to say anything opposing slavery.

Two of the most influential delegates to the Topeka Constitutional Convention were Charles Robinson, who would become the first Kansas governor, and James Lane, who would become the first U.S. senator. Cyrus K. Holliday, Topeka's founder, was another delegate.

When the Topeka Constitution was submitted to Congress, it was passed in the House of Representatives. However, proslavery members of the Senate attempted to block voting to prevent passage. The Topeka Constitution with subsequent national press sent a powerful message that the Free-State cause would eventually triumph. It did on January 29, 1861. Kansas entered the Union as a free state.

Topeka's Constitution Hall, originally a free-standing building, was added onto and became known as State Row, housing government offices until a move to the east wing of the Kansas Statehouse.

Efforts are underway to restore Constitution Hall in Topeka. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is recognized as a site important to the Underground Railroad by the National Park Service Network to Freedom program.



CONSTITUTION HALL-TOPEKA
Detail from mural
by Cally Krallman and volunteers