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**The Kansan Ethos  
in the  
Last Three Decades  
of the  
Nineteenth Century**

by

**Patricia R. Spillman**

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*The Emporia State Research Studies*

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
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Patrick H. Visser

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## The Kansan Ethos in the Last Three Decades of the Nineteenth Century

by

Patricia R. Spillman\*

The character and customs common to a group of people that distinguish them from other groups constitute their Ethos. In this paper an attempt has been made to identify such commonalities in the beliefs, ideas, attitudes, principles, values, and practices of Kansans in the three decades of the 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's.

The late nineteenth-century Kansan was a product of both his geographical and cultural environments. His state had been carved from land long thought to be desert. The Missouri Bluffs had been described in the earlier part of the century as a "shore at the termination of a vast ocean desert nearly one thousand miles in breadth, which it was proposed to transverse, if at all, with caravans of camels and which interposed a final barrier to the establishment of any large commercial, agricultural, or even pastoral activities."<sup>1</sup> By the 1870's, the Great American Desert Myth had been destroyed as real grain replaced the imagined sand. However, the drouth of 1859-60 for a time made "desert" seem plausible again. One-third of the people left, while others delayed their coming to Kansas.<sup>2</sup> In the three decades covered in this study, problems did arise intermittently: grasshoppers, blizzards, dry years, Indian raids, and financial panics. But, there was progress, also, brought about by fine growing weather, abundant crops, and increasing market potential as the railroads advanced across the plains.

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Spearman, "The Great American Desert," *Harpers* (July, 1888), 232.

<sup>2</sup>Anna E. Arnold, *A History of Kansas* (Topeka, 1931, revised; original printing, 1914), 106-07.

An Easterner observed that the weather was the main topic of conversation in Kansas. He experienced hot days and was surprised at the cool nights. He also observed that the farm animals pastured without shelter all winter and that ploughing could be done in mid-winter. He recognized that in Kansas one could go through "all zones and seasons" in a single day. He marveled at the equanimity of Kansans regarding a wind that blew constantly hard enough to make walking difficult and chimneys fall. He used all of the following descriptions for the state: sunny, windy, drouthy, and "also fertile, beautiful Kansas."<sup>3</sup>

A New Yorker, who had spent considerable time in Kansas, reported in *The Bird City Frontiersman* of October 13, 1886, that there were ten months of growing and harvesting weather in the state, leaving two months, January and February, to rest and prepare for Spring work.

This need for proper growing conditions led to great interest among Kansans in rainfall. Because of periodic dry years in Kansas, there developed a number of theories regarding what made rain fall. The *Wichita Eagle* of October 16, 1896, carried an item stating that forests produced moisture cycles and since 1880, the area that became Kansas had experienced a cycle of nineteen years of moisture followed by three years of deficient rainfall. Other theories were based on the idea that man can change the climate. One asserted that the cultivation of trees brought rain (one justification for the Timber & Stone Act) and to destroy trees would bring drouth; another established a relationship between telegraph wires and rainfall; yet another specified that for every yard of steel rail, one gallon of water was drawn from heaven per year. Finally, there was the theory that rain followed the breaking of the sod because it absorbed water rather than shed it as it did when the sod was unbroken.<sup>4</sup> The problem was put very succinctly by a railroad publicity man who indicated that the moisture was "up there" and the trick was to get it down, whatever the means, which could, he inferred, include cannons.<sup>5</sup>

In 1886, one writer, in an article entitled "Progress of Kansas," proposed that the soil was even more fertile in the prairie western half of the state than in the forested eastern half. He explained that the science of meteorology supported the reality of climate changes

<sup>3</sup>M. H. Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas Seen with Eastern Eyes," *Atlantic Monthly*, 56 (July, 1885), 106-08.

<sup>4</sup>Spearman, "Great American Desert," 244.

<sup>5</sup>David M. Emmons, "Richard Smith Elliott, Kansas Promoter," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 36 (1970), 393.

and that as Kansas skies changed, the Kansas earth changed and the hard, trampled buffalo pastures had been transformed into "mellow acres with high and waving grass" ready for plow and reaper.<sup>6</sup> For whatever the reason, the importance of moisture was such that *The Great Bend Register* with a touch of religious thanksgiving recorded in its issue of October 19, 1876, "Gently the Rain Falleth."

The climate of Kansas was also less than beneficent, in that it bred the ugliness of grasshoppers, the horror of blizzard deaths, and financial disasters often related to drouth. The first devastated parts of Kansas in 1874, the second killed people and animals in 1886, the third came at various times during the three decades.<sup>7</sup>

Prairie fires, even in their beauty-by-night, were feared, and Kansans were warned to carry matches in their trips across these grasslands so they could burn a safety island for themselves if needed.<sup>8</sup> There were dangers from high waters, from tornadoes, and from snakes. These prompted Anna Webber, a schoolteacher, to comment, "Oh, dear, this is a hard place to live, this Kansas is. I wonder what will come of us anyway!" Then she noted it was July 26 (1881), and that she was near freezing!<sup>9</sup> A French worker traveling across Kansas observed, "the North wind freezes and the South wind burns."<sup>10</sup>

Even though a schoolboy in Barber County defined a farm as "a tract of land covered by a mortgage and bounded by a barbed wire fence,"<sup>11</sup> Kansas farmers were persevering and cautiously optimistic as described in an article about the picturesqueness of Kansas farming: "everywhere is eagerness, energy, and urgent action, for time is precious and foul weather may intervene; each stroke counts, each step is triumph."<sup>12</sup>

Observers have continually drawn conclusions regarding the contributions of Kansas geography to the character of Kansans. The geography of Kansas, its location, its climate, and its terrain gave Kansans an awareness of their natural surroundings and a unique sensitivity to its potential for both help and hindrance in their rela-

<sup>6</sup>John A. Martin, "The Progress of Kansas," *North American Review*, 142 (April 1886), 854.

<sup>7</sup>Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas: A Land of Contrasts* (Saint Charles, Mo., 1974), 131-34; Anna E. Bingham, "The Grasshopper Plague," in *The Heritage of Kansas*, ed. Everett Rich (Lawrence, 1960), 149-50.

<sup>8</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 106; for a summary description of a contemporary prairie-fire account, see William H. Seiler, "Magazine Writers Look at Kansas, 1854-1904," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 38 (1972), 10-11.

<sup>9</sup>Lila Garatt Scrimsher, ed., "The Dairy of Anna Webber: Early Day Teacher of Mitchell County," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 38 (1972), 328.

<sup>10</sup>Clyde Thogmartin, "Prosper Jacotot: A French Worker Looks at Kansas in 1876-1877," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 41 (1975), 17.

<sup>11</sup>*Oxford Register* (Sumner County), October 16, 1896.

<sup>12</sup>Henry King, "Picturesque Features of Kansas Farming," *Scribner's Monthly*, 19 (November, 1879), 135.

tionship to it. On the positive side, Kansas was a land of gorgeous sunsets and natural beauty leading Senator Ingalls to describe it poetically as "Smoky Waters" because of the "blue and pensive haze which in autumn dims the recesses of the forests, the hollows of the hills, and broods above the placid streams like a covenant of peace."<sup>13</sup>

Kenneth Davis developed a kind of geo-theological interpretation from this people-nature relationship in Kansas. He contended that the roots of a Kansan's religion lay in his being a sky-watcher and thus more conscious of the eternal. Weather disasters were then considered by him as the voice and actions of an "Angry God" punishing the sinner who had yielded to the temptations of the Devil. Davis concluded that because of this, Kansans developed a greater reverence for eternal truths, a greater concern for the basics of life and behavior, a strong and strict moral sense, a genuine respect for others, a careful regard for the law, and a greater degree of human warmth, generosity, kindness, and decency.<sup>14</sup>

A less ponderous interpretation of the role of geography was proposed by an author who noted that in new counties of Kansas, fences were being discarded. He concluded from this that the right-angled roads served as boundaries and were evidence of the cheerfulness and confidence of Kansans who, he stated, must not lack self-respect since they kept their hogs from running at large in spite of the lack of fences.<sup>15</sup>

Among other historians who assigned specific influences of Kansas geography on the Kansan Ethos were Carl Becker and James Malin. Becker pointed out that the superior climate of Kansas fortified the Kansan more than any other factor against the need for ale. He also stated that the conditions in Kansas not only gave Kansans the characteristics of frontiersmen, earlier delineated by Turner, but also had added one: the belief that nothing was too much to endure with good humor, resulting in their ability to conform when necessary, but resist with passion when merited.<sup>16</sup>

According to Roy Nichols, Malin indicated the influences that shaped Kansas were the transportation revolution of the nineteenth century, the rounding out of the continental land mass of the United States, and the location of the state with a boundary that lay be-

<sup>13</sup>John James Ingalls, "Kansas—1541-1891," *Harpers*, 86 (April, 1893), 696.

<sup>14</sup>Kenneth Davis, *Kansas* (New York, 1976).

<sup>15</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 135.

<sup>16</sup>Carl Becker, "Kansas," in *Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics* (New York, 1935), 1-28; also reprinted in Rich, ed., *Heritage of Kansas*, 340-359.

tween forest and grassland, creating an environment both familiar and strange for those who faced it. This combination of time, space, and experience created in Kansans traces of confusion and instances of insecurity that led to emotional exaggeration and erratic behavior which made adjustment to the new environment more complicated and more difficult.<sup>17</sup>

The social environment also influenced the Kansan. The very act of moving to a frontier has been analyzed as an exercise in cultural shock with the consequent emotional disruption occasioned by being cut off from the familiar. This in turn led to a more equalitarian mix, a loneliness that sought assuagement in joining groups, and a tendency to substitute the legislation of morality for the restraints of tradition and customs from "back home."<sup>18</sup> Such was certainly true in the Kansas experience. In fact, Kansas was described as a state that became "an experiment station in the field of social science."<sup>19</sup>

Pierson in his study of mobility in the American Experience suggested that there were general categories of "pushes" that led people to leave where they were: voluntary escape, which he described as "one long series of Emancipation Proclamations" from religious, political, or military constrictions; individual's escape from personal mistakes and failures; and escape for the one or the many based on dissatisfaction with the way things were going, either the pace of change or the lack of it; and finally, the push-for excitement and pleasure which he described as the exchange of the pursuit of happiness for the happiness of pursuit!<sup>20</sup>

People came to Kansas to escape either group pressures or individual failures. The Exodusters left the South to get away from a social environment that threatened their future by limiting it. They wanted homes, food, clothes, and education for their children. They wanted the accepted minimum of the promise of the American Dream and felt they could not find it where they were, in a moral atmosphere still tainted by the nightmares of their past.<sup>21</sup>

Young Easterners came to Kansas to escape the barriers to social mobility resident in a society dominated by inherited wealth,

<sup>17</sup>Roy F. Nichols, "Kansas Historiography: The Technique of Cultural Analysis," *American Quarterly*, (1957), 86-87.

<sup>18</sup>George Wilson Pierson, "The Moving American," *Yale Review*, 44 (1954), 110-11.

<sup>19</sup>Becker, "Kansas," 27.

<sup>20</sup>Pierson, "Moving American," 106 ff.

<sup>21</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 137-38.

entrenched power, and an imposed class structure.<sup>22</sup> Other Easterners left because of financial failure and moved West to try to save whatever they had left. In fact, early emigrants from that area have been classified into two groups: "younger" and "older" with the latter leaving because of lack of success in business and politics.<sup>23</sup>

Orthodox Jews from Russia came to Kansas to escape the anti-semitic "May Laws" of 1882, which confined them to towns and burroughs, denied them property beyond, and forced them to observe the primacy of Christian Sundays and Holy Days by refusing them the right to transact business on those days.<sup>24</sup>

The Volga Germans left their homes to escape "Russianization," while the Mennonites left to escape the demands of the military which ran counter to their belief that one should love one's enemies, not kill them.<sup>25</sup>

The Swedish feared that their religious and cultural identity was endangered in the conflict between the State church and the pietist movement, and they, too, left to find a less threatening environment.<sup>26</sup>

There were also those who left their homes to come to Kansas to originate changes, while others came to influence changes already in the making. Certainly one of the most publicized "pushes" was the sense of mission held by New Englanders to make freedom for slaves a practical reality. The moral urge was enhanced by the inherent possibility of making the West like the East,<sup>27</sup> although Becker suggested that even though such people thought they came to fight oppression, in reality, they came for cheap land and a better life.<sup>28</sup> Even the Swedish came with the idea of doing a bit of missionary work among those they met.<sup>29</sup>

One writer suggested that a transplanted Englishman in New York left his city to come to Kansas because, as a Communist theorist in 1871, he could not talk about the tyranny of wealth unless he at least had a homestead to give him an identity with those he might

<sup>22</sup>J. W. Glead, "Is New York More Civilized than Kansas," *Forum* 17 (1894), 217-34.

<sup>23</sup>William E. Treadway, "The Gilded Age in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 40 (Spring, 1974), 2.

<sup>24</sup>James A. Rudin, "Beersheba, Kan.: God's Pure Air on Government Land," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 34 (Autumn, 1968), 282.

<sup>25</sup>Harley J. Stucky, "The German Element in Kansas," in *Kansas, the First Century*, ed. John D. Bright (4 vols.; New York, 1956), I, 334 ff.

<sup>26</sup>Emory Kempton Lindquist, "The Scandinavian Element in Kansas," in *Kansas the First Century*, ed. John B. Bright (4 vols.; New York, 1956), I, 309.

<sup>27</sup>Arnold, *Kansas*, 63 ff.

<sup>28</sup>Becker, "Kansas," 16-17.

<sup>29</sup>Lindquist, "Scandinavian Element," 309.

hope to convert. He had failed to convince the unemployed in New York that he had the answer.<sup>30</sup>

Individuals who had failed at home sought a second chance and left their older societies for a newer one. Spearman speculated in 1888 that it might be true of all pioneers that they were the "poor devils" of a community who left because they had to "strive again to make a stand in the battle of life."<sup>31</sup>

Further, this was a time when romanticism and religion contributed to increased mobility among people.<sup>32</sup> There were American wanderers who were described as exiles, absentees, and prodigals who because of "unexplainable unrest" came to Kansas.<sup>33</sup> They were among those who subscribed to the idea that "the American haven of eternal rest lies ever just a little further west."<sup>34</sup> Then, there were the young adventurers who acted on what Archibald MacLeish has since described as "America is West and the wind blowing," and those older about whom it was said that such a "Kansan would not care to go to heaven unless he could be guaranteed an ample range to the west of it."<sup>35</sup>

The pulls to Kansas were strong. The attractiveness of vast, open country,<sup>36</sup> and the belief that Kansas was a "Pot of Gold" not only from potential agricultural production, but even more from land speculation, especially in town lots.<sup>37</sup> The availability of cheap and fertile farmland was proposed by William Allen White as one of the pulls to Kansas, along with the desire to satisfy the longing to behave badly and to do so by gambling in land speculation which he described as the game of "squares and rectangles."<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the push or whatever the pull, there is justification in Pierson's observation that there was a "conservative drift" in such movements, according to evidence found in the Kansas experience. The European immigrants came to keep the best of their past intact, the New Englander came to keep some of the East intact in the West, and the Exoduster came to make the traditional rights of other citizens of his country his own. One of the characteristics then of the Kansan Ethos, its conservative strain, may be traced to the reasons

<sup>30</sup>Frederick Lockley, "A Kansas Settler," *Overland Monthly*, 7 (July, 1871), 23-24.

<sup>31</sup>Spearman, "Great American Desert," 233.

<sup>32</sup>Nichols, "Kansas Historiography," 87.

<sup>33</sup>*Kansas at the World's Fair*, Report of Kansas Board of World's Fair Managers, 1893 (Topeka, 1894).

<sup>34</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 101.

<sup>35</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 132.

<sup>36</sup>Noble L. Prentiss, *A History of Kansas* (Winfield, 1899), 127.

<sup>37</sup>Treadway, "Gilded Age," 2.

<sup>38</sup>William Allen White, "A Typical Kansas Community," *Atlantic Monthly*, 80 (1897), 171.

they left and the reasons they came: to come to a place where they could shape their new environment in the image of their old one!

The sociologist and the historian could find a common interest in the class structure in early Kansas. For example, Senator Ingalls of Kansas was of the opinion that the strength of the New England influence on Kansans was rooted more in the Pilgrim experience than in the experience of those who came later. He believed that it stemmed from what he called primitive Massachusetts, before its middle class disappeared. He specified the element in this legacy as the "spit on tomorrow" characteristic born of the uncertainties of weather, crops, climate, and insects, shared across time by Pilgrims and Kansans from their respective frontier experiences. He also stated that only from an area of "calcareous plains in a temperate latitude where agriculture is supreme, are the qualities of grace, beauty, and passion found in women, and stature, courage, health, and longevity in men."<sup>39</sup>

William Allen White, writing about the typical Kansas Community in 1897, commented on the intensity of social democracy in a Kansas town. He indicated that class lines were indistinct because family background with its implications of status had less meaning. He did state that there were defined social groups such as the "young dancing crowd" and the "church social crowd" as well as the "old whist crowd and the young whist crowd," the "lodge crowd" and the "surprise party crowd." He also noted, however, that there was a recognized freedom to choose one's own companions and that "crossing the tracks" was possible. Every town had its rich men. The richest man was frequently a retired farmer turned banker. The second "richest" was probably the best lawyer, but nobody was respected more than the doctor.<sup>40</sup>

It was noted that one explanation for the failure of the Jewish settlement at Beersheba, Kansas, (1882-1884) was the class distinction and conflict between the urbanized Reform Jewish of the Eastern United States who might have saved the colony had they not considered their frontier Kansas brethren as too Orthodox and as their inferiors. The Kansas neighbors did help, but it was not possible to help enough to make up for the lack of agricultural experience of the Jewish pioneers.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Ingalls, *Kansas*, 711.

<sup>40</sup>White, "Typical Kansas Community," 171 ff.

<sup>41</sup>Rudin, "Beersheba, Kan.," 296-97.

The tendency to legislate morality as a substitute for tradition and custom was vividly illustrated in Kansas where prohibition dominated the function and effectiveness of every social institution, even after the state constitution was amended in 1881, making prohibition a legal act. *The Abilene Chronicle* of November 30, 1871, reported that the Indiana school fund was \$52,050 richer during the past year as a result of licensing of liquor sellers. But, the Kansas paper observed that the amount of misery caused by the sale of "liquid damnation" in Indiana was not computed nor reported. *The Wyandotte Gazette* of Kansas City, Kansas, October 15, 1886, flatly stated that the average liquor dealer did not believe in the God of the Bible. No statistics were given, and evidently no logical argument was expected. *The Wichita Eagle* of October 15, 1886, solemnly declared that the road from soldier to prisoner was strong drink. The Leavenworth Apple Carnival was reported in *The Wichita Eagle* of October 16, 1896, with the closing admonition that the only problem for that greatest apple city in Kansas was that "Apple Jack lurks beneath the rosy rind."

*The Topeka Daily Capital* of October 14, 1886, headline read: "Saloons take workers' checks" and then the paper developed the topic further by suggesting that violation of the prohibition law "breeds contempt for all law and often opens a hospitable door to Communism and anarchy." It concluded that the saloon was a "school for criminals."

Senator Ingalls described drunkenness as the curse of frontier life, lamenting that the saloon in Kansas preceded the school and the church. He stated that agitation for prohibition began as early as the organization of the territory and continued until the Constitution of Kansas was amended, limiting the use of alcohol to medicine, science, and mechanics. He pointed out that even though there were clubs and "joints" around where drinking occurred, the saloon and the dram shop were gone. And, as a result, crime, poverty, and disorder were diminishing.<sup>42</sup>

Kansas Day Club speakers had their say about drinking: J. S. West in 1894 opined: "We must make treason as bad as selling beer . . ." <sup>43</sup>Kretsinger in 1896 justified prohibition "to preserve her boys and girls from the blighting curse of liquor."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Ingalls, *Kansas*, 709.

<sup>43</sup>J. S. West, "The Young Crowd" (1894), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1901), 115.

<sup>44</sup>William S. Kretsinger, "Kansas" (1896), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1901), 185.



Kansas newspapers had much to say on the issue: Reminiscing about her life in Lawrence in the early 1870's, a Kansan remembered well that alcoholic beverages were never served in mixed company.<sup>45</sup> The former newspaperman, Noble L. Prentis, in his history of Kansas, indicated that the enforcement of prohibition was a major interest in 1895. He defined "joints" as the Kansas label for saloons. He also indicated that a District Judge ruled that the "so help me God oath must be taken in all sales of liquor." Prentis also cited an instance in Weir City where a judge fined a fifteen-count violator of the prohibition law \$1,500 and gave him 450 days in jail — a record! Prentis also quoted an eyewitness to the Populist-Republican conflict in the Kansas House as a result of the election of 1892: "No other capital city on earth could have passed through such a scene of conflict without serious loss of life, and, it is also likely, great destruction of property. The absence of the saloon is the chief explanation."<sup>46</sup>

Obituary writers took due notice of the role of drink in deaths: *The Wichita Eagle*, October 15, 1886, under the "Death's Doings" column reported that: "Mrs. ---- cut her throat because her solicitude for her husband in jail for drinking, caused illness which affected her brain and in the end, caused her death." *The Topeka Daily Bulletin*, October 14, 1867, reported: "Dr.----'s funeral was wretched and poorly attended, the 'dreariest' funeral ever. Not many mourned him. When himself, he had no superior in the state. Whiskey got away with him—his friends deserted him and he died in wretched loneliness, being cruelly denied to see his wife and children while on his death bed." The editor of the paper then editorialized that he should have had a better fate, even though "sunken to the depths of degradation."

Opposition to prohibition came from the German community, whose traditions and customs were strong, and who felt that legislating morality was not needed, especially when the moral stance taken by that legislation ran counter to their customs. Harley J. Stucky quoted a C. B. Schmidt, who was described in *The Commonwealth* of July 12, 1881, as threatening: "No European of whatever nationality will submit to a law which makes it a crime for him to use his beverage to which he has been accustomed from

<sup>45</sup>Flora Kennedy Cowgill (Mrs. S. Macy), *Never Forgotten*, ed. Lottie Lesh and John R. Willingham (Lawrence, 1965). Foreword.

<sup>46</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 223.

childhood up. . . We must have immigration . . . and we shall not get it . . . unless our prohibition law is repealed."<sup>47</sup>

*The Frontiersman* of Bird City, Kansas, October 13, 1886, in *Kansas Notes*, quoted the *Lawrence Journal*: "We don't like the fetid atmosphere of the saloon. Bloated and bleary-eyed loafers swagger and swear, in rowdy, beastly orgies. Kansas is 500% better, cleaner, purer now than four years ago (before prohibition). She has today the most orderly, the most decent, and the cleanest capital city in the United States and the purest and finest university town in the United States."

There were other influences that contributed to the making of a Kansan from his social environment. There was the moral urgency created by the slave issue. According to Walter Wellman, this struggle purportedly left its mark on the Kansan in his yearning for reform and his tendency to think often with more energy and originality than with depth and balance.<sup>48</sup> Others have concluded that the conflict over slavery created in Kansas a tradition of participation in political activity and a sensitivity to other moral issues.<sup>49</sup> In addition, because it was thought to be a state dedicated to the sacred purpose of human freedom, the spirit of sacrifice and toil was purportedly ingrained in the personalities of Kansans, in Kansas institutions and in Kansas laws.<sup>50</sup>

There were also clusters of characteristics assigned to Kansans because they were pioneers: independence, courage, resourcefulness, endurance, democracy, the ability to laugh at adversity, adaptability, risk-taking, and an acute awareness of the future. There were other clusters of characteristics assigned to Kansans because they came from Puritan New England: their belief in the ideal of liberty, a certain sternness and rigidity of mind, a sense of purpose, a security resident in their certainty of divine leadership, a hatred of oppression, their belief in justice, fairness, and their respect for personal worth, their advocacy of human rights, and their ability to govern themselves. There were even clusters of characteristics attributed to the Civil War as found in its veterans, many of whom came to Kansas to get land under the Homestead law and in the process gave their qualities of hardiness, bravery, patriotism, and discipline to the developing Kansan Ethos.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Stucky, "German Element," 347.

<sup>48</sup>*Wichita Eagle*, October 16, 1896.

<sup>49</sup>William E. Connelley, *History of Kansas Newspapers* (Topeka, 1916), 10-12.

<sup>50</sup>B. H. Tracy, "The Builders of a State" (1896), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1902) 211-13.

<sup>51</sup>Arnold, *Kansas*, 119, 212.

Kansas was an ethnic mix and Kansans represented a diversity of cultural characteristics which enriched the Kansan Ethos. There were Indians, Europeans, Negroes, and "Americans" (born in this country but not native to it as were the Indians), the latter constituting 90 percent. The Europeans were principally English, German, and Scandinavian. The Negroes numbered less than four percent.<sup>52</sup> According to these statistics from the Census of 1860, there were 94,513 native born and 23,691 foreign born for a total of 107,204 Kansans. The birth place of these Kansans ranked from the highest to the lowest of the top ten were: 1. Ohio, 2. Missouri, 3. Kansas, 4. Indiana, 5. Illinois, 6. Kentucky, 7. Pennsylvania, 8. New York, 9. Iowa, 10. Virginia.<sup>53</sup>

The Indian in the history of Kansas was not generally described as the proud warrior, but as a figure no longer rich in his native tradition. He appeared squalid, degraded, brutal, terrifying, a beggar or a bandit. To one observer in 1899, "he menaced the border" and fought the advance of civilization "with the ferocity of a wild beast." He left "behind no eulogist to praise a brave foe, nor mourner for a generous enemy."<sup>54</sup> There were reports, however, of specific Indians quite different from those described above. An article in the Waterville, Kansas, *Telegraph* in 1870 praised the Kickapoos, describing them as well advanced in civilization, good farmers, and as having two churches, two successful schools and a religion "savoring of orthodoxy" rather than superstition.

There were immigrants from nearly every country in Europe. They came to stay, in large part, and enriched Kansas with the contributions of their communities. The transplanted Germans gave Kansas a model for the farm villages, complete with flowered lawns. They provided political leadership, and their faith, persistence, and agricultural productivity coupled with their thoroughness and industry, and enhanced by their love of music and learning, provided the state with a strong and valuable legacy: their introduction of Turkey Red Winter Wheat, which revolutionized the role of wheat in the agrarian economy.<sup>55</sup> The Swedish were described as energetic and determined. They created patterns of family-based communities, and their concern for the arts matched that of the Germans. One Swedish man came to the McPherson area, unable to

<sup>52</sup>Ingalls, "Kansas," 706.

<sup>53</sup>Arnold, *Kansas*, 252.

<sup>54</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 138.

<sup>55</sup>Stucky, "German Element," 348 ff.

speak English, having no money, and no tools. Yet, between 1868 and 1877, he established the best hardware store in the area and was himself worth between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars.<sup>56</sup>

The Welsh who settled in Emporia were described by William Allen White as the "best single strain of blood in our Emporia life." They became Americanized, but preserved and contributed their ethnic strengths of thrift, honesty, industry, and deep sense of morality. He concluded that they made Emporia "a better, cleaner, kindlier town."<sup>57</sup>

The earliest days were not easy ones for some of the immigrants. A report in the *Abilene Chronicle*, November 30, 1871, described the immigrants as they moved in wagons across the Solomon valley. They were destitute for food and the women and children were suffering. Their hunting had been unsuccessful and grain was scarce. They had lost both men and animals due to the cold. The reporter admired their courage but questioned their judgment in pushing into a frontier at the beginning of winter.

Some of the freed men who came to Kansas, known as the Exodusters, settled in the town named Nicodemus. These and others of the "colored" gave lie to those who had predicted that Kansas would be flooded with indigent freed men. They proved to be in no sense public burdens and were the first of African descent to successfully occupy and settle public lands.<sup>58</sup> Most of the families were self-sufficient. By 1881, former slaves living in Nicodemus were doing as well as their white neighbors, and had won the respect of the people in surrounding areas. They were described as diligent, intelligent, sensible, and law-abiding. They were politically active in Graham County, Kansas, and it was considered their right to hold a portion of the offices in that county. Ultimately, the town became almost a ghost town following a rapid decline after World War II.<sup>59</sup> However, as early as September 1, 1883, *The Atchison Weekly Champion* stated that "Nicodemus may become no more than a name, but that name will always recall the bravest attempt ever made by people of any color to establish homes in the high plains of West Kansas." The experience with the Exodusters appeared to have given at least some Kansans a picture of blacks as mature and able, perhaps erasing or at least blurring the long-held "Uncle Tom" child-like image given by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

<sup>56</sup>Lindquist, "Scandinavian Element," 312-13.

<sup>57</sup>William Allen White, *Forty Years on Main Street* (New York, 1937), 49.

<sup>58</sup>Martin, "Progress of Kansas," 352.

<sup>59</sup>Glen Schwendemann, "Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 34 (1968), 19 ff. *passim*.

The existence of the Cowboy-Cowtown-Kansans as an American ethnic group within Kansas appeared a paradox, and, in a sense, it was. This group was considered as foreign to Topekans as to Bostonians. This attitude was even more dramatically held when expressed by people like Dodge Citians whose great concern in 1876 and 1886 was to change the image of their town from the "rough days of the past" and to divorce the now business-oriented Dodge City, anxious for capital and settlement, from its own past peopled with "Ruffians and Lewd Ladies."<sup>60</sup>

There were both positive and negative reactions to the ethnic diversity in the state. This was reflected in the reactions among some Kansans who feared the different, and whose tradition-bound thought patterns led to prejudice and virulent racism, sometimes in the guise of protecting the purity of the country. Others, less threatened and more thoughtful, reacted with gratitude and pride for the ethnic element in Kansans. One Kansas Day speaker, B. H. Tracy, suggested that "the perils and privations of a common cause molded all nationalities into one, and gave to the world a character that will claim forever a place in history—the Kansas pioneer."<sup>61</sup>

Another Kansas Day speaker, J. S. West, noted in 1894, however, that restrictions on immigration represented the nerve of some "to demand that this domain cease to be earth's garbage dump, and that the pilgrim hither must dry himself from [the] ocean's brine before he can be a voter."<sup>62</sup>

W. Y. Morgan in 1896, another Kansas Day speaker, cited Kansas as the purest in American blood, and Frank Nelson followed with a warning against the "silent and lurking foe, whose strongholds are found in our large cities, and whose leaders are ignorant of our institutions and our laws." He further emphasized that "there should be nothing foreign or un-American in our politics or our education."<sup>63</sup> Not too unexpectedly in 1891, restrictions were placed by law on alien ownership of land in Kansas.<sup>64</sup>

Examples of racism were found in the Kansas press and in the writing of Kansans elsewhere. While *The Topeka Daily Capital* of October 14, 1896, called attention to the schools provided for colored children in the capital city, it also pointed out that the colored

<sup>60</sup>*Dodge City Times*, October 12, 1876 and October 14, 1886.

<sup>61</sup>Tracy, "Builders of a State," 212.

<sup>62</sup>West, "The Young Crowd," 115.

<sup>63</sup>W. Y. Morgan, "Three of a Kind" (1896), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1901), 195; Frank Nelson, "Our Prospects" (1896), in *ibid.*, 201-02.

<sup>64</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 208.

were able to work less and less due to economic conditions; and that even if the colored succeeded in business, they had to employ whites to keep white patronage. The report concluded that there was nothing personal alleged against the black man, "save his race." In the same issue of this paper, there was a cartoon that could only be labeled a "Darkie" cartoon, using the vernacular of the day. The characters were caricatures in stereotype: big feet, big lips, and overdressed, unlettered, familiar with prison, and "handy with a razor." The dialect spelling was difficult to read, but the title was "Juges De Bait De Pan versus De Sawd." The question was asked as to which was mightier. The answer was "in de fust place, nevah been in de pen. In second place, I don't fink a swode is in it wif a razahl"

There were other examples of such racism. *The Weekly Kansas Chief*, October 12, 1876, contained an item in which Negroes in Georgia were called "Darkies." In the *Great Bend Register* of October 19, 1876, another vivid description read: "dark mahogany-colored female." The *Kansas City Gazette* of October 14, 1896, indicated that there were 14,000 colored Baptists meeting in Kansas City, Kansas. During that meeting, there was an attempt to put together a Negro ticket. It was described as a "ridiculous" scheme and was disapproved by a large number of those in attendance. An item about a meeting of Kansas Presbyterians in the *Lyndon Journal*, October 14, 1886, reported that missionaries were active among freed men of the South, encouraging education and succeeding in "elevating colored people" toward "Christian manhood and citizenship." The group also learned that support for such Home Mission programs of their denomination was up 3,000 percent in Wichita. An ad in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 14, 1886, read: "Wanted: by colored man—place to do chores and go to school." An early day teacher in Kansas observed in her diary that it was "warm enough to roast a Darkey (sic) today."<sup>65</sup> A French worker, who traveled by train across Kansas in the 1870's, recounted that he went back to the *Negro car* to smoke a cigar, but had realized that under no circumstances could Negroes go into cars reserved for whites.<sup>66</sup>

Others attempted to combat racism and prejudice. In his history of Kansas, Senator Ingalls referred to the limiting of suffrage to white, male citizens as a "strange illustration of Anglo-Saxon pride of race and its haughty assumption of superiority, in a state

<sup>65</sup>Scrimsher, ed., "Diary of Anna Webber," 328.

<sup>66</sup>Thogmartin, "Prosper Jacotot," 16.

which apotheosized John Brown of Ohio and gave a new definition to the rights of man."<sup>67</sup>

J. L. Bristow in his speech "Why a Young Man Should Become a Republican," gave his party credit for leading the way to overcome prejudice of race by moral force rather than physical force.<sup>68</sup> Finally, B. H. Tracy, in 1896, summarized the status of the issue by indicating that belief in the rights of man, in the principle of equality, and in the teachings of the scriptures, made it impossible for race to any longer excuse a prejudice or color to gild a crime. He further explained any remnants of prejudice lingered only from a time when "souls of men were as shriveled as their brains."<sup>69</sup>

Kansans were boosters. The spirit was nurtured to robust health in the towns of Kansas. It was seed-bedded, often, in publicity emanating from railroads as they campaigned for additional population. It came to full flower in the Kansas press as individual towns campaigned for capital, citizens, and customers.

In 1872, the railroads with land and services to sell blanketed the Eastern United States and Europe with agents and brochures extolling the virtues of Kansas land and Kansas climate. Their agents offered passes to community leaders to come to Kansas to see for themselves what they had read about. The Santa Fe Railroad offered cut rates for travel and low prices for land to prospective settlers, in addition to promising a three-month travel period, established credit, and help in case of disaster. It even chartered a Red Star Steamer and sent it to a port in southern Russia to pick up cargo for the immigrants, bring it to the United States where it was then shipped by rail to Kansas.

The brochures were printed in German, Dutch, Swedish, French, Danish, and Russian. One forty-five page booklet described German settlements in southwest Kansas and even gave the impression that Kansas was primarily a German state. These publicity efforts met with great success. Population grew rapidly. For example, from Hutchinson, Kansas, to Pueblo, Colorado, 2,019 people lived in the valley of the Arkansas River in the 1850's and '60's. By 1876, there were 45,868; by 1877, there were 67,450. In one year, the Larned, Kansas, Land Office sold 600,000 acres to 5,000 settlers. The Wichita office sold 400,000 acres to 3,500 settlers. There

<sup>67</sup>Ingalls, *Kansas*, 706.

<sup>68</sup>J. L. Bristow, "Why a Young Man Should Be a Republican" (1894), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1901), 118.

<sup>69</sup>Tracy, "Builders of a State," 211-12.

were those who said Kansas grew in population numbers and land development with more speed than anywhere on earth.<sup>70</sup>

The role of the Northern press in "boosting" Kansas was described by Senator Ingalls in elaborate prose when he said that these correspondents were unsurpassed in ability and passionate devotion to liberty, — chronicling every incident, delineating every prominent man, arousing indignation by the recitation of the wrongs they denounced, and exciting the imagination with descriptions of the loveliness of the land, rivaling Milton's portraiture of the Garden of Eden. No time was ever so minutely and so indelibly photographed upon the public retina. The name of no State was ever on so many friendly and so many hostile tongues. It was pronounced in every political speech and inserted in every party platform. No region was ever so advertised, and the impression they produced has never passed away."<sup>71</sup>

Selected Kansas newspapers for the years 1876, 1886, and 1896, bear out this fulsome praise: After announcing in October of 1876 that "the rough days" are things of the past, *The Dodge City Times* described this new "Dodge" as a flourishing young commercial metropolis, and urged others to take advantage of railroad excursion rates to come visit it. And, by October of 1886, this same newspaper reported that progress in changing the image of Dodge City from cowtown to commercial center was a reality. Not only did the town now have electric lights, graded streets, sidewalks, and a waterworks, but even more importantly, the "gang of ruffians and lewd ladies who had once ruled the town were daily leaving in search of greener pastures." Finally, in the best spirit of the booster, the editor pointed out that more towns die from lack of confidence on the part of businessmen than from the rivalry of other towns or adverse conditions. "Hope breeds hope," he said, and he urged his fellow citizens to be live, enterprising, positive and, by doing so, promote the moral and financial interests of the city and its people.

*The Wichita Eagle* in October 1886 reported a visit by the entrepreneur, Jay Gould, and quoted his opinion that Hutchinson, Kansas, was destined to be the "Queen City," a wholesale and manufacturing center of Kansas.

*The Topeka Daily Capital* of October 1886, carried an item from Rush Center, Kansas, in which that town was described as booming, with town lots for sale, promising quick returns to the

<sup>70</sup>Stucky, "German Element," 336.

<sup>71</sup>Ingalls, *Kansas*, 702.

speculator based on the fact that Rush Center was a prospective county seat. It boasted that it already had a new hotel and a new railroad.

*The Wichita Eagle* of October 1876 reported that it had been said that Wichita had more fine carriages and horses than any other town in Kansas. It also claimed that the beautiful houses being built in Topeka could not match those of Wichita. In this same issue, Kinsley, Kansas, advertised for more people to come live there in a town that was destined to be the "Garden of the World" in ten years. Another item called attention to the fact that Fort Scott, Kansas, had the most complete and the largest sorghum factory ever built. Finally, there was a plug for Morton County in Southwest Kansas, in which mention was made that a "distinguished writer" (not identified) had said that the "Creator could have made a better country than Kansas, but He had never done so." The item also described the county as having rich soil and as being beautifully landscaped while pointing out that its boom town of Richfield sought investors.

Not to be outdone by a metropolis like Wichita, the Bird City, *Frontiersman* in 1886 bragged that Bird City had the best buildings of any town in Northwest Kansas; and even more, that its citizens were both as enlightened and well civilized as anyone would wish to meet.

In a lesson-like manner, the editor of the Oxford, Kansas, *Register* in October of 1876 admonished his fellow citizens to work for their town. He cautioned them not to continue to denounce mistakes that were made in a negative way that would indicate prejudice against Oxford, but to "hold fast" and to remember that because its population was limited, its trade potential small, and its attractions less than a lot, there was just no room for jealousy and spite. By the next year, however, the *Oxford Independent* boasted: "With our own eyes we behold Cowley County: 15,000 people, school houses, magnificent churches, mills, newspapers, 400,000 acres 'paying tribute' to the government, 150,000 productive acres, and yet, she was organized but seven years ago."

The *Great Bend Register* outlined its editorial policy in 1886, in its reaction to a local political squabble. It stated that, as the recognized newspaper of the city, it was not devoting its space to abuse or insults of those who have interest in Great Bend, if they happen to be there on business or pleasure. The newspaper would rather build up than tear down. Its motto was, therefore, "Onward and Upward."

Boosterism included successful activities by Kansas as a participant in the exhibits in both the Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia in 1876, and the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. The state was considered the best advertised and most favorably known of the Western states at the Centennial. The State of Kansas shared space with the State of Colorado. Kansas won several prizes, including one for the best collective exhibit, for her fruit display, for a bound record book, and for the best farm wagon. Locally, the Centennial was celebrated with enthusiasm and local histories were published by seventy-five newspapers.<sup>72</sup>

The state's success at the Chicago World's Fair was even more spectacular. She not only was first in completing her building, but she received the honor of having distributed the most practical books descriptive of her resources of any state at the exhibition. She also had what experts considered the best and most complete silk exhibit, drawing the interest of New York, China, and Japan. It was even suggested that silk might well become one of the leading industries of the state. The irony of it all was that Kansas was presented to the world as a land of peace and plenty, when in reality at the time the state was suffering from a depressed economy and political disorder. Further, the key motif of the Kansas display was corn, which at that particular time was the curse of Kansas rather than the blessing. This gap between fantasy and fact did not dampen the ardor of the Honorable Albert H. Horton, Chief Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, who, in the dedicatory address of the Kansas building, stated: "Kansas is here, because she has not been disobedient to the heavenly vision; because she believes, as she has always believed, in her own motto . . . And if, a hundred years hence, in whatever land or country the world shall gather, to testify, as now, to the brotherhood of man, the kinship of labor, the fellowship of art, and to the truth that God 'made of one blood all the nations of the earth,' there will Kansas be in the midst."<sup>73</sup>

There were other miscellaneous claims to fame pointed out by boosters of Kansas, both in-state and out. For example, one history of the state included the facts that Kansas was among the first to do away with striped prison uniforms; and, that seven of the thirteen species of fossilized birds catalogued for North America and Europe were found in Kansas. An Easterner, writing in 1885, stated that one of the policies of the press in Kansas was to omit coverage of any

<sup>72</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 151.

<sup>73</sup>*Kansas at the World's Fair*, 105.

events which might cause anxiety to residents in the local area because it would not be politic and it might hinder immigration. But, he continued, citizens were encouraged to belittle a rival town, because it was believed that even the transient visitor was influenced by local enthusiasm and would be likely to support whatever town he happened to be in at a particular time.<sup>74</sup>

John A. Martin, Governor of Kansas elected in 1884, writing for the *North American Review* in 1886, summed up Kansas in the style of the booster by his statement that no state had braver, more intelligent, more enterprising, more sober, more law-respecting people than Kansas. Further, he proposed that no country in the world could match their achievements in turning a desert into a garden, pushing the plains to the foothills of the Rockies, dotting a treeless prairie with forests, and producing agricultural crops more valuable than all the gold and silver mined.<sup>75</sup>

The status of women in Kansas appeared to be a subject of considerable interest in the press and prose of the years between 1870 and 1900. In general, in Kansas, the social emancipation of women was considered complete. There were exceptions, however, in that they could vote only in municipal and school elections and were exempt from jury and military duty, and work on the highways. Women could practice in the professions and could participate in business. Discrimination between the sexes was evident only when common sense would make it appear feasible. Senator Ingalls, writing in 1893, addressed the political exceptions by saying, "Agitation for full suffrage is active, and will undoubtedly ultimately prevail."<sup>76</sup> The *Oxford* of Sumner County, Kansas, in its October 13, 1876, edition, however, printed an item from *The Topeka Blade* which appeared to be an early reaction to what was ultimately to be called, "The New Woman." The item contained a number of rhetorical questions based on the hypothesis that it was nonsense to assume a woman could fill a man's sphere: How can she sit in the Post Office and whittle a pine shingle with a jackknife while waiting for mail that doesn't bring her one letter in a year? How can she elevate her heels above her head and squirt tobacco juice without soiling her dress bosom?

The presence of this new status for women was further indicated in *The Great Bend Register's* report in October of 1886, that

<sup>74</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 103.

<sup>75</sup>Martin, "Progress of Kansas," 355.

<sup>76</sup>Ingalls, "Kansas," 708.

a woman delivered an address in Trinity Church in Atchison, Kansas, for the first time; but, it was added, she did not stand in the chancel. *The Topeka Blade* of October 14, 1896, had two items on the subject. One was a report of a novel experience in Minnesota, where William Jennings Bryan gave a campaign speech to an audience of women only. Then, there was the report of a woman who skipped to Wichita, Kansas, with \$25,000 and she was dressed in man's clothing. The reporter speculated that perhaps she wanted to be a "new" woman.

William Allen White wrote that women were active politically in his typical Kansas community, taking part in all parades of any political party, but voting only in town and school elections. Sometimes, he observed, men would elect a women's ticket, half jokingly. But he said that women were often elected to do secretarial work. A woman could be the breadwinner of the family and not be socially stigmatized, and she could anticipate possible advancement as a teacher. He concluded, however, that the State of Kansas was governed by petticoats only through their influence on public opinion.<sup>77</sup> However, in 1889, five Kansas towns elected women mayors: Argonia, Oskaloosa, Cottonwood Falls, Rossville, and Baldwin.<sup>78</sup>

The *Smith County Pioneer* supported a woman for Superintendent of Public Instruction in October, 1876, because she had both practical and theoretical knowledge. The candidate was quoted as saying that she supposed the community would think her nomination was quite a departure and that she could already see the campaign as a fight against "the woman."

There was the lyrical description in *The Wichita Eagle* of October 16, 1896, of a young "new" woman who was described riding a bicycle as the "Prettiest thing on wheels, suit of blue-black velvet or the like, she wore a student's hat and was the picture of poise, grace, and majesty. There was the contrasting gleam of very white hands as the pretty feet blessing alternate pedals below peeped in and out, and the vision had vanished."

An example of sexism in advertising was carried in many Kansas papers. The product was Battle Axe Plug tobacco and the ad showed the "new" woman in bloomers on a bicycle. She was said to favor economy and so always bought Battle Axe Plug for her sweetheart. No explanation was given to the paradox implied in the naming of the product, "Battle Axe," a label often used to describe another type of woman.

<sup>77</sup>White, "Typical Kansas Community," 176.

<sup>78</sup>Prentiss, *Kansas*, 193.

Other newspaper articles and items were reflective of the more traditional view of women. *The Wichita Eagle* in 1886 in an editorial, "Armistice over Women's Rights," stated that the greatest role for a woman was in the home where she could show her family love, truth, thought, inspiration, charity, and gentleness. *The People's Herald* of Lyndon, Kansas, observed in its issue of October 15, 1896, that as soon as a woman failed to take interest in dress, she was either failing in health or disappointed in love. *The Dispatch* of Clay Center, Kansas, advised in 1896 that one should honor the girl who makes good bread above the one that makes the piano howl. *The Richfield Monitor* in 1896, suggested that when a man had a little time to improve his mind, he was more likely to spend it in thinking what a woman ought to do.

The life of the farm woman differed from that of the town woman. A poignant description of that life was given in an interview with a man and his wife on a Kansas farm in 1879. The man observed that it was "wearin" on women, that men didn't mind it so much after a while, but women, he observed, were queer that way. His wife was asked if she longed for her life in Ohio and she answered: "No, not since the baby died. She's buried in the garden, sorriest grave, so little, so pitiful, the prairie widened out from it so far. I never mistrusted before how big the prairie was. It seemed wicked not to have a funeral. After it was over, I felt more at home, more settled, wouldn't want to live anywhere else. I'll be glad when the grass comes up in the Spring to cover the grave, it'll look less like it did the winter day of buryin'."<sup>79</sup>

A traveller going through Kansas, indicated that it appeared to him that the women of the state were to make homes and little Americans rather than work the land as the French women did. However, John Ise, in writing about his mother's experience as a pioneer in Western Kansas in the 1870's, commented that the women then worked out-of-doors as much as possible, that there was little in the way of activities to pass the time, and that there were no books and magazines.<sup>80</sup>

A teenager homesteading with her parents in Kansas, also in the early 1870's, recorded in her diary that her mother read aloud to her every morning and evening. She also noted that she would prefer to be homely and disagreeable, as she said she was, than be so devilish

<sup>79</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 137.

<sup>80</sup>John Ise, "Pioneer Life in Western Kansas," in ed. George Anderson and Terry Harmon, *Kansas History: Selected Readings* (Lawrence, 1974), 143-44, 147.

agreeable to every man and boy. She also wrote of having met a 13-year-old married lady.<sup>81</sup>

There were some general observations by press and pen that gave clues to the political philosophy and political practices of Kansans during the three decades of this study. Kansas Day speakers in the 1890's defined and discussed government from the Republican frame of reference. E. C. Cole of Great Bend, for example, stated that politics were both a business and a science, calling for good sense and the ability to appear "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove." He also supported the concept of a political boss, provided he were of the right kind.<sup>82</sup> C. D. Jones of Norton defined politics as the branch of ethics responsible for the nation's safety, the augmentation of its strength and resources, protection of the rights of the its citizens, and the improvement of their morals.<sup>83</sup> Frank Nelson of Lindsborg believed that government as an institution was worthy of the unswerving loyalty of all intelligent and patriotic men.<sup>84</sup>

The Kansas newspapers devoted a large portion of their space to political news and opinions. Sometimes there was a modicum of humor, sometimes a modicum of cynicism and of satire that could be detected among the straight reporting of political personalities and events. Writing of local politics in 1876, the *Lyndon Weekly Times* editor trenchantly observed that if it took a change of heart to vote for a named candidate, it took a change and location of brains to induce honest men to vote for him. And, he added, in his opinion, office seekers were public property and stuck up simply as targets for honest folks to shoot at.

In an issue whose front page was devoted exclusively to political news (except for the ever-present ads), *The Smith County Pioneer* in 1876 indicated that its editorial policy was based on the position that a newspaper was supposed to represent the sentiments of the party for which it was an organ. In a more specific sense, *The Clay Center Dispatch* in commenting on a local issue in 1876 stated its belief that the government should have the right to confiscate property and stop secession.

Mud-slinging was the concern of *The Wyandotte Gazette* in 1876. The paper took a stand against the tactic as a reflection of lower standards of character that led to such things as buying votes

<sup>81</sup>Venola Lewis Bivans, ed., "The Diary of Luna E. Warner, a Kansas Teenager of the Early 1870's," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 35 (1969), 276-311, 411-41, *passim*.

<sup>82</sup>E. C. Cole, "Political Sense" (1896), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1901), 209-10.

<sup>83</sup>C. D. Jones, "Flexible Politics" (1896), in *Kansas Day Club* (Hutchinson, 1901), 206.

<sup>84</sup>Nelson, "Our Prospects," 202.

by buying drinks in local saloons. In that same year, *The Wichita Eagle* reported that the difference between major parties in the campaign of 1876 was that the Republicans were for the nation and the Democrats were for states' rights.

R. R. Glass of Melvern, Kansas, wrote to *The Lyndon Journal* in 1886, indicating his belief that consistency in fighting for political ideas was the most admirable characteristic in a politician. If a man were corrupt, he believed that one should say so, even if his party had nominated him.

Even verse became a vehicle for political philosophy of a kind. *The Baxter Springs News* printed such a poem during the national campaign of 1896:

Would rather be a lady bug with looks fine as silk  
Than a gold bug that robs infants of their milk.

During this same campaign, *The Gove County Republican* predicted that in the campaign of 1896, politics would make a lot of strange "dead" fellows. The *Kansas City Gazette* printed a quip about that year's campaign also, indicating that a free silver man was known to have deserted his girl because she had golden hair. In a more humorous vein, during the campaign of 1896, *The Wichita Eagle Weekly* suggested that the commercial traveller (today's traveling salesman) was a formidable force in Kansas politics. He was described as one who talked sound money in hotels and in business houses; as one who was informed, obviously persuasive, and able to talk before a crowd. He was further described as having good judgment and as being admired as a missionary of good sense. He was said to be traveling through the West, scattering seeds of wholesome truth—a bright, hustling, quick-thinking typical "American of the Road."

There were those who were enamored and those who were repelled by Kansans and their political philosophies. To one, Kansas demonstrated that the American Republic's form of government was a fit vehicle for political action by free, intelligent people at all three levels of such government.<sup>85</sup> While to the *New York Evening Post*, one Kansas was enough.<sup>86</sup> That paper was quoted as stating that the state cared too little about opinion; and more significantly, many Kansas papers reported the trial of the Chicago anarchists, and, without exception, were strongly against what they stood for.

<sup>85</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 159.

<sup>86</sup>Gleed, "New York More Civilized," 217.

Kansans took education seriously and prided themselves on the results. Their concern for quality was reflected in the kind of information given to the press. For example, success in the grade school at Belle Plaine, Kansas, was attributed to the fact that the new professor understood that ten minutes of explanation of a difficult part of a lesson led to more learning than a two-hour lecture. As a result, the patrons felt that after one month of school, more work had been done during that time than in all the previous nine years of the history of the school!<sup>87</sup>

Expectations from teachers were not limited to baby-sitting their students. At a teacher's institute in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1886, as reported in the *Wyandotte Gazette*, October 15, not only was discipline discussed, but there were discussions of different ways of teaching in order to create interest in the learning process. The value of pictures in readers was pointed out. Further, teachers were to have a statement of principles (comparable to today's demand for objectives) for each program of instruction offered. Teachers, themselves, were required to take a public examination as a part of the application process. Competency was a prerequisite for employment.<sup>88</sup> It was further expected that the child would know his letters and be able to count before entering grade school at age five.<sup>89</sup> Attendance figures were published regularly, and they appeared to indicate that consistent daily attendance was not the general rule. In the Oxford, Kansas, schools, the average daily attendance for the month ending October 6, 1877, was 23 out of an enrollment of 36 in the grammar school.<sup>90</sup> Parents, incidentally, were encouraged to visit the schools.

According to Emporia editor, William Allen White, the 1890's were the "boom" times for the "real estate" colleges, improving many localities. He considered this of great importance, as he believed such college graduates provided communities with knowledgeable leadership.<sup>91</sup> An ad in the *Oxford Independent* (October 18, 1877) solicited students to take advantage of the agricultural college's curriculum that emphasized studies in practical education. There was no tuition charge or fees. One could enter at any time and could also earn part of his expenses by voluntary labor.

<sup>87</sup>*Oxford* (Sumner County), October 13, 1876.

<sup>88</sup>*Smith County Pioneer* (Smith Center), October 12, 1876.

<sup>89</sup>Cowgill, *Never Forgotten*, 7.

<sup>90</sup>*Oxford Independent* (Sumner County), October 18, 1877.

<sup>91</sup>White, "Typical Kansas Community," 173.



*The Great Bend Register* of October 14, 1886, carried an article indicating the offerings available from the hometown school, Kansas Central College. The College did not as yet have a building and classes were being held in various churches. Not only did its curriculum include language, math, and bookkeeping, but also painting, drawing, and china decoration were offered. The *Register* further suggested the College should be better patronized.

There were private schools that advertised their offerings in the local press. These included Spalding's Commercial College and a Day School in Kansas City, Kansas, the latter charging 50¢ a week for English lessons;<sup>92</sup> Topeka School of Physical Education for young boys and a dancing school for children,<sup>93</sup> and the Lewis Academy, a classical and Scientific School for both sexes in Wichita.<sup>94</sup>

According to Senator John Ingalls, Kansans paid their taxes for schools more cheerfully than any other taxes. He indicated that the Senate provided equal services for blacks and whites. The average school year was 27 weeks. He reported that at the time of his writing, 1893, the University of Kansas, at Lawrence, had 36 faculty members and 474 students; Emporia had 18 faculty members and 1200 students; and the agricultural college at Manhattan had 18 faculty members and 575 students.<sup>95</sup>

The first schools in Kansas were mission schools for the Indians,<sup>96</sup> and the denomination-related colleges were a part of the Kansas educational scene. These schools reflected the historic relationship between religious institutions and education and were designed to perpetuate the Christian emphasis and its influence in Kansas society. Representative of these many institutions were Bethel College, a Mennonite affiliate; a German Baptist or Dunkard College at McPherson; St. John's Lutheran College at Winfield, and Ottawa University, supported by the Northern Baptist Convention.<sup>97</sup>

Kansans were also interested in adult education. They were described as omniverous readers. Libraries were supported as a major source of religious and literary information, and recognized as essential to the progress of Kansas communities.<sup>98</sup> Granges were en-

<sup>92</sup>*Kansas City Gazette*, October 14, 1896.

<sup>93</sup>*Topeka Daily Capital*, October 14, 1896.

<sup>94</sup>*Wichita Eagle*, October 15, 1896.

<sup>95</sup>Ingalls, "Kansas," 708.

<sup>96</sup>Arnold, *Kansas*, 183.

<sup>97</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 176.

<sup>98</sup>Ingalls, "Kansas," 709.

couraged to establish circulation libraries, one in each Grange Hall. This was designed not only to promote professional farming, but to provide opportunities for elevating the intellectual, moral, and social well being of the farmers, themselves. It was even suggested they simulate law-making activities of Congress in order to prepare themselves as potential lawmakers.<sup>99</sup> Ethnic groups, such as the Emmet Club in Chase County, were motivated to study their own history, which that club did with a program on Irish history.<sup>100</sup>

It was interesting to this writer that a poem, "School Begins Today," appeared in the *Lyndon Journal* at the time school was opening there in the Fall of 1886. It was clear that mothers in Kansas then were as glad as mothers now to have that day come and with the same tinge of guilt. That aspect of the Kansan Ethos has remained constant.<sup>101</sup>

The role of religion in the lives of Kansans was a significant one. For some, Kansas, itself, was the result of the working of God's will; and, as a consequence, Kansans, themselves, were people with a mission. For others, religion was the handmaiden of politics and business, and vice versa. To an even larger number, religion and the church were the directors and arbiters of behavior. There were things one must do and things one must not do. There were those who were in Kansas because of their religion and in whose communities the church was central. Religion could also be a very personal experience. The sense of Divine destiny and sacred mission for Kansas and Kansans was expressed in scriptural cadence by a speaker, W. Y. Morgan, at a Kansas Day Club meeting. He said: "The Creator, who understood His business better than we gave Him credit for, intended that we should . . . make the desert blossom and the prairies rejoice in plenty." However, he extended God's will in this manner, as he continued, "He did not intend . . . that we raise hell instead of corn; elevate whiskers in place of brains, and demagogues instead of patriots."<sup>102</sup>

Other items in the Kansas press indicated the scope and significance of religious influences. The *Dodge City Times* ran a big ad in its issue of October 14, 1886, about the Kansas Free Bible Competition. The task was to find the word "silver" in the Bible. Prizes were offered of \$2500.00 in gold for first with other prizes

<sup>99</sup>*Wichita Eagle*, October 12, 1876.

<sup>100</sup>*Wichita Eagle*, October 15, 1886.

<sup>101</sup>*Lyndon Journal*, October 14, 1886.

<sup>102</sup>Morgan, "Three of a Kind," 196.

totaling \$21,000.00 A Topeka mother requested that her son be excused from taking physiology inasmuch as she was a Christian Scientist and felt that the information about the human body as taught in the science course would not be compatible with the teachings of her religion.<sup>103</sup> An infidel had to be buried without funeral rites in Syracuse, Kansas. The clergy refused to perform the service because he was an unbeliever.<sup>104</sup>

A circuit-rider, Jeremiah Everts Platt, first a teacher, then a preacher and Sunday School Organizer for the Congregational Church in Southwest Kansas, in the 1880's, found it easy to do the Lord's work in harvesting souls and difficult not to see the parallel potential for man's work in this developing area which seemed to offer great promise for a harvest of crops. He found himself a kind of traveling salesman both for his church and for Southwest Kansas. He was made even more aware of this dichotomy of interests when a rancher accused him, in anger, of ruining his business by attracting settlers with his selling.<sup>105</sup> Platt was unlike some of the preachers on the early frontiers of Kansas who were described as often illiterate, ignorant, and even of dubious character.<sup>106</sup>

An item appearing in *The Gove County Republican* in October, 1896, exemplified the close relationship between religion and business by stating that the words "In God We Trust" on the dollar were put there to remind the business man that the formula for success was to trust God and to get cash from his customers. One Smith County druggist balanced religion and business by keeping gospel hymn books for sale as a sideline.<sup>107</sup>

Kansans were pretty sure that to be a Christian meant to act like one. Church groups concerned themselves with defining what actions were to be considered acceptable and which were not. The record of the Presbytery meeting in Lyndon, Kansas, in 1886, indicated that its participants were concerned about the state of religion in Kansas, particularly about the increasing evidence of worldliness, especially card-playing and dancing. They felt that family solidarity was being threatened by such actions. They agreed to wage war against both the traffic in drink and its habitual use.

<sup>103</sup>*Kansas City Gazette*, October 14, 1896.

<sup>104</sup>*Smith County Bulletin* (Smith Center), October 15, 1886.

<sup>105</sup>Louise Barry, ed., "Circuit Riding in Southwest Kansas in 1885 and 1886, The Letters of Jeremiah Everts Platt," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 12 (1943), 380.

<sup>106</sup>Ise, "Pioneer Life," 148.

<sup>107</sup>*Smith County Pioneer*, October 15, 1896.

Third on their agenda, which could be assumed as third in importance, was their concern that too few young men were entering the ministry.<sup>108</sup>

Putting such worldliness in larger context, the Bird City *Frontiersman* of October 13, 1886, picked up quotes from a New York minister that had been printed in the *Kansas City Times* that indicated his belief that America, itself, was worse than ever; too many of its people were blasphemers and drunks. He, in essence, cited the cities as impure and veritable cesspools of sin. A Kansan enjoying the beauty of Bismarck Grove near Lawrence on a Sunday might have found himself outside its gates if he failed to attend both the morning and afternoon sermons. It was in this park, too, that the largest camp meetings in Kansas history were held in 1878 and 1879 for the purpose of supporting national temperance. One of the days, attendance swelled to 25,000 or more. Participants included nationally prominent temperance speakers, the Governor of the State, and three Indian chiefs, who gave testimonies on the curse of drink and the blessings of temperance. The 12-day meeting in 1879 brought 75,000 to 100,000 people to Bismarck Grove.<sup>109</sup>

In Kansas, a hunter drawing his new gun on Sunday to try it out could have found himself summoned before a court. It was against the law to go hunting on the Sabbath.<sup>110</sup> The editor of *The Oxford* reported an instance of behavior unbecoming to worshipers. It seemed that young gentlemen (from another town, he was proud to point out) were in the habit of going into church, sitting down, giggling [sic], hissing and sneering at what the minister said. The editor suggested their fathers should take them in hand; and, if they had none, that a guardian should be appointed to deal with them.<sup>111</sup>

Religion was a factor influencing groups such as the Mennonites, the Swedes, the Anabaptists, and the Volga Germans to come to Kansas. Their churches were central to their community life. The Cathedral of the Plains at Victoria, Kansas, gave evidence of the significance of religion in the lives of the Volga Germans. Each person over twelve in that community was expected to haul a minimum of six loads of stone and was assessed \$45.00 to help build the church. These early settlers could not rest until their House of God was the finest they could produce.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup>*Lyndon Journal*, October 14, 1886.

<sup>109</sup>Jim L. Lewis, "Beautiful Bismarck—Bismarck Grove, Lawrence, 1878-1900," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 35 (1969), 227-30.

<sup>110</sup>Thogmartin, "Prosper Jacotot," 19.

<sup>111</sup>*Oxford*, October 13, 1876.

<sup>112</sup>Stucky, "German Element," 347.

At the dedication of the Kansas Exhibition at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, the Chief Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court stated his version of the role of religion in Kansas history: "Kansas is here because she has not been disobedient to the heavenly vision; . . . she pursues her way to the stars, a long journey, but to an ever-shining and ever-lasting goal."<sup>113</sup>

The American historian, Carl Becker, defined this mission for Kansans in a blend of national fervor and religious rhetoric: "Within its borders, Americanism, pure and undefiled, has a new lease on life. It is the mission of this self-selected people to see to it that it does not perish from off the earth. The light on the altar . . . must ever be replenished in Kansas."<sup>114</sup>

Finally, there was the very personal reaction of a young school teacher near Beloit who recorded in her diary in 1881: "To me the Sabbath Day seems different from all others. There is a calm, soothing peacefulness in the very air. The sun seems to shine brighter and nature seems trying to remind us of the Great God."<sup>115</sup>

There is a sign fronting Highway I-35 South from Salina that reads, "If you lived in Assaria, you'd be home now." The feeling that home was a good place to be has been a part of the Kansan Ethos from the earliest days of Kansas history.

Abbie Bright, a woman homesteader, described her first home in considerable detail. It was a cabin, 12 x 12. The roof was covered with dirt. Her bed was constructed from notched sticks driven into the ground with tree limbs laid in them and the head of the bed resting in one of the logs of the house, itself. Poles were put across the limbs and a tick on top of them. She did her own cooking in the fireplace, using a Dutch oven, a skillet, and a coffee pot.<sup>116</sup>

The "soddy" home of the prairie literally grew out of the environment. The sod bricks provided a shelter of dubious comfort in its most primitive form with dirt floor, few, if any openings, other than a doorway, and protection from falling insects only when a muslin drop caught their fall. However, as the fortunes of the family improved, so did their sod house. Ultimately, plastered ceilings and walls and wood flooring replaced dirt and clay. Furniture and

<sup>113</sup>Carleton Beals, "Kansas at the World's Fair," in *The Heritage of Kansas*, ed. Everett Rich (Lawrence, 1960), 292.

<sup>114</sup>Becker, "Kansas," 28.

<sup>115</sup>Scrimsher, ed., "Diary of Anna Webber," 325.

<sup>116</sup>Joseph W. Snell, ed., "Roughing It on Her Kansas Claim: The Diary of Abbie Bright, 1870-71," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 37 (1971), 262.

decoration included an organ, curtains at the windows, and pictures on the walls.<sup>117</sup> Stone, where available, was also used as a building material for houses.

In the earliest days of town life, twenty or thirty persons lived in barrack-like accommodations, or in their covered wagons, until the men could get building materials together, which could entail a journey of as much as seventy miles. During the construction, as houses were erected, the green body, red-wheeled immigrant wagon often served as the first grocery store.<sup>118</sup> County seat towns were characterized by the town square with the courthouse in the center and business houses ringing it on the four sides. Single family dwellings formed the outer rims of the town with churches and schools interspersed. As the towns grew and prospered, the residences became more elegant.

Though a traveler through Kansas described the homes he saw as "slapdash and temporary with smoking chimneys," a Kansas poet described Kansas homes and the permanence they represented, built on the basic unit of Kansas society, the family, quite differently:

Title: "The Homes of Kansas"

The sod-built homes of Kansas  
Tho' built of mother earth  
Within their walls so humble  
Are souls of sterling worth.  
Tho' poverty and struggle  
May be the builder's lot  
The sod house is a castle  
Where failure enters not.

God built the homes of Kansas!  
From poorest to the best;  
The cabin of the border  
The sod house of the West.  
The dugout, low and lonely,  
The mansion grand and great,  
The hands that laid their hearthstones  
Have built a mighty State.

Sol Miller

<sup>117</sup>Spearman, "Great American Desert," 235-36.

<sup>118</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 103.

The significance of the family was alluded to in the *Wichita Eagle* of October 12, 1876, in an item that urged young men to get married because "God looks with favor on the honest man of family."

There were those who believed that the family-sized, family-operated, family-owned farm was the ideal agrarian, social, and economic unit. Even the hiring and caring for the needs of the additional help required during harvest was considered a test of any man's Christian piety. In many cases, however, the owner was an absentee landlord who did not even live on his land; but instead, operated the grain elevator or ran a bank or practiced law in town.<sup>119</sup> In fact, it was reported that almost every man was engaged in two or three kinds of business. Combinations of these interests were listed as law and sheep, or land agent and hogs, or newspaper and corn.<sup>120</sup>

There were many professions, businesses, and services offered and advertised in the town newspapers. Lawyers, doctors, and dentists felt free to take out ads; as did auctioneers, portrait painters, and photographers.<sup>121</sup> As a town grew, the economic activities multiplied and there were ads for hedge plants and marble works, watermills and plumbers' goods, brickyards and match factories, indicating jobs of all kinds. It appeared to be good business to combine undertaking and furniture selling.<sup>122</sup> Clothing stores often placed their ads on the front page. Whatever the product or services offered, cash was preferred to credit, and notices appeared regularly requesting that accounts be settled within ten days.<sup>123</sup>

The demands of pioneer living contributed to the development of an inventive strain in the Kansan Ethos. The use of stone for posts was an example of adaptability when usual materials were not available.<sup>124</sup> But this inventiveness was not limited to creative uses of natural materials. An item in the *Troy Weekly Kansas Chief* as early as 1886 listed Kansans' patents for a kind of hog pen, a news file, a vehicle wheel, and an electric programme clock. In addition, one woman received a gold medal from the Paris Academy of Inventions for her gas-powered Sad Iron exhibited at the World's Fair in

<sup>119</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 135.

<sup>120</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 105.

<sup>121</sup>*Oxford Register*, October 16, 1896.

<sup>122</sup>*Weekly Kansas Chief* (Troy), October 15, 1896.

<sup>123</sup>*Oxford Register*, October 16, 1886.

<sup>124</sup>Dudley Cornish, "Carl Becker's Kansas: The Power of Endurance," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 41 (1975).

Chicago in 1893. In that same exhibit, another Kansas woman was honored for her invention of a broom catch.<sup>125</sup>

Life was hard work for many in Kansas. But, life was not all hard work and people did play. "Visiting around" was most popular, especially when there were few amusements of other kinds. This "neighboring," as it was called, often meant going to visit in the morning and staying all day. Distances were too great to go just for an hour or so.<sup>126</sup> A reading of old postcards between friends and families in the last years of the 1890's revealed that this type of communication was used to send the invitation, often with the request that the visitor bring a cake, or with the offer to have one baked, when the visitor arrived. "If I'd known you were coming, I'd have baked a cake," obviously had early use in Kansas sentiment and in fact. Such cards also indicated that during the visit there would be a dance or that there would be a party.<sup>127</sup> One family made neighboring with friends and relatives in Comanche County, Kansas, a vacation. They were going to spend twenty days visiting them, living along the way in the 1886 version of the recreational vehicle, their covered wagon.<sup>128</sup>

A fifteen-year-old, homesteading with her parents in the early 1870's south of Downs, Kansas, recorded a number of leisure activities in her diary. She swam in the river (probably in an old dress) in the summer, ice-skated on it in the winter, danced 'til midnight, and went to town often. She noted that her mother read aloud to her every day from such books as *Oliver Twist*, *Eminent Women*, and *A History of New York*. She also mentioned that her mother sculpted a limestone vase.<sup>129</sup>

*The Lyndon Weekly Times* had an item in October of 1876, about a walking match on crutches, indicating a prize of \$50.00 to the winner. Ten years later, the WCTU of Lyndon held a Dime Social at which there were singing, sandwiches, and cake. It was noted with some scorn that everybody wanted to be served first and that the waiters had a tendency to do just that with their friends!<sup>130</sup>

Excursions by train were available. Newspapers carried ads of trips to the Rocky Mountains via the Iron Trail. There were special-rate excursions to the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, and to

<sup>125</sup>*Kansas at the World's Fair*, 49.

<sup>126</sup>Ise, "Pioneer Life," 148.

<sup>127</sup>Glen and Erma Gentry, Private Post Card Collection.

<sup>128</sup>*Oxford Register*, October 16, 1886.

<sup>129</sup>Bivans, ed., "Diary of Luna E. Warner," *passim*.

<sup>130</sup>*Lyndon Journal*, October 14, 1886.

areas within the State of Kansas.<sup>131</sup> Social notes in the newspapers indicated that people took advantage of these options.

Bicycling was another popular mode of travel. *The Wichita Weekly Eagle* carried a note in its October 16, 1896, issue about eight couples who biked from Wichita to Wellington, Kansas, to "make merry with their friends," which they did. The meal was described as a joyous one with "mirth giving relish to eating." They returned on the Rock Island, singing for the other passengers all the way home. It was also noted that other Wichitans attended trotting races. Topekans went on all-day trips to a carnival in Leavenworth. Ten years earlier, boating was all the rage in Topeka.<sup>132</sup> Clay Center, Kansas, residents went to box socials, to ice cream parlors, and stayed home to play cribbage.<sup>133</sup> Surprise parties were popular in Oxford, Kansas, as elsewhere in Kansas.<sup>134</sup> William Allen White even designated a Surprise Party Group as a clique in Emporia society.<sup>135</sup>

Outdoor sports included football, baseball (complete with town games), at which, incidentally, there were always girls, but no drinking.<sup>136</sup> By 1886, Troy, Kansas, had a group of thirty citizens who were organizing a baseball team as a business venture. Indoor sports, by 1896, included lessons in billiards and pool for women.<sup>137</sup>

Between the years 1870 and 1900, there were programs put on by literary societies even in the smallest of towns. There were spelling matches and country dances. Quilting and husking bees provided exhibits for county fairs, as did vegetable and flower gardening. There were even jokes about the entertainments offered in one town. For example, the *Oxford Register*, October 16, 1896, ran one about the three Ottawa, Kansas, girls who ran away from home and went to the bad — bad was defined as Paola, Kansas!

It was interesting to note that the *Wichita City Eagle* reported in October 16, 1896 that Grover Cleveland would be remembered in history as the President least concerned for the country and the greatest vacation-taker, since the country never heard from him six months out of every year!

<sup>131</sup>*Great Bend Register*, October 19, 1876.

<sup>132</sup>*Topeka Daily Capital*, October 14, 1896.

<sup>133</sup>*Clay Center Dispatch*, October 15, 1896.

<sup>134</sup>*Oxford Register*, October 16, 1886.

<sup>135</sup>White, "Typical Kansas Community," 172.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>137</sup>*Weekly Kansas Chief*, October 14, 1886.

Kansans did not overlook the arts as a source of leisure time activities, even though Americans, generally, were purported to view the arts with suspicion. According to an ad in a Kansas paper, usefulness was a more valid criterion for the validity of artistic works than aesthetic value. This led to the infusion of nationalism as a factor in the arts with the degree of excellence dependent on the quality of the political and social system in which it was created.<sup>138</sup>

A Kansas poet, Lincoln Phifer, took exception to what he saw as the dominance of American arts by New England, which in turn had been "poisoned by exotics from the overflowing flood" of such works from Europe. He struck his blow for artistic freedom by writing a history of Kansas in verse.<sup>139</sup> Kansas poetry was described as primarily concerned with its land and sky rather than with its problems and its progress as a state; and one historian stated that Kansans were too busy to give much attention to the arts and, therefore, made few contributions of any permanent value in the field.<sup>140</sup>

While the creative contributions of Kansans may have been limited, their participation in activities related to the fine, practical, and popular arts appeared to be extensive. Reading was a particularly popular pastime. Mothers read aloud from Dickens and fathers did the same from the Bible.<sup>141</sup> According to William Allen White of Emporia, in every Kansas town there were those who read the best books and took regular trips to Chicago and St. Louis to hear good music. He further stated that Kansans bought the new books in popular literature and the best magazines. He decried the fact that theater as it appeared in Kansas was of poor quality. He pointed out that the Emporia Opera House was used primarily for community affairs, especially high school graduation exercises complete with "the terrible annual concert of the silver cornet band."<sup>142</sup> However, plays were attended by people of Kansas City, Kansas, in the Coates Opera House in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>143</sup>

Kansas newspapers carried poetry and short stories in their weekly issues. Titles of some of the poems gave clues to what editors thought their readers would like: "The Cane Bottomed Chair,"

<sup>138</sup>Ruth Miller Elson, "American Schoolbooks and 'Culture' in the Nineteenth Century," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46 (1959-60), 433-34.

<sup>139</sup>Lincoln Phifer, *The Dramas of Kansas* (Chicago, 1915), 9.

<sup>140</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 297; Arnold, *Kansas*, 237.

<sup>141</sup>Bivans, ed., "Diary of Luna E. Warner," *passim.*; Cowgill, *Never Forgotten*, 25-26.

<sup>142</sup>White, "Typical Kansas Community," 174; for a complete list of attractions, see James D. Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House in Emporia, Kansas," *Emporia State Research Studies*, XVIII (1970).

<sup>143</sup>*Kansas City Gazette*, October 14, 1896.

"The Parable of Adam and Eve," "School Begins Today," "Morality," and "Autumn" and "Greenbacks."<sup>144</sup> These reflected Kansans' interests in everyday events, religion, morality, nature, and politics. Titles of the short stories included: "Power of Prayer" and "Stranger Betrothed," "Matchmaking," and "The Turret Doors."<sup>145</sup> A cursory survey of the contents indicated a popular interest in romance, mystery, and peoples of other cultures.

Community newspapers offered fine art reproductions as inducement for new subscribers, printing a certificate which, with a quarter, would allow them to choose a print from a collection that included: "The Christian Graces," "The Prodigal Son," and "The Scout's Last Shot."<sup>146</sup> They carried ads for popular magazines such as *The American Rural Home*, *The Commonwealth*, and *The Ladies Home Journal*. There were also publications directed to those interested in learning to paint. The magazine, *Art Amateur*, included articles on practical hints for the beginning painter, flower analysis, and measurements of the human figure.<sup>147</sup>

Homemakers were interested in the decorative arts. A farmhouse in 1879 was described as having a parlor with three-ply carpeting, lace curtains, and a large vase of daisies, larkspur, and verbenas.<sup>148</sup> An item in one Kansas paper pointed out the availability of furniture that was being made of pressed paper.<sup>149</sup> Kansas wives could buy original paintings for their walls by commissioning the services of the artist who advertised his work in the *Dodge City Democrat*, October 19, 1896 and indicated his forte as subjects dealing with lands, flowers, fruits, animals, and marine life.

A relative uncertainty and degree of romanticism in the Kansans' aesthetic sense was apparent in the state's exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. It was an uneasy blend of Chinese, Moorish, Grecian, and Kansan motifs, described as "the somewhat admirable and pathetic efforts of a people without artistic precedents or roots, unable as yet to weave the gifts of other peoples into the fabric of their own lives."<sup>150</sup>

<sup>144</sup>Oxford Register, October 15, 1896; (Bird City) *Frontiersman*, October 13, 1886; *Smith County Bulletin*, October 12, 1886; *Smith County Pioneer*, October 15, 1896; *Weekly Kansas Chief*, October 12, 1896.

<sup>145</sup>Wyandotte Gazette, October 13, 1876; *Oxford Register*, October 13, 1876; *Smith County Bulletin*, October 12, 1896.

<sup>146</sup>*Smith County Pioneer*, October 12, 1876.

<sup>147</sup>*Oxford Register*, October 16 1896.

<sup>148</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 133.

<sup>149</sup>*Smith County Pioneer*, October 15, 1896.

<sup>150</sup>Beals, "Kansas at the World's Fair," 297.

There was more than a touch of romanticism in the writings of Kansans in their descriptions of things Kansan. This was found in their extolling the beauties of the natural setting or eulogizing the character of one just dead. It even permeated the writing of non-Kansans about the state and its people. To distill the essence of such writing would do violence to its content and cadence; therefore, exclusive of any necessary introductory information, the quotations following are verbatim. Regarding the attitude of Kansans toward corn, one writer speculated:

I suspect it (corn) has special favor with frontier people, perhaps without their realizing the preference, because of the resolute, imperious, army-like banners method it has of possessing and holding the country — for corn is by nature aggressive and determined. Smaller grains are timid in primitive soil while corn seizes the soil and makes it its own.<sup>151</sup>

Further, in an item about "King Corn" in *The Smith County Pioneer*, October 15, 1896, the grain was described as:

premier potentate of prairies and their prosperity. It is used for Irish Bacon, Boston Waffles, and Kentucky Mountain Dew.

A description of available prairie land appearing in an ad for the Union Pacific Railroad in a Welsh newspaper read:

Land where the gentle Spring and wonderful Summer pour down their blessing from overflowing coffers and only the playing of the red deer and the wonderful singing of the birds break the silence. Waggon roads which reveal the black earth cross green and verdant slopes where the tall grass of the prairies waves in the breeze.<sup>152</sup>

Senator James Ingalls of Kansas, was noted for his descriptive phrasing, and in writing about the slave issue in Kansas, he stated:

Indescribable agitation which always attends introduction of a great moral question into politics pervaded the souls of men, transferring the commonplace into the ideal, inaugurating a heroic epic. The raptures that swelled the hearts of pioneers yet thrill and vibrate in the blood of their posterity, like the chords of a smitten harp when the player has departed.<sup>153</sup>

It was in the obituary notices, that superlative and poetic imagery blended most vividly:

She saw, till for her the curtain fell, the whole splended drama of civilization in Kansas.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>151</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 134.

<sup>152</sup>Alan Conway, ed., *The Welsh in America* (Minneapolis, 1961), 10, quoted in Carolyn S. Berneking, "The Welsh Settlers of Emporia," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 37 (1971), 269.

<sup>153</sup>Ingalls, "Kansas," 703.

<sup>154</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 219.

She calmly made all preparations, bidding weeping friends, "Good-night," with blessed assurance that in a happier clime she would bid them "Goodmorning."<sup>155</sup>

The cold, relentless hand of death shows no mercy, and, in this case, as in many others, it has plucked a bloom of youth just in the prime of radiant life; but it is a great solace to the bereaved parents to know that such a bloom is not blighted, but only the more deeply budded in the tree of everlasting life on the other shore.<sup>156</sup>

The health of Kansans was considered to be both good and bad depending on the particular instance. It was mentioned often, however, and the patent medicine ads were a major part of every newspaper. A Scotsman was quoted as saying that Kansas was such a healthy country, if the people wanted graveyards, they would have to shoot someone.<sup>157</sup> An Easterner writing of his experience in Kansas observed that there was no malaria in Eastern Kansas.<sup>158</sup> Another observer stated that catarrh, rheumatism, and neuralgia were unknown in Kansas.<sup>159</sup> However, there was sickness also reported, to the contrary of the above. One young homesteader observed in her diary in the early 1870's that there were a good many sick with typhoid. Her father had an extended illness of almost a month's duration, her mother suffered from sick headaches, and she, herself, was sick.<sup>160</sup> Children appeared to be especially vulnerable to the diseases of membranous croup and diphtheria. There were twelve cases of the latter reported in Mulvane, Kansas, and the disease was reported as "raging" in October of 1886.<sup>161</sup> There was a typhoid death that same month in Clay Center. One paper commented on the "usual" sickness that occurred in August of that year. The first cases of Russian influenza, later called the grippe, were in Atchison, Kansas, where 1,000 cases were reported in January of 1890.<sup>162</sup>

Theories were stated relative to causes of sickness and suicide. A woman who grew up in Kansas in the 1870's and 1880's indicated that, at that time, the medical profession had much to say opposing bathrooms and indoor toilets as unsanitary and conducive to too frequent bathing which was considered unhealthy.<sup>163</sup> One young man

<sup>155</sup>Wichita Eagle, October 15, 1886.

<sup>156</sup>Oxford Register, October 16, 1886.

<sup>157</sup>Snell, ed., "Roughing It," 259.

<sup>158</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 107.

<sup>159</sup>Spearmen, "Great American Desert," 242.

<sup>160</sup>Bivans, ed., "Diary of Luna E. Warner," *passim*.

<sup>161</sup>Wichita Eagle, October 15, 1886.

<sup>162</sup>Prentis, Kansas, 198.

<sup>163</sup>Cowgill, *Never Forgotten*, 21.

was reported to have committed suicide; and, it was further reported, he was known to smoke 100 cigarettes a day. There was a warning printed in the *Baxter Springs News*, October 17, 1896 of a French physician and a New York doctor who were of the opinion that drinking coffee would cause blindness. The *People's Herald* of Lyndon on October 15, 1896, carried a definition of a relatively new disease called Railroad Kidney, which was a condition attributed to artificial stoppage of the pores of the skin by dirt.

Ills were not only of the body. Women suffered from depression because of loneliness on the prairies, and families moved back to town because of sickness. One woman succeeded in committing suicide by drinking a mixture of hair dye and embalming fluid.<sup>164</sup>

If the number of patent medicines available were any indication, the demand for commercial cures was a wide one. One such medicine promised that after two bottles of "Mother's Friends," a woman could deliver twins in less than twenty minutes with scarcely any pain, then or afterward. Another promised cure for fits.<sup>165</sup> Yet another ad promised "Happy Relief" for young men suffering from the "effects of errors and abuse in early life." This formula for "restoring their manhood" would be sent in a "sealed envelope."<sup>166</sup> In fact, it appeared that familiar ailments from constipation to falling hair could be treated by mail without benefit of physician.

Even in the years that cycled and recycled both depression and prosperity, the people of Kansas were compassionate and caring about their own need and the needs of others outside the State. In 1884, a thirty-one car train of corn was shipped from Sedgwick County farmers to the aid of flood victims in the Ohio Valley. Butler County farmers shipped thirty carloads of corn to the same area. The GAR Post in Fort Scott sent a load of corn to the Confederate Home in Richmond, Virginia, when their needs became known. When drought and depression hit the Western tier of Kansas counties in the early 1890's, Nortonville, Horton, and Shawnee County Railroad Commissioners purchased 10,000 bushels of seed corn and shipped it to the people there. Ellis County Russians, moved by the plight of their German kinsmen in the homeland, sent \$10,000 to them, along with an agent to bring a party of over 300 families back to Kansas.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>164</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 137; *Smith County Pioneer*, October 15, 1896; *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 14, 1896.

<sup>165</sup>Wichita Eagle, October 15, 1886; *ibid.*, October 16, 1896.

<sup>166</sup>Clay County Dispatch (Clay Center), October 12, 1876.

<sup>167</sup>Prentis, Kansas, 166, 242, 211.

In Bird City, Kansas, a dance was held to raise money to help an unfortunate woman who had no hands, to get artificial ones. An item reporting six inches of snow in Chicago also contained an expression of concern for the probable suffering of the homeless in that city. There were expressions of like concern for the English, reported suffering from a sudden severe cold spell in their country, and for the hundreds reported dying of cholera in Corea [sic].<sup>168</sup> In the late 1890's, Kansans were deeply concerned about the Cuban people during their struggles with Spain. It was reported that 150,000 non-combatants had died from starvation and that the Spanish were determined to exterminate the Cuban people, one way or another.<sup>169</sup>

Time appeared telescoped during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Progress in Kansas was so rapid and disasters so destructive that the past, present, and future were difficult to set apart. This contributed to a difficulty at times in separating myth from reality. The historical image of the Western prairies as the Great American Desert led Easterners to believe that Kansas was flat, featureless, and devoid of any natural beauty. At the same time, a Kansan was seeing and reporting that the valley of the Republican River was an area of clean, pure air, a great expanse of sky, and clouds and sunsets of rare beauty and color.<sup>170</sup>

Kansans, themselves, were sometimes criticized as "country people" with the implication that they were primitive and ignorant. This was the case when a writer described Kansas soldiers in that manner during their stay in San Francisco following enlistment in the army to serve in the Spanish-American War. It was found on investigation, however, that more than half the officers in the Kansas contingent were graduates of Kansas State College.<sup>171</sup>

A true Kansan was portrayed as intensely interested in his past, eager to tell about it, and explain its greatness. The events that made up his history, such as the Western migrations, the slavery issue, and the Civil War, were inextricably tied to his nation's history. At the same time, there were those who observed that in Kansas nothing rested on the traditions of their elders.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>168</sup>(Abilene) *Chronicle*, November 30, 1871; *Dodge City Times*, October 14, 1886.

<sup>169</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 256.

<sup>170</sup>Spearman, "Great American Desert," 243.

<sup>171</sup>Prentis, *Kansas*, 262.

<sup>172</sup>Arnold, *Kansas*, 237.

Still others predicted that a split between the East and the West or the South and the West was not probable because the West was made up of Easterners and Southerners who continued to look back to their roots in the families and homes of their respective section.<sup>173</sup>

An item appearing in both the *Garden City Press* and the *Wichita Eagle* in October of 1886 exemplified the confusion that could result when myth was destroyed by reality in the growth of Kansas. It stated that thirty years ago, which would have been around 1856, it was believed that agriculture was not possible west of the Blue and Neosho Rivers. Then, within the next ten to twelve years, the line between potential garden and traditional desert moved to the Republic and the Arkansas Rivers. Finally, between approximately ten to twelve years before the item was written, which would be between 1874 and 1886, the line was moved west once more, to the 100th meridian. Thus, the area that was considered too barren, too arid, and too high for farming became limited to a narrower and narrower corridor in the state. The people who came and stayed and conquered the soil made a rich agricultural economy a reality for Kansans, in spite of drought, grasshoppers, and blizzards.<sup>174</sup>

As this pattern of growth unfolded, it left in the procreant earth seeds of the future, recognized and expressed in an optimism that remained constant even during the worst of times. An Easterner observed that the typical Westerner (and he was writing of Kansans) "thinks that he can prove by mathematics and geography that the city in which he had cast his lot cannot fail of greatness, and the one chief object of his life is to advance its interests."<sup>175</sup> This same attitude of optimism was observed in the way individuals in Kansas looked toward their own personal futures. The hired man and the hired girl considered their status both temporary and transitory.<sup>176</sup> As one farmer put it:

And all the time we'd be plannin' what we'd do next year. I think that helped a good deal to keep us in heart; it's a lucky knack in anybody; when a man quits lookin' ahead, I wouldn't give shucks for him.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>173</sup>*Wichita Eagle*, October 16, 1896.

<sup>174</sup>*Wichita Eagle*, October 15, 1886.

<sup>175</sup>Leonard, "Southwestern Kansas," 103.

<sup>176</sup>James C. Malin, *A Concern About Humanity* (Lawrence, 1964), 198.

<sup>177</sup>King, "Picturesque Features," 137.



As one writer put it, the todays in Kansas became tomorrows as if by miracle. He observed that prophecy and fulfillment tended to come together as when a railroad created traffic rather than being created by it; and when a newspaper was printed under a tree before a town was staked out.<sup>178</sup>

The Kansan Ethos during the 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's was a blend of the past, present, and future. Although the Kansan was developing a frontier, he was not always a frontiersman. He was less a primitive man breaking trail on that line between wilderness and civilization but more an experienced farmer, a cultivated New Englander or a European immigrant. He was less a rugged individualist and more a member of a cause or a community. He was less a child of nature and more a disciple in awe of God's creation and keeping a close eye on His weather. He was less a cynic and more a paradoxical optimistic fatalist. He was inventive, invincible, and superstitious. He was a moralist and likely to make immorality not only sinful, but illegal. He was a man with a mission and believed the fields were "white unto harvest" in Kansas more than any place on earth, whether for reaping souls, freeing slaves, tilling the soil, or turning a dollar.

He believed and practiced the ideals of the second chance and unlimited opportunity in both the social and economic arenas. He was, whether white or black, likely to have made the American Dream his own. If he were black, his chances of making it come true were considerably less than if we were white. If he were Indian, his own image was blurred. In either instance, Negro or Indian, he was subject to prejudice, sometimes virulent, other times that of gentle ignorance. He mixed his devotion to the traditions of his past with his commitment to making life better for himself and his community in the future. He thereby developed both a conservative strain and an adaptability to change. On the surface he could "spit on tomorrow" with all its uncertainties but underneath, he was sure that tomorrow ultimately would, indeed, be a good one.

He believed that education was the key to success and drinking the path to failure. His personality was a blend of Puritanism, patriotism, and perseverance. He was an ethnic mix, as well.

He was a booster without peer of his town and his state. He was unsure about the "New Woman," but he was sure her place was still in the home. She knew how to suffer, but as the years passed, she suffered less.

<sup>178</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.

He was suspicious of alien political ideologies but was avidly political, himself — at times more avid than wise. He had a "way with words" whether pungent platitude or purposeful prayer. He appreciated beauty of many kinds — man-made or God-made. His houses were decorated, his feelings were often rhymed, he had prints on the wall, and he was enriched by his ethnic/cultural heritage. He may have been untutored in the finer arts, but his neighbor may have belonged to a choral group whose musical roots were deep. His mother may have read to him from the classics. His newspaper printed short stories from Europe and commented on Greek history.

He worked hard, not always in the soil. He was a professional, a laborer, a salesman, a businessman, often more than one at a time. He played hard, mostly in groups. He was more healthy than sick, but sickness was known both of body and mind. Healing was often by mail rather than by science. He was a humanitarian. He cared for others in near and far away places, but above all, he loved Kansas and revered his own homeplace.

Religion tied his time together. It also knitted the strands of his other social institutions into the fabric of his life. To most, it was the "Old Time Religion" in which belief was behavior. It was even then, though, a moot point whether religion was the agent of changing a man's ways or whether a man's ways in business, politics, education, and the family changed his religion.

Kansas in the last three decades of the nineteenth century provided a synergism of nature and culture that released energies of character and custom that combined with the times to create the Kansan Ethos.