

Classical Place-Names In Kansas

by Karl Rosen

As a linguist who is in the present instance trying to discover history, or reconstruct it, I feel a bit out of place in the present company, for my interest is rather to dispel than preserve folklore. On the other hand the naming practises of a people certainly mirror their spirit and interests, and hence my interests have a common meeting ground with yours.

The choice of classical names, for people as well as places, was part of the spirit of the nineteenth century in the United States. There is nothing unusual about their appearance in Kansas. How they got here will come out in the sequel.

This afternoon I shall be giving you a progress report on my investigation into the place-names of classical origin or inspiration in the state of Kansas. It would be pleasant if one could simply enumerate a number of semantic categories of names, give a list or count of each type, and say "Done!" But this is not fully possible at the present time.

My collections—compiled essentially from the late Robert W. Baughman's book *Kansas Post Offices* (Topeka, 1961)—include roughly 300 names that (a) are attested Latin or Greek words; (b) were obviously formed in post-Classical and even modern times in more or less successful imitation of Latin and Greek; or (c) may possibly have been attempts at giving a name a classical flavor, but so faintly show classical inspiration that no definite statement about any one of them can be made unless we should find out exactly who thought up the name and why. Among such problematic names are those ending in *-a*, that look like stylish girls' names of a century ago, e.g. *Fleta*, *Florena*, *Vanora*, and as such are probably names taken from early residents and no more classical in their intended effect than certain other names that I shall cite presently—names that did exist in Latin and Greek but whose ultimate origin is beside the point. I suspect that when all of the problematic names have been eliminated the number of classical names in Kansas will be below 200.

Perhaps the group of names with the most classical aura is that of figures of mythology and legend. At the moment there appear to be over 30 names ranging from *Achilles* to *Zephyr*. Interesting are the

doublets *Alcyone* and *Halcyon*, *Hesper* and *Vesper*. There have been three *Auroras*, as least one of which is supposed to be named after the Illinois city and so must have been chosen for its evocation of the recent past of some settler rather than of the distant past. Not only is there a *Vesta* (who for all we know was someone's wife or daughter and not the Roman goddess of the hearth) but there is also a unique *Kalvesta*, which we are told has Greek *kalos* "beautiful, good" prefixed.

It is not surprising that in a state where agriculture is the number one industry there are 20 odd names in a category I call "agriculture, plants, and animal husbandry." These names, too, range from *A* to *Z*, specifically from *Agricola* to *Zeandale*. The *Agricola* of Kansas has been found to be the first town with this name in the United States (1876). *Agricola*, of course, is the "farmer" in Latin. *Zeandale* (1857) is a hybrid: *-dale* was suffixed to *zea*, the name of a genus of grasses, including *zea mays*, Indian corn; *zea* goes back to Greek *zea*, *aeia*, the name of some types of grain; its use in a place name seems unique to Kansas. A few other words in this group are *Bosland* ("Cow-land"), *Pastura*, and *Spica* ("ear of grain"). My favorite is *Aroma*, which probably does *not* refer to the barnyard as one might suspect initially (Greek did have an *aroma* "aromatic spice" which lies behind English *aroma*) but is more likely Greek *aroma* "arable land."

Names of historical personages may number as many as 30. They also range from *A* to *Z*: *Adrian* to *Zenobia*. Among them are *Cato*, *Flavius*, *Homer*, *Plato*, *Pliny*, *Tully*, and *Virgil*. Some of these must simply repeat town names back east. Others may have been taken from the given names of settlers and may eventually have to be so groups. A name worth dwelling on is *Bucyrus*. It and all the other towns of the same name in the United States must repeat the name of *Bucyrus*, Ohio. According to William D. Overman in his *Ohio Town Names* (1958 ed., p. 20) this town was named about 1820 and refers either to a *Busiris* of ancient Egypt, which I strongly doubt, or contains the name of "Cyrus the Persian" with the prefix *Bu-* "beautiful," referring to the countryside. Well, perhaps the name Cyrus cannot be disputed, but *Bu-* does not mean "beautiful" in Greek or Latin; rather Greek *bou-* as a prefix means "huge, monstrous" and is the word for "cow" or "ox" cognate with Latin *bos*. I suspect that *Bucyrus* was a valiant attempt at a Greek-sounding name, and when I Hellenize it to *Boukyros* it feels as Greek as can be—but no such Greek word ever existed. Or can *Bu-* be simply a respelling of the first syllable of *beautiful*!

About 40 places in Kansas bear names of cities and countries of the ancient world, or neo-Latin names for locations in the Old World. There have been 3 *Albions* (*Albion* seeming an attempt of the Romans to reproduce a native name for Britain); 2 *Athens*, 2 *Romes*, 2 *Syracuses*, Zenobia's *Palmyra*, and other ancient cities; an *Arcadia* and a *New Arcadia*, 2 *Atticas*, a *Laconia* and a *Sparta*; an *Ilion* and a *Troy*. *Belgica*, *New Cambria*, *Germania*, *Helvetia*, *Italia*, and *Scandia* (earlier *New Scandinavia*) are either ancient or medieval Latin; they and others like them tell us as a group that classical place-names were stylish when Kansas was being settled and tell us individually where their principal founders had come from. Of uncertain origin is *Media* (1878), which may be the land of Medes, or the Pennsylvania city, or a neo-classical coinage, since the settlement was established at a point on a railroad midway between Lawrence and Ottawa. Or else, it has been suggested to me, it prefigures the recent watchword of Kansas "Midway USA!"

Two names of ancient places other than political units are found: *Aetna*, which must be of ancient inspiration because of the *Ae*-spelling, and *Tempe*.

Two letters of the Greek alphabet are found: *Alpha* and *Delta*.

There are about a dozen names that seem to have geographical and topographical significance, e.g. 2 *Acemes* (though figurative use is possible), 3 *Akrons* (I wonder how many were actually on a hill-top), 3 instances of *Oasis*, a *Montana*, a *Fontana*, and a surprising *Terra Heights*. I should note that the same name may have been used more than once as settlements and post offices failed.

Nine terms, more or less, of astronomy and meteorology appear, overlapping with other categories. *Aurora* (3 instances), *Alcyone* and *Halcyon*, *Hesper* and *Vesper*, and *Zephyr* have already been mentioned. *Comet* may be the ordinary English word, and so may *Zenith*; the two *Stellas* may be personal names.

A half-dozen verbs appear: *Amo*, *Cresco* (three times), *Fiat*, *Ovo* (unless it's an egg), *Scio* (twice)—these from Latin. Greek *Eureka* is also found. These names are known from other states, as are just about all the names I have been discussing.

There are a good number of names that defy classification. Among these are *Agenda*, *Angelus*, *Concordia*, *Ego*, *Emporia*, *Excelsior*, *Museum*, *Plexus*, *Superior*, and *Xenia*. The origin of some is known; all must have an interesting history.

Somewhat problematic are names derived from minerals, when these are the usual English words, e.g. *Carbon*, *Carbondale* (twice),

Gypsum, Niter, Radium, Silica (twice). *Argentine* looks like a recent neo-classical coinage; *Petrolia*, with its final *-ia*, is one for sure.

There are a large number of neoclassical coinages, some old and some recent. Names like *America, Americus, Atlanta, Columbia, Columbus, Georgia*, and even *Utopia* came to Kansas from elsewhere. Most interesting to me are names formed by adding *-ia* to a family name, e.g. *Dentonia, Padonia, Wirtonia* (probably). These follow closely the Roman pattern of naming a place after the people who lived there: the *Galli* were said to live in *Gallia*, for example, and the *Germani* in *Germania*. I am endlessly amused by the fantastic *Nonchalanta* and *Violenta*, which are based on ordinary English words (in turn borrowed from French), though I must add that the latter may alternatively be taken from the name of a character in Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well*, for literary allusions are a source of Kansas names. *Indianapolis* and *Minneapolis* appear to be transplanted; *Centropolis* may be a local coinage and *Kanopolis* must be. *Polis* was, of course, the Greek word for "city."

The ultimate in names in *-polis* occurs in Kansas, namely *Opolis* (the *O-* is pronounced like the name of the letter). I think I can explain this name. In 1868 J. L. Davis and Ebenezer B. Hoyt founded a town in Crawford County just on the Missouri line, calling it *State Line* (*Stateline*). Its postoffice was called *Steven(s)town* after Leonard G. Stevens, the first postmaster. After the railroad came through in 1876 the town was resurveyed by the founders, and it got its new name in 1877. On 4 June of that year the post office was changed from *Steven(s)town* to *Olopolis*, and on 5 July to *Opolis*. The postmaster at the time of these changes was John H. Ozburn (Osborn, Ozburn). I venture to say that *Opolis* was derived from the postmaster's name (taking its initial letter) just as *Steven(s)town* had been, and that the city got its name from the new post office. But I am bothered by *Olopolis*, in case that it did not contain an erroneous dittography, i.e. an extra *ol* or *lo*, that was quickly corrected. Since Greek *holos* means "whole, entire," *Olopolis* could conceivably be poor Greek for "big city," coined by cofounder Hoyt, who had taken the classical course at Knox College in Illinois; but why it should have been shortened to *Opolis* after one month I cannot say. And so I prefer the first explanation, although I must admit I don't know why the town should have been renamed for the post office.

Just one week before the scheduled delivery of this paper I had for a few moments thought that further evidence had turned up supporting my explanation of *Opolis*. John Fydjord, in his new volume *Kansas Place-Names*, which had only then become avail-

able to me, cites an *Ospolix* as the short-lived predecessor of *Opolis*. It looked to me as if the first *two* letters of the postmaster's name had been used. But neither of Fydjord's cited sources mentions any form other than *Opolis*; nor does he comment on the *Olopolis* that appears several times in Baughman's lists. Since Fydjord simply doesn't say where he found *Ospolix*, the matter must continue uncertain until the discrepancy between it and *Olopolis* can be cleared up.

I have postponed until now mentioning some names that are of ultimate classical origin but have no classical reference as they are used in Kansas. Towns named after known settlers are *Alexander*, *Augusta*, *Delia*, one *Letitia*, *Sylvia*. *Eudora* is named after an Indian girl whose father was Pasc(h)al (Pascel) Fish. *Victoria* was founded by some *Englishmen who decided to honor their queen*. Indian girl whose father was Pasc(h)al (Pascel) Fish. *Victoria* was founded by some Englishmen who decided to honor their queen. The best-known *Ulysses* is the seat of *Grant County*. *Horace* and *Tribune* look so Latin, but, alas, they are side-by-side in Greeley County, commemorating the great journalist, who made a famous trip through Kansas, and his newspaper. Nonclassical *Whitelaw*, a few miles away, recalls his associate, Whitelaw Reid. It has even been claimed that nearby *Hector* preserves the name of Greeley's dog! Thus we see that although it may be disputed just how deeply the spirit of things classical has affected Kansas, Horace Greeley has certainly become part of the folklore of Kansas. And on this note I shall close.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

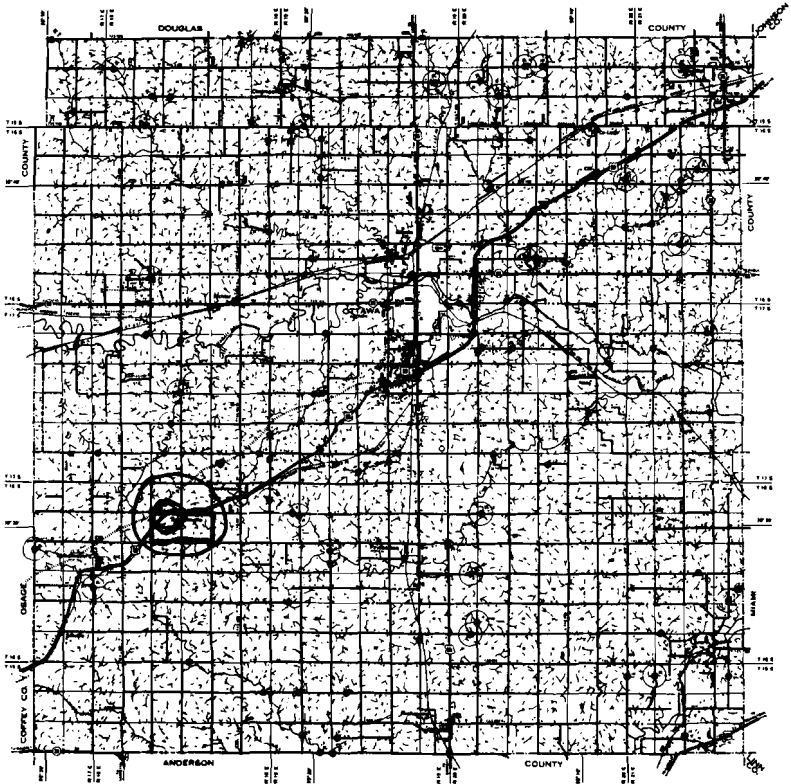
LISSA McQUIN, a sophomore at Emporia Kansas State College, is a French major with a minor in History and is working toward a career as an interpreter.

BEVERLY MAYROSE is a graduate of Benedictine College and the 1975 winner of that school's Jean Mabillon Award for excellence in History. Ms. Mayrose is presently a graduate assistant at the University of Kansas.

KARL ROSEN is a native of Boston, Massachusetts. He received his A.B. in Linguistics and Romance Languages at Harvard College. He has an M.A. and Ph.D. in Linguistics from Yale University. Formerly Instructor in French, Spanish, and German at Bates College (Lewiston, Maine), and Instructor in Romance Languages at Rutgers University (New Brunswick, New Jersey), he is presently Assistant Professor of Classics and Linguistics at the University of Kansas. In addition to Kansas place-names his current research interests are in the writings of the Italian humanist Politian and in the preparation of materials for computer-assisted instruction in Latin.

APPENDIX I

Map showing location of Ransomville and the sections Cap Ransom first leased when coming to this area. (Courtesy of Ransom Family)



APPENDIX II

Lease telling about the agreement between Lizzie Richards and H. G. Ransom.
(Courtesy of Ransom Family)

WILLIAM H. SCHOFIELD,
President.

JAMES F. DANE,
Treasurer.

Kansas City, Burlington and Santa Fe Railway Co.

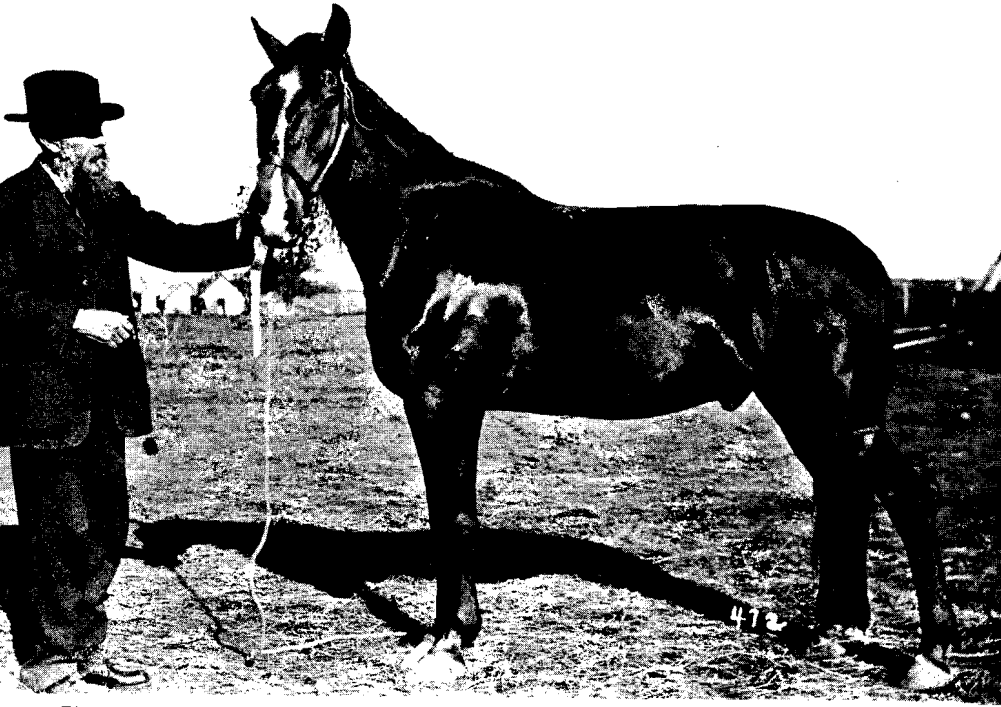
Williamsburg, Tenn. May 25 1878

Agreement entered into this twenty fifth day
of May 1878 between Lizzie M. Richards of
Chicago Ill. and James H. Ransom of Williamsburg
Tenn. said Lizzie M. Richards's Lessee to H. G.
Ransom the Coal Tract known as the Short &
Long Tract situated on Sections 7 and 8 in
Franklin Co near Mtburg for the purpose of taking
out coal and shipping at one dollar per
ton for all taken in - taken from said land
also the right to strip for coal on said land
at or near where shipping has been done.
The Royalty for shipping coal is to be one half
cent per bushel and it is expected that
if the RR rates are satisfactory & the said
Ransom will take out four to seven thousand
Cords of coal during the coming coal
season ending May 1 1879

The Royalty to be paid Monthly on the 15th
for the preceding month coal taken was
85th to be as follows

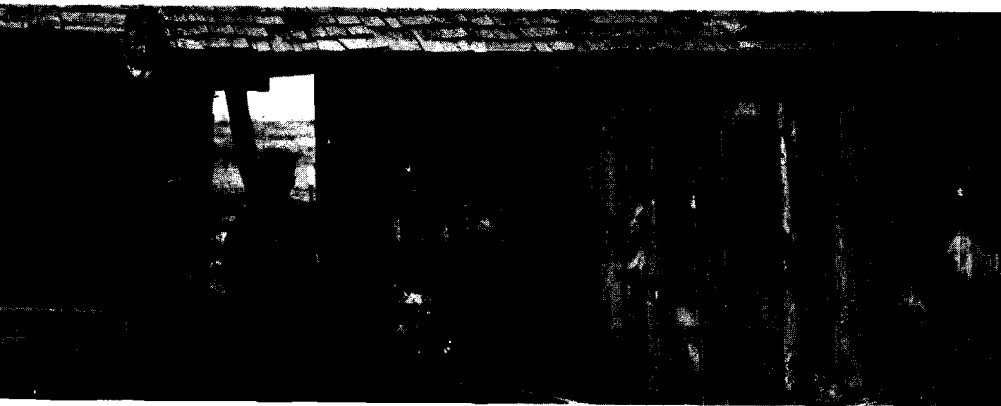
James F. Dane Trustee
for Lizzie M. Richards

APPENDIX III



Picture 1

H. G. ("Cap") Ransom with one of Ransomville's horses. (Courtesy of Ransom family)



Picture 2

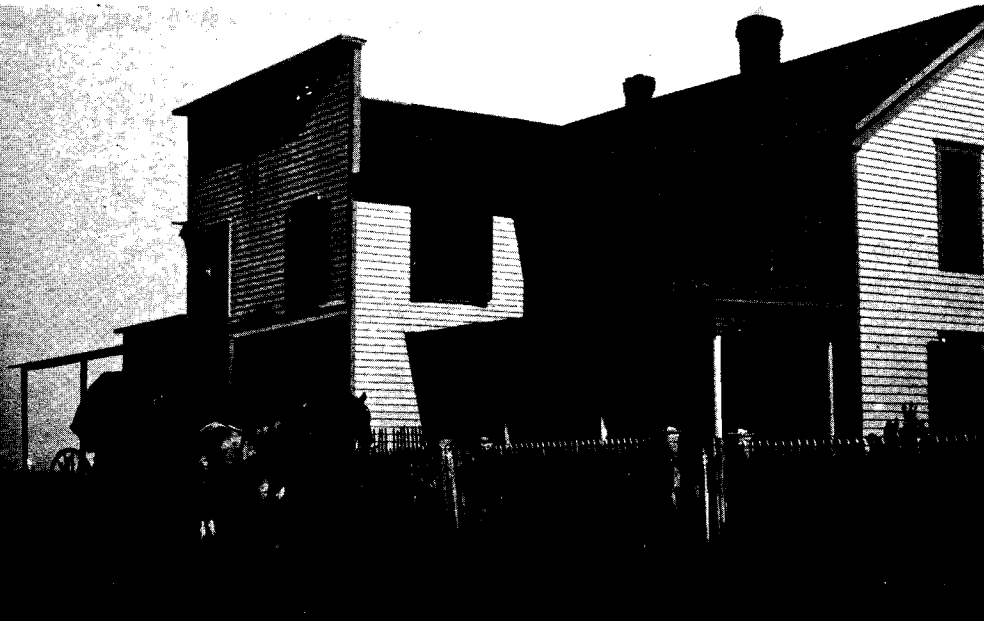
One of the coal mines back when it was in operation. (Picture courtesy of Ransom family)

APPENDIX IV



Picture 3

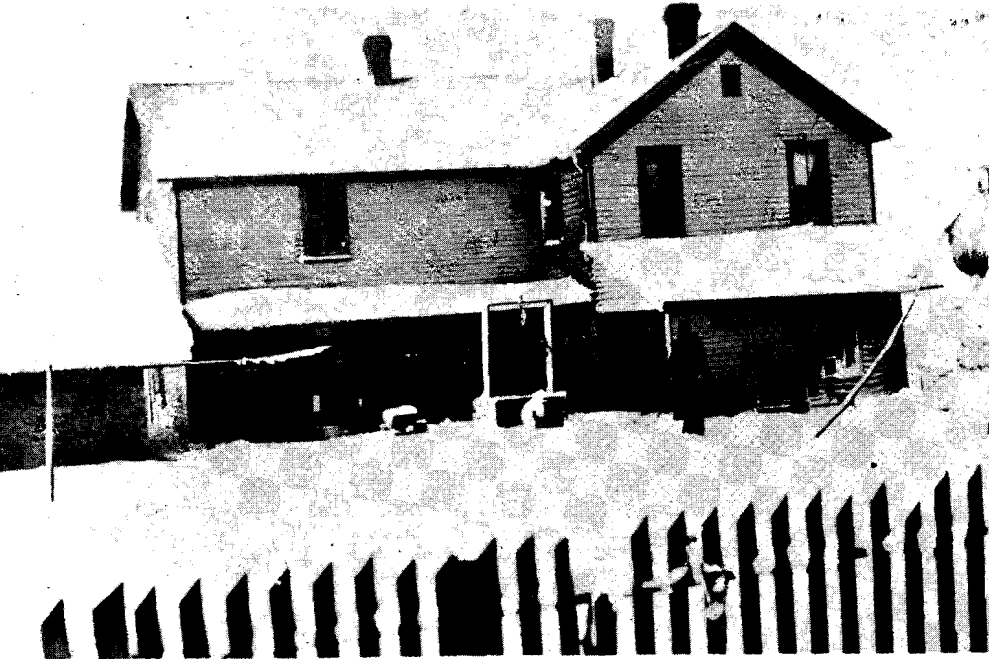
One of the miner's homes. Now used as a garage. A few of these houses are still being used.



Picture 4

The General Store and Post Office at Ransomville. (Courtesy of Ransom family)

APPENDIX V



Picture 5: The back of the General Store and Post Office.



Picture 6: Full picture of store and Post Office. (Pictures courtesy of Ransom family)

APPENDIX VI



Picture 7: Post Office and General Store as seen today.



Picture 8: Post Office and General Store as seen today from front.



Picture 9: New grain bin built when Cap Ransom started buying and selling grain. (Picture courtesy of Ransom family)

APPENDIX VII



Picture 10: All of the work was done on the farm by horse and wagon. (Picture courtesy of Ransom family)



Picture 11: To place the hay in the hay loft, a hook and pulley were used. In this picture the hook is in the hay and the men are getting ready to pull the rope in order to raise the hay to the loft. (Picture courtesy of Ransom family)

APPENDIX VIII



Picture 12



Picture 13



Picture 14



Picture 15

Pictures 12, 13, 14, and 15: All pictures of the new Ransom home built in 1905.
(Pictures courtesy of Ransom family)

APPENDIX IX



Picture 16: The Ransom home built in 1905 as it is seen today.



Picture 17: A. L. Cook, the wealthiest man in Franklin County at this time. Donated gift to the Ottawa hospital in Ransom's name. (Picture courtesy of Ransom family)

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 - Vol. 6, No. 2, *The Potawatomes of Kansas*.
 - Vol. 6, No. 3, *The Kickapoos of Kansas*.
 - Vol. 6, No. 4, *The Iowas, Sac and Foxes of Kansas*.
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Vol. 3, No. 1, *Kansans Talk Tall*, February, 1959.

Vol. 4, No. 1, *Geography and Weather of Kansas*, February, 1960; Vol. 4, No. 2, *Fencing the Prairies*, May, 1960; Vol. 4, No. 3, *Free Range and Fencing*, September, 1960; Vol. 4, No. 4, *Some Place Names of Kansas*, November, 1960.

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Vol. 6, No. 1, *The Kansa Indians*, February, 1962; Vol. 6, No. 2, *The Potawatomes of Kansas*, May, 1962; Vol. 6, No. 3, *The Kickapoos of Kansas*, September, 1962; Vol. 6, No. 4, *The Iowas, Sac and Foxes of Kansas*, November, 1962.

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