



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Clayton Callahan for the Master of Arts in History presented on March 1, 2018.

Title:

Intertwined Legacies: Emporia and its Railroads: 1857-1900

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Gregory Schneider

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:

The aim of this research was to follow the development of the city of Emporia, and several of the railroads that connected to it early in the history of Kansas, specifically from 1857 to 1900. This investigation was conducted in order to determine a correlation between the success that railroads had and the success that the town enjoyed by association. The dependence that these early railroads had on Emporia for their continued success was also examined. In order to best analyze the totality of this relationship, several topics are covered in depth, including economics, culture, politics, the social changes railway connection brought, and how influences in Emporia could affect the grander workings of the railroad companies. Finally, to determine a legacy, evidence of the railroads' impact on Emporia in the present day is also briefly analyzed.

Keywords:

Railroads, Gilded Age, Populism, Kansas, Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad, Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, Emporia, Local, Populism, Culture, Farming, Immigration, Kansas City, Emporia, and Southwestern Railroad, American West, Frontier, Transportation

INTERTWINED LEGACIES:  
EMPORIA AND ITS RAILROADS: 1857-1900

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
 <u>Chapter</u>	
Introduction .....	1
1 Railroads Reach Kansas .....	3
2 Emporia is Founded .....	15
3 Railroads Reach Emporia .....	27
4 Impact of the Railroads: Economic .....	45
5 Impact of the Railroads: Society and Culture.....	64
6 The Legacy.....	80
Bibliography.....	90

## Introduction

The story of the American West throughout the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century is one that has always generated romanticism and intrigue. Stories of survival in the wilderness, gunfights, outlaws, lawlessness, and adventure are all classical characteristics that quickly come to the front of popular opinion when one thinks of the “West”. Of course, no discussion can happen unless the march of civilization across the plains and hills of the frontier is also made clear. Railroads dramatically changed the course of life for those braving the trip westward. Railroads brought immigrants, investment opportunities, and the basic necessities of life, and secured the United States’ domain across its lands. The nation would be drawn closer together by the people’s will to succeed and through bars of iron that drew the nation closer. Railways made desolate backwaters into prosperous centers of progress. They brought new people, ideas, technology, resources, and opportunities into the vastness of the frontier where such things would have never existed without some sort of assistance. Railroads represented salvation to those communities that made contact. Almost all communities that were bypassed by a railroad fell into promiscuity and desolation.

Kansas is a state that has many of these stories. Those towns that continue to exist do so, at least in part, with the assistance of a railroad connection that was made during the formative years of the state. Several of these towns would become the population centers, such as Wichita, Lawrence, and Topeka, which today still remain arguably the three most important cities in this state. However, it is in my opinion that no other town in Kansas offers a better example of this relationship between small frontier towns and small railroad companies than Emporia.

It was a town whose foundational ideas were set upon two pillars: that slavery was a cruel institution, and that market capitalism was the supreme economic system. Even when the town was only a handful of buildings big in size, its founders knew one thing to be a certainty: a railroad would determine whether the town lived or died. When these railroad connections finally did arrive, they influenced every facet of society. The success of both the town and the railroads would rise and fall in tandem. The town's economy, its culture, were determined by the service that the railroads could bring to the town. Yet this influence was not one sided. Emporia represented an immensely important service station for two separate railroads. Support from the town to keep the railroads alive in the earliest years gave both companies an opportunity to find success. Then, even after both railroads had spread throughout multiple states, events in Emporia would demonstrate the lasting impact that political and economic issues in the town could have on companies as large as the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad or the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad. Even today, this rich railroad legacy can still be observed.



## Chapter 1: Railroads Reach Kansas

In the late 1850's, the faint blow of a locomotive whistle could be heard as a train entered the Kansas territory for the first time. The arrival of the steam locomotive and railroad transportation signaled the beginning of a new era in the territory. When steam locomotion and iron rail finally reached Kansas, they were embraced wholeheartedly and lauded as the answer to so many problems that had been endured on the frontier. This enthusiasm was not surprising, considering that, "by the first half of the nineteenth century Americans had become particularly receptive to mechanical inventions as embodiments of their belief in the value of progress and in man's power over nature,"<sup>1</sup> Iron rails ultimately proved to be the unifying instrument that would advance civilization across the west, turning the region into an oasis of modern productivity.

To understand the logistical difficulties endured by Kansas before the railroads, we need to look at the national situation. Before the arrival of railroads in the United States, transportation of any kind was enormously expensive, hazardous, and painfully slow. The lack of any kind of effective shipping infrastructure had been a significant dilemma, and one which dated back to the country's inception. During the American Revolution, absent transportation infrastructure in the colonies significantly handicapped both British and American armies, for throughout the colonial period, "Roads were mainly the responsibility of local public authorities."<sup>2</sup> This initial struggle with the movement of goods foreshadowed the multitude of future difficulties that would arise in the absence of an essential transportation infrastructure. Game trails and well-worn paths

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<sup>1</sup> I. E. Quastler, *Railroads of Lawrence Kansas* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1979), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Carter Goodrich, *Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads: 1800-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 20.

made by native peoples and plucky colonists represented the best routes along which nearly all cross-country travel and transportation were carried.<sup>3</sup> Difficulties experienced with these beaten paths were numerous. Such trails were not always well-known or heavily trafficked routes, and losing one's way while traveling on these was not an uncommon occurrence. During each rain, the trails became muddy and largely unusable, halting all significant travel and shipping to all but the hardiest carriage drivers and lone wanderers. River crossings, where they occurred, caused still greater delays. Due to the troubles associated with using these paths, colonial shipping across land routes became prohibitively expensive and stiflingly slow<sup>4</sup>. The problems manifested themselves in the colonies in such a way that "the cost of transporting general merchandise from Philadelphia to Lake Erie was \$349 per ton and the time in transit might be weeks. Forty miles a day was excellent time in the crack coaches of the era."<sup>5</sup> The country possessed an unsustainable transportation system, and overall efficiency and affordability would not improve significantly in the coming years.

Once America became a nation, the ability of goods and people to travel at a brisk pace to different regions was not only essential for the economy to thrive and function, but also for effective governance. In a nation that was as vast as the United States, an improved system of transportation was needed to assert the government's influence over its domain. One of the earliest efforts to emend these troubles manifested in the development of federal roads and turnpike systems. These were purposefully-built roads rather than well-worn trails, and could as such handle much more traffic. The arteries that

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<sup>3</sup> L. L. Waters, *Steel Trails to Santa Fe* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1950), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Goodrich, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Waters, 4-5.

were designed to connect major cities were, in certain examples, a great success.

Turnpikes were able to drive the price of transporting goods down to double-digit totals on some of the shorter routes.<sup>6</sup> However, these roads were expensive to build and maintain against the daily assault by nature. Riding on them was still rough, and the system as a whole was ineffective at alleviating the transportation burden ailing the nation.

Horses and wagons, as tools for transportation, were the most common form of long-distance and bulk transportation. Indeed, in the United States, everyone was still traveling in much the same manner as the Romans had more than a thousand years earlier. A single horse, or even several attached to a carriage, would still be limited in what kind and how much of a product could actually be transported cross-country. Even on the turnpikes, goods that were transported were usually high-end products that could justify the expense. The long-range transportation of less extravagant goods by identical means was almost always out of the question. When transporting most food products, for example, the lack of shelter from the elements, limited carrying capacity, and no effective way of keeping food from spoiling while in transport rendered the utility of shipping foodstuffs by horse-drawn cart minimal at best. In the case of shipping food, the rates, which even after the War of 1812 were still at 30¢ a ton-mile, were, “three times the value of a bushel of wheat, and six times that of corn.”<sup>7</sup>

These limitations of wagon-borne transportation were stifling issues that were further complicated by external factors from which wagons were inherently vulnerable.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>7</sup> John F. Stover, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads* (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), 10.

Attacks by bandits, poor riding conditions for those operating the coaches, and exhausting long trips assured that anything that was requested, even in scenarios where supplies may have been needed urgently, were almost always unavailable either on demand or on time. It was in this era that one of the old Conestoga wagons, with its wooden wheels and white canvas, had managed to make the trip from New York City to Philadelphia in just three days, and it was promptly given the name “flying machine” for its incredible achievement.<sup>8</sup> Yet, with no better alternative for cross-country transportation, these antiquated forms of movement continued without significant challenge.

In Kansas, some attempts were made by the territorial government to create some form of a road network, but these efforts were stunted by the same challenges faced in the East. There were several trails that reached across the territory, however, and one of the most notable was the Santa Fe Trail. This trail crossed most of the length of the Kansas territory, and terminated in the commercially successful town of Santa Fe. The trade from Santa Fe was lucrative, but it was also exceedingly expensive due to poor transportation facilities. As a result, the rates for transporting goods and people were both grossly inflated. The journey along the Santa Fe Trail was also dangerous. Transportation across the western roads not only faced many of the dangers experienced back east, but in many cases the journey was far more treacherous. Lawlessness throughout the West heightened the potential for danger posed by bandits. Harsh environmental conditions and the lack of civilization along the western route from which new supplies could be requisitioned further complicated the journey’s logistics. In fact, it was at an outpost established in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

Council Grove in 1847, by a man named Seth Hays, that the last supplies could be bought on the trail before arriving in Santa Fe hundreds of miles away.<sup>9</sup> The dangers facing early Kansas shippers were further exacerbated by the poor relations that existed between Native American populations and the U.S. government. Usually, outrage against the actions of the U.S. federal and state governments resulted directly in retaliatory attacks on traders that most would not survive.

The limitations of horses and wheeled transportation were obvious and the natural tendency was to examine how watercraft could alleviate these burgeoning problems. Ships had always been used in the U.S. for the purpose of transporting goods and people. When the nation was still a series of colonies, smaller vessels were already designed to coast up and down the inner rivers and waterways connecting port towns, providing easy communication and trade. The U.S. benefited greatly from an abundance of natural water passages, and for those towns that could establish a connection with a port, the benefits were substantial. In comparison to those traveling on land, citizens could travel in greater numbers and at a faster pace, even if it was frequently much less sanitary. Ship borne-transportation additionally offered the benefits of cheaper fares and faster delivery of raw materials and manufactured goods than could have ever been dreamed of with horses.

Even so, the limitations of geography meant that the benefits of water transportation would not be felt throughout the nation in its entirety. In order to extend the benefits of water transportation beyond that nation's natural waterways, a sporadic and intense period of canal building began. Beginning in the early 1840's and lasting through to the end of the Antebellum period, 4,300 miles of canals would be dug in an

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<sup>9</sup> Greg A. Hoots, *Images of America: Flint Hills* (Charleston: Acadia Publishing, 2011.), 45.

effort to expand access to one of the nation's most valuable natural resources.<sup>10</sup> Designed to bring the benefits of water shipping to economic centers that lacked a water connection, canals that linked large cities generated incredible profits for those who dared to commit the arduous task of canal building. The most famous of these systems was the Erie Canal, which was 364 miles long and cost over \$8 million to complete and linked Albany and Buffalo.<sup>11</sup> It was an incredible success in a heavily commercial region of the nation that led to drastically diminished shipping rates and thus aided in the incredible rate of growth enjoyed in New York City.

Canals, despite all the potential they represented, would never be a cure-all for the country's transportation problems. Over time, the traffic demands across the country's transportation system only grew exponentially heavier. Limitations as to how much traffic canals could effectively maintain meant that eventually demands exceeded the canal system's expected capacity. As a result, even on the Erie Canal, shipping was eventually strait-jacketed. Canals and some natural U.S. waterways had the additional complication of freezing during the winters, which brought transportation to a standstill during the winter months. Despite the previously mentioned drawbacks to horse-reliant transport, horses with sleds were able to utilize these frozen rivers to at least keep some semblance of service continuing.<sup>12</sup>

The success of the Erie Canal was also not representative of the outcomes experienced by canal builders throughout the rest of the frontier. Many canals ended up being terminally expensive and unable to produce a sizeable profit margin (if one at all),

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<sup>10</sup> Dolores Greenberg, *Financiers and Railroads: 1869-1889* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Stover, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Waters, 4.

which made it difficult to justify keeping some services going. By the end of 1826, the demand for efficient and affordable transportation across the nation was coming to a boiling point. In Kansas, shipping and transportation via waterways was never going to be a workable solution. Lacking the high number of capable waterways that the nation's eastern municipalities were able to utilize, settlers in the Kansas territory found little relief in using watercraft. In the absence of canals, Kansas relied more heavily on transport via natural waterways to keep local shipping services crutching along. However, Kansas' lack of wide waterways limited the size of watercraft to mainly rafts or small boats that had exceedingly limited hauling capabilities. With the natural waterways also restrained in their reach, the vast majority of the territory continued to feel the strain caused by having little to no viable methods of movement.

In this ever-demanding and competitive transportation environment, the introduction of the railroads proved to be a beast that matched all of its rivals in tenacity and force. The first railways were not railroads in the traditional sense as they are recognized today. The first railroads in the U.S. resulted from early experiments to try and improve on the service that could be offered by a horse. The system included using carts that were placed on smooth iron rails and then drawn by a beast. As simple as this new method indeed was, it produced dramatic results. The Mauch Chunk Railway, at the time a remarkable feat of engineering, exemplified the extraordinary enhancement provided by this technology. The line itself was little more than a mine railway that carried away materials from a dig site.<sup>13</sup> The rail-and-horse combination meant that carts were able to scale the mountain with much less difficulty than before. When the cart was

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<sup>13</sup> Craig Miner, *A Most Magnificent Machine: America Adopts the Railroad, 1825-1862* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 1.

allowed to coast freely back down the slope, the grand vision for the future of rail travel could be experienced. According to Craig Miner, “Coming down, there was no horse, only a rope wound at the top around a wheel with a friction brake to control the descent. That ride reached speeds of 30 miles per hour – faster than the passenger had ever experienced.”<sup>14</sup> These speeds were hardly imaginable before. The evidence of what rail transportation, and high-speed rail at that, could accomplish echoed throughout the untamed landscape, resonating in the hearts of the imaginative and ambitious alike. What could be achieved was ingrained in the minds of many plucky entrepreneurs who envisioned the future of rail transportation.

With the arrival of the steam locomotive, the answer to the prevailing transportation problem had finally arrived. Americans had already known of the existence of the steam-propelled engine, as they had watched developments in England closely. In 1813, Americans already knew of “Puffing Billy,” which was replacing the coal cart pulling horses in England. In 1825, they learned of “Locomotion,” which trundled along at the brisk pace of 16 miles per hour.<sup>15</sup> The combination of American passionate curiosity towards new technology and economic demand drove efforts to bring this machine across the Atlantic. The first railroad in the nation arrived on February 28, 1827, when the Baltimore & Ohio railroad was chartered, which signaled the beginning of the railroad industry to North America.<sup>16</sup> While the promise of the railroad was observed and well understood, it would a few years before the railroad building craze would finally take in the nation. This hesitation to implement the new technology was partly because of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Dee Brown, *Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow: Railroads in the West* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1977), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Stover, 13.



a lack of iron industry required to make building materials affordable, and partly because many potential investors were still uncertain of the new technology.<sup>17</sup> Superstitions surrounding railroads further fed public distrust and fears. When in Virginia a locomotive broke free of its train and lost its engineer, it went speeding down the tracks unmanned. When onlookers saw the sight of the lone locomotive speeding along, “some thought it was Lucifer himself in the shape of a steam engine taking little brush against time.”<sup>18</sup>

However, as the benefits of railroad connections disseminated more widely, public opinion shifted in the favor of the railroad industry. While these early rail lines were not at all as fast and efficient as they are today, they were still revolutionary in what could be accomplished. In comparison to horse-drawn wagons and stagecoaches, railroads usually offered cheap fares and an experience traveling that was much more enjoyable for those passengers who rode on them. With freight traffic, railroads could carry more product at a faster pace than could have been achieved with just horses, and shipping rates plummeted as a consequence. By 1853, for example, the cost of shipping freight on any one of the northeastern railroads “ranged from 2.4¢ to 3.5¢ per ton-mile. By 1860 these same railroads had lowered their rates to around 2¢ a ton-mile.”<sup>19</sup> While it could be said that horses were not restricted by iron rails for movement, there was also nowhere rails couldn’t reach, and gradually, traffic that was reserved for movement by animal now was being taken over by machine as rail networks expanded steadily. In comparison to shipborne transportation on rivers and canals, one characteristic of rail traffic proved particularly advantageous: railroads were not confined to a waterway. By

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<sup>17</sup> Greenberg, 22.

<sup>18</sup>“Ludicrous Accident on the Petersburg Railroad,” *The Connecticut Courant* (Hartford: October 28, 1833), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Stover, 22.

building routes directly between economic centers, railroads were able to ship goods and people across distances that were exponentially shorter than their water-bound counterparts.

In the age of steamboats, a cargo ship, for example, could travel from Cincinnati to the important commercial city of St. Louis, but this was a trip that was 702 miles long. However, the Ohio and Mississippi (O.&M.) Railroad was able to make the same trip in just 339 miles.<sup>20</sup> Nor did railroads stop operating in the winter months. In the markets of the nation, especially in the northeast, stable and reliable transportation services that were not affected by the daily weather patterns were essential. Since only the railroads were offering this, the choice was clear as to what transportation service would win favor among year-round shippers. Railroads were relatively cheap to maintain and operate after the initial building costs, and these characteristics similarly sealed the fate of shipborne transport in almost all markets.

Railroads had taken over the transportation industry in the U.S. The steam locomotive demonstrated its ability to dominate the competition in any of the markets that its competitors participated in, and it did so while excelling in every measurable aspect.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. ultimately embraced this new form of transportation, and in only a few decades, railroads had been chartered and built across the nation. Almost in tandem, as the nation expanded, so did its ever-increasing railway network. Iron rail and wood ties followed in the footsteps of settlers westward, solidifying American claims to these lands,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Robert William Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 207-208.

and providing the economic environment that was required for society on the frontier to not only survive, but also to thrive.

In the Kansas territory, the railroad-building environment was energetic but financially much more perilous than it was elsewhere. While many of the major railroads that crossed the nation at that time did not need to rely on individual towns for prosperity, the situation in Kansas was especially vulnerable. The potential traffic in the territory was limited, and sparsely-populated lands meant that railroads built in the state would have difficulty ever turning a profit to justify construction. This further stifled investment, as those with capital didn't want to take a chance on railroads that would begin on unstable financial grounds and without a clear vision for survival. These lines were ones that began and ended in seemingly unremarkable locations, with the intent that the railroad itself would give the area value.<sup>22</sup> The combination of a lack of investment from the east, and limited civilization and industry to provide the economic life needed, ensured that the future of any railroad in the territory would be uncertain from its inception. Yet, these factors would not be enough to stop the true dreamers of the age, whose visions ranged from establishing vast empires of steel to wanting to connect localities into a more closely-knitted community. Therefore, regardless of the enumerated risks, on February 1, 1855, when the Leavenworth, Pawnee & Western Railroad was organized, it would become the first railroad chartered in Kansas; it kicked off a period of railway building and chartering that would erupt across a territory that was desperate for the life blood that railroads could pump through it.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Goodrich, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Pacific Railway Act, July 1, 1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

Emporia was founded from its inception with the goal to become a cultural and economic utopia which provided the fertile soil for a number of its own ambitious dreamers. The people who were moving into the area had “at once caught the spirit of enterprise and push which has been characteristic of the people,” from the founders of the township to the lowly farmers that called Emporia home.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the odds of success were against the town. Like many Kansas towns, Emporia was no more than a dot on a map. The intersection of opportunity, necessity, and ambition forged a symbiotic relationship between Emporia and two prominent railroad companies of the era. Emporia pushed relentlessly for railroad connections, and became heavily invested in ensuring the development of any railroad that offered a connection to the rest of the nation. Particularly in their infancy, Kansas railroads were desperate for investment and traffic to keep their lines alive, and Emporia offered both. The fate of the two railways connected to Emporia became intertwined with the fate of the Emporian dream itself. In this time period, such a marriage of the rail industry and Emporia’s entrepreneurs would change the face of southern Kansas. Emporia would be opened to new ideas and resources from the rest of the nation, paving the road for the town to become a manifestation of the cultural, economic, and political ‘utopia’ that the town’s founders had wanted from its conception. Emporia, in turn, would also come to have a significant impact on the railroads as well, as it provided traffic and initial investment that helped bolster the rail lines financially during many uncertain early years. From the beginning, success or failure would rely on the fortitude and persistence of this partnership.

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<sup>24</sup> Edwards Brothers, *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas* (Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1878), 5.

## Chapter 2: Emporia is Founded

At the beginning of 1857, Emporia, Kansas did not exist. While Emporia existed as an idea in the minds of a handful of energetic and bold men from Lawrence, the physical elements of the future city were non-existent. The only aspect of Emporia that did exist was the land, which rested within the softly flowing Flint Hills that gently graced the prairie. The soil here was rich with minerals and nutrients, which were “capable of producing more grain than any other river valley in the world.”<sup>25</sup> This was especially true to the south of the future townsite, where rich soils were especially prevalent. Yet, to the south of the future town were the Native-American reservations, lands owned and roamed by indigenous peoples already displaced once before by the U.S. government. While not all of these rich prairie lands were opened for settlement, treaties and agreements worked out between the U.S. government and the resettled tribes allowed for some limited homesteading in the region. There was little doubt that under the right conditions, a town situated deep in the Flint Hills would have the chance to become an agricultural powerhouse. The man who recognized the potential of the location, and came to seize upon the opportunity, was a young newspaper editor in Lawrence.

During the tumultuous period of ‘Bleeding Kansas,’ G. W. Brown would happen across this land full of potential. Here he saw the ideal location in which his idea of a utopia could become a reality. As the owner of the popular and widely-read Lawrence-based newspaper, *The Herald of Freedom*, Brown was one of the top provocateurs and a widely-recognized leader of the anti-slavery forces in the Kansas Territory. His

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<sup>25</sup> Keith L. Bryant Jr., *History of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 65.

newspaper, which held readership not just throughout the territory, but on the east coast as well, retold the stories of clashes between border ruffians and free-state agitators. The *Herald of Freedom* became the perfect forum in which to champion his beliefs not only in the abolition of human bondage but also in the capitalist system and the rights for all workers engaged in a free labor system. As a consequence, the struggle to determine the adoption or abolition of slavery in the Kansas territory took on an almost biblical meaning for him. Amidst the fighting throughout the territory, and rising tensions across the country, Brown was determined to provide an example that the rest of the nation could follow. He would carve out a place amid all of the civil unrest and bloodshed that could stand as a beacon for what these ideas would become if allowed to take hold. Even in his old age, Brown held to this vision firmly. Brown, at the town's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1907, stated, "I hope our beloved Emporia, whose birth we saw...whose future is so full of promise... will go from age to age, her people accumulating wisdom, true greatness and glory, and serve as a living example for all time... They who shall succeed you will toil on, and add new luster to your fame and achievements."<sup>26</sup>

There can be little doubt of the vision that Brown and the other founding members, Lyman Allen, Columbus Hornsby, General Deitzler, and Preston B. Plumb, had for the future of their experiment in town-building.<sup>27</sup> Unanimously, the decision was made in Lawrence, Kansas, on February 10, 1857, to form the Emporia Town Company. It would be a town that would champion all of the right and proper Christian and free-market ideas that Brown held to be absolute. Among these ideals was abstinence from

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<sup>26</sup> Ted F. McDaniel, *Our Land: A History of Lyon County, Kansas: A Bicentennial Publication*, ed. Alberta Brinkman (Emporia: Emporia State Press, 1976), 153.

<sup>27</sup> Original Emporia Township Company Charter, Lyon County Historical Society, 1.

liquor, laws against gambling, and other ordinances designed to prevent those vices that may have threatened their utopia.<sup>28</sup> Their fledgling town would not just be another small dot on a map, but instead, the five Lawrence men were determined that this town would be an oasis in a land of untapped wealth and opportunity. However, founding a town in the Kansas territory at this time was no small feat. Survival of the Emporia Town Company was uncertain from the beginning.

Founding a town in the Kansas territory was a risky endeavor. There was no shortage of dangers faced by early settlers, and navigating these obstacles seemed to make the success of the town a doubtful prospect. First, there was persistent frontier violence between the pro- and anti-slavery forces that had already led to death and destruction throughout the territory. Towns had been sacked and pillaged, and young towns with little ability to defend themselves were especially vulnerable. In Breckinridge County, known soon after the Civil War as Lyon County, there had already been violence. On the night of September 14, 1856, less than a year before Emporia's founding, the county became embroiled in the thick of frontier aggressions when a settlement was attacked. Jacob Stotler, in his record of the history of Lyon County, described the attack:

The settlement about the junction and below there was largely composed of pro-slavery men. One of them, a Mr. Gregg, kept a store on or near the present site of Neosho Rapids. A gang of robbers, under the name of Free State men, mostly, from Topeka, came to rob this store and others in this region. After they had robbed Mr. Gregg, they went to the house of a Mr. Carver near by, and demanded admission. This was refused, when shots were fired into the building, one of them taking effect in Mrs. Carver's side, from which she died.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards Brothers, *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas* (Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1878), 5.

The next day that attack continued:

They came up toward where Emporia now stands and passed north. Next day they gave C. H. Withington's store at Allen a call, and carried off and destroyed everything he had, amounting to over \$3,000.<sup>30</sup>

The risk of conflict with warring forces was very real, and when it did occur, Stotler's testimony showed that not only did it consume human life, but it also destroyed the livelihoods of settlers touched by such tragedy. There was also risk of conflict with the Native American tribes, whose fragile and heavily-strained relations with intruding settlers made outbreaks of violence almost inevitable. Truly, the area in and around Emporia *was* wild country, and the indigenous peoples in the region already disdained the idea of white settlement. Raw in spirit over repeated forced relocations, and having very little to no trust vested in the promises made by newly arriving settlers, there can be little doubt that a settlement on or near lands believed to be theirs would be met with hostility and resistance. While violence was a rare occurrence, native tribes still did occasionally plunder and pillage settlements, sometimes seemingly at random.<sup>31</sup>

When a new settlement was established, basic needs had to be met if life were to be sustained for any period of time. A reliable water supply was an absolute necessity, as well as the ability to grow crops effectively. Crops were to be for more than supplying food to individual families and communities, for they also needed to provide a surplus of produce for regional and national markets. Farming was the most widely practiced means of making the prairies into an economically viable region. With few exceptions, any settlement that did not facilitate the growth of cash crops would not survive. Access to

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., loc-cit.

<sup>31</sup> James Marshall, *Santa Fe: The Railroad that Built an Empire* (New York: Ams Press, 1987),



mail and other basic goods not manufactured within the town was also a necessity. Not everything that the settlers needed could be produced in the small communities. Heavy machinery, building materials, and other heavy goods or bulk products had to be brought in from the outside. Therefore, a means by which this importation could be facilitated had to be established early on. Finally, a steady stream of new settlers was essential for any settlement that evolved to be a success. A small population would be suppressed by its lack of spare hands to aid in farming and in developing manufacturing and commercial businesses. An insufficient number of skilled individuals also resulted in a need to rely upon outside goods and services to fill deficiencies experienced in their own capabilities, further strangling the town's independent growth.

Brown and his four other associates were acutely aware of these issues when they were searching for the location for their town. After riding out and seeing the future townsite from a nearby hilltop, Brown and his associates knew that this tract of land would be the perfect location for their utopia.<sup>32</sup> Even so, before the first settler could come, Emporia's founders were faced with the daunting prospect of dealing with the native peoples in the region. In the area where the future town would soon rest were the displaced Iowa tribes of the Kaw, Sauk and Fox, who, in the 1837 Treaty of St. Peters, ceded their homelands to live in the new Indian Territory.<sup>33</sup> Despite the aforementioned challenges that accompanied to establish relations with the native tribes already in the area, changing circumstances in the region played in the favor of the founders. Waves of settlers had already begun to build new lives on native lands in the area despite warnings and mandates by the federal government to cease such encroachment. In order to funnel

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<sup>32</sup> McDaniel, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Treaty With the Chippewa, July 29, 1837 7 Statute, 528. Proclamation, June 15, 1838.

new arrivals to land that was open to settlement, the territorial legislature created Breckenridge County in 1855.<sup>34</sup> Near the southernmost tip of habitable land would be the future location of Emporia. With the location for their town locked into their minds, they decided to pool their resources, and on February 21, 1857, Brown and the rest of the founders agreed to send General Deitzler south, where he would “purchase or cause to be purchased in his own name an Indian Land Warrant for Six Hundred and Forty Acres of land to cost not exceeding Eighteen Hundred Dollars”<sup>35</sup>

Buying the land would be enough to avoid early conflict with the tribes in the area, but most of the other aforementioned problems were not as easily or simply handled. In the earliest years of Emporia’s founding, there were numerous reasons to be concerned about the future of the young town. These perils were well documented by Preston B. Plumb, the only founding member of the town company to ever fully commit to living in the settlement. As a former newspaper foreman and editor, Plumb put his skills to work in 1857 as he established the *Kansas News* in a town that was no more than three buildings large.<sup>36</sup> Town growth was practically non-existent for four months after Emporia was established, and the land purchased lay largely untouched. Stotler, a former foreman for Plumb, wrote on May 19, 1860: “When the paper began there were only three houses in Emporia, the hotel, the grocery store of Hornby and Frick, and a small building” that was “set up as a boarding house.”<sup>37</sup> It was from the boarding house that the newspaper was operated until its official building was constructed.<sup>38</sup> There was little

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<sup>34</sup> McDaniel, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Original Emporia Township Company Charter, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia: 1882), 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

doubt that the newspaper was key to the survival of the town, and until construction was completed the printing office worked endlessly to keep the paper running with almost no facilities or supplies.<sup>39</sup> It was a titanic struggle to keep the paper operating in the town's early years, but such struggles paid dividends later on, and the newspaper served many functions in the foundational development of Emporia.

Desiring to attract new settlers, the *Kansas News* published many articles encouraging new settlers to come to Emporia. These periodicals were the critical medium through which Emporia was able to broadcast not only its existence but also its grand prospects for the future. The paper would also become the defensive weapon that the townspeople used to fight off bad rumors about the region that threatened to keep additional settlers from coming, such as the belief that the land was tainted, diseased, or generally bad for one's health. Perhaps most importantly, however, the paper was also the conduit through which the town unified. It provided a sense of mutual experience for the townspeople, instilled courage in those settlers who chanced to make Emporia their new home, and promoted a sort of pride that would keep those living in the township from wanting to leave when the times were tough.

Simply existing as a town was not the extent of the plans the founders had in mind for Emporia, however. Just surviving on the frontier with minimal native conflict and a small number of settlers would not accomplish the original goals for the town. Becoming an economic and cultural powerhouse required more than just a small newspaper and a few local industries. Good soil was plentiful, and highly-productive farms could be developed over time. Through bold claims and clever marketing in the newspaper, local

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<sup>39</sup> Steven Hanschu and Darla Hodges Mallein, *Images of America: Emporia* (Charleston: Acadia Publishing, 2015), 10.

businesses in the area began to develop, yet much more slowly than the founders had initially believed. There was a small and energetic population in the town, which allowed Emporia to be reasonably self-sufficient. It was not initially clear as to why their town wasn't enjoying much more growth than it had been experiencing. There had been no shortage of employment opportunities, and building materials were bountiful. Morale had also been good in the town. Essential foods and a hearty surplus of crops were grown with great ease initially, but in the coming years two near-fatal issues threatened the town's future. The first and most threatening of these obstacles to the town in its infancy had been the water shortages and infestations of grasshoppers that devastated crop yields. When these occurred, the town's morale plummeted, regardless of what the paper printed. Water shortages were ongoing. In 1859 and 1860, there was a drought that plagued the whole county.<sup>40</sup> Thaddeus Hyatt, the head of the National Kansas Committee, visited then Breckinridge County to ascertain firsthand how bad the drought was. While still in Emporia, he wrote a letter to the *New York Tribune*, where he described the situation in Emporia with the most dramatic language, proclaiming:

The Drouth in Kansas Universal! The Last Crop Gone! No buckwheat! No vegetables! No Corn! No seed of any kind! No bread! No Money No Hope! What is to be done?<sup>41</sup>

Crop failures were widespread, and in 1860, Emporia struggled, for "In the Emporia township, the yield of corn was an average of one bushel per acre; 340 acres of wheat yield only 70 bushels," which was accompanied by a total vegetable failure and hundreds of cattle dying.<sup>42</sup> This unforeseen drought was followed almost immediately by an

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<sup>40</sup> Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia: Emporia Gazette Print, 1929), 21.

<sup>41</sup> Thaddeus Hyatt, *Letters From Thaddeus Hyatt*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Edwards Brothers, *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas*, 8.

infestation of grasshoppers. Yet, these were only temporary circumstances, and after the drought and grasshopper swarms cleared, growth still remained stagnant. The second and only real obstacle which had stemmed growth and opportunity, and indeed threatened the future prosperity and existence of Emporia, was the lack of any efficient transportation.

It is hard to exaggerate just how poor the transportation facilities were to and from Emporia. It had been and continued to be exceedingly difficult to get anything or anyone brought into or out of the town. This alone made life on the whole much worse for both businesses and citizens. Even the most basic functions of a town's municipalities, such as receiving mail, took days. According to Jacob Stotler:

At this time, the government ran a mail from Westport, Missouri, out on the Santa Fe Trail to Council Grove, and thence to Columbia. This would not do the wide-awake Emporians at all. They hated everything pro-slavery and instead of patronizing this route they took steps to have their mail sent by way of Lawrence. They had box five hundred in Lawrence from whence the mail was brought by private hands.<sup>43</sup>

This was done by foot or on horseback to the nearest town where a stagecoach could be requisitioned. This was then taken to Lawrence, and then the same process was taken to get back to Emporia. This ensured that Emporians could stay connected with the rest of the nation, but just barely. This task took four days to complete and was as dangerous as it was slow. As for other materials that couldn't be produced in the town, any other supplies for the settlers had to be brought in from Kansas City by stagecoach.<sup>44</sup> Within a few months, a direct stagecoach service was finally established that ran weekly between Lawrence and Emporia, but this only marginally improved the situation. All of the problems naturally inherent in the stagecoach lines back east were apparent in Emporia as

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<sup>43</sup> Stotler, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Edwards Brothers, *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas*, 5.

well. The service offered through the coach lines was rough and never came with the frequency that many of the leaders in Emporia had either needed or desired. It was also incredibly expensive; “Enormous charges for transportation from remote towns which were only mere embryos of commercial centers and likewise remote from well-established and adequate centers of commerce was the regular course of procedure.”<sup>45</sup> Regardless of the enhanced cost, coach lines were the only form of established transportation available to Emporians, since the two nearby rivers were not deep or wide enough to facilitate a boat service of any significance. As a result of lacking transportation services, the rate of economic and population growth in Emporia was bottlenecked dramatically. Yet this would not be the only difficulty felt because of Emporia’s lacking transportation facilities.

The lack of adequate transportation further choked Emporia’s growth because new settlers who were heading west to take advantage of cheap land and opportunity were missing Emporia almost entirely. The Santa Fe trail, which thousands of settlers traveled down, lay just a few miles north of Emporia. Being off the route by just a mere handful of miles ensured that the majority of potential settlers simply traveled past. The lack of new blood coming to the town rapidly became a sizeable problem for the local businesses and industries, which by 1867 included 68 separate local shops, services, and enterprises.<sup>46</sup> Already, most citizens in Emporia had to perform two or three trades in order to cover all of the needs of the town.<sup>47</sup> Though businesses expanded and became

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<sup>45</sup> George L. Anderson, *Kansas West* (San Marino: Golden West Books, 1963), 7.

<sup>46</sup> Emporia News, Feb. 15, 1867, *Emporia: Its Central Location- Its Prospects, Population, Business Houses, Etc., Etc.*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

more profitable, limited growth only slowly developed because there were not enough people to work.

Furthermore, any new products or cash crops couldn't leave the town to be sold in wider markets. While the stage coach line was able to carry some freight, it had been handicapped by what it could realistically be expected to accomplish in practice. The lumber mills, farms, blacksmiths, and small quarries were being strangled by the limited flow of their products out of the town. While Emporia wasn't totally cut off from markets outside of the county, most trade was done with other smaller settlements in the immediate vicinity. Limiting trade to only these smaller markets meant that the economic capability of Emporia wasn't fully realized.

During the Civil War, growth slowed even more considerably. The war, which called on Americans from all across the nation to fight, rendered other desires of little importance.<sup>48</sup> Even Emporia, still very young in its life, would see the bulk of its working-age men leave to serve in the Union Army. A number of these young men would perish on American battlefields, shrinking the town's population in ways that would not have seemed recoverable. Once the war had ended, the rate of settlement in the central and western United States picked back up again. Before the war, ever-increasing numbers of immigrants had been coming to the U.S. This flow of people had not stopped during the Civil War, but once the war finally ended, these new arrivals dispersed rapidly across the Plains, along with many ex-Confederates, freed slaves, and Union war veterans, hoping to begin life anew across the region.<sup>49</sup> Emporia benefited from this, and some new

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<sup>48</sup> Oscar Osburn Winther, *The Transportation Frontier: Trans-Mississippi West, 1865-1890* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1964), 94.

<sup>49</sup> Dee Brown, *Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow: Railroads in the West* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1977), 54.

life was breathed into the town's workforce, not only replacing many of those who fell during the war, but also providing enough newcomers to alleviate the manpower shortage for a brief period of time.

Emporia was positioned to thrive in the post-Civil War United States. However, since the town continued to lack sustainable transportation facilities, the dampening of potential growth endured year after year. The problem eventually reached a critical mass, and if it was not addressed, Emporia would be in danger of remaining little more than a small farming town like so many others in the state. The solution to this transportation conundrum, which would simultaneously lead Emporia to become a prosperous regional capital in the state, was the arrival of the railroad.



### Chapter 3: Railroads Reach Emporia

The founders of Emporia recognized early in the town's life that if the issue of the lack of transportation was not solved, then the town would never have a chance to become the economic and cultural hub they had envisioned. The founders already knew what railroads could accomplish and watched the progress made by several railroad companies as they slowly crept westward during this period. Once the first railroad arrived in the territory in 1857, the signs were obvious that Kansas was to be one of the next states to see widespread railroad development. In just a few years following the arrival of the first locomotive in the territory, there was an eruption of private charters and proposed rail lines, which set the railroad building fervor underway.<sup>50</sup> During this period of enterprise establishment and rail laying, Preston Plumb began his push in earnest for Emporia to have a rail connection of its own. Plumb, as well as the other town founders, had understood that almost all of the issues that had been plaguing the town's development would be resolved if a railroad connection was established in their young town. Knowing the stakes were high, and that the future of the town depended heavily upon his success, Plumb encouraged the construction of a railroad of any kind to the city. His newspaper was the platform through which he rallied the town, and indeed Lyon County, to the idea of a railroad. Almost from Emporia's conception, the desire for a railroad connection was at the forefront of everyone's minds.

In the second issue published of the *Kansas News*, Plumb had already begun his campaign for a railroad, as he called for a town meeting to discuss how to incentivize the

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<sup>50</sup> Balthasar H. Meyer, *Railway Legislation in the United States* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1903), 94.

construction of a railroad connection to their young township.<sup>51</sup> The article called the town's population to attention that Gen. C. K. Holliday, with a Corps of Engineers, would be present. The meeting was organized:

...to take some preliminary action with reference to building a Railroad from some point on the Kansas river-probably Topeka-to connect with the St. Joseph & Topeka Railroad, through the Neosho Valley, and to connect with the Napoleon & Fort Smith Railroad, in Arkansas.<sup>52</sup>

The article continued to assert that in regards to obtaining a railroad connection,

A matter of greater importance could not be presented to the people of the Neosho Valley, and we hope they will manifest the interest they feel in this movement by turning out en masse.<sup>53</sup>

This would not be the last mention of a railroad connection to Emporia. For the remaining duration of the first year of publishing, of the twenty-seven issues of the *Kansas News* published in 1857, fourteen of these contained articles investigating the construction, funding, and chartering of railroads that might include Emporia. This would almost seem absurd given the town's small population. As already stated, Emporia had only a few founding families, and yet the local newspaper was speculating on a grandiose scale about incentivizing several railroads to make a connection. It was a topic the newspaper constantly championed, as it encouraged commitment and excitement from those living in the town and county to impress the idea that a railroad was a necessity, and that it would be up to those living in Emporia and the surrounding region to make it into a reality.

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<sup>51</sup> "Railroad Meeting", *The Kansas News* (Emporia: June 20, 1857), 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

While the push by the newspaper and subsequent public enthusiasm for a connection did help to incentivize the railroad to come to Emporia, the town's location, population, and economic potential were much more attractive features for numerous railroads that had hoped to make a connection. Alone, railroads that lacked sufficient freight and passenger traffic gained only minimal investment, would drown in a sea of competition that was fighting over an already tiny pool of traffic. Emporia was already significantly populated, being by far the most heavily populated city in the county, to the point where a connection with Emporia would generate just enough economic activity to stabilize and keep struggling rail lines afloat. It is largely because of this that many lines that crossed through southeastern Kansas would have been inclined to make sure that Emporia was involved in the route planning, and there are numerous examples.

During the 1858-1859 railroad boom, there was a proliferation of charters coming from Lawrence.<sup>54</sup> Lawrence, which wished desperately to become a Midwestern super city, was constantly investing and exploring different railroad options that would make the town into a railroad hub. Therefore, Lawrence needed to ensure that it was connected to all of the important Kansas towns that it could feasibly maintain, and near the top of its priorities was a connection with Emporia. This resulted directly in the chartering of the Lawrence and Emporia (L.&E.)

It was clear that the little town was going to become an important city in the state, and by connecting Lawrence to Emporia, it could be reasoned that this would give Lawrence domination over trade from southern Kansas.<sup>55</sup> Emporians additionally wanted to be connected to the city from which their founders hailed, and local enthusiasm for the

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<sup>54</sup> I. E. Quastler, *Railroads of Lawrence Kansas* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1979), 31.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

line was high. When the founder of the L.&E. came to Emporia on September 12, 1865 to solicit support for the line, \$125,000 in bonds were voted into effect.<sup>56</sup> Even before the first spade of dirt was turned for this route, there was another company which had involved Emporia from its conception. This line was projected to start in New Orleans and would have pushed North traveling through Little Rock, and then Emporia, and finally linked with Fort Riley, which was then an important frontier fort.<sup>57</sup>

The U.S. government, taking measures to ensure domain over its sparsely-populated frontier, dotted the plains with forts. These military installments were intended to protect both the various settlements across the prairie and heavily-trafficked trade routes from outlaws and Native American aggression. Keeping these forts supplied would naturally be a substantial undertaking, and connections, like the one to link Fort Riley to the Gulf of Mexico, served multiple purposes. Not only would a railroad stabilize the flow of supplies to the fort, it also was needed to make certain that if troops were called elsewhere, speedy transportation from the fort to the coast and beyond could be achieved. While the route remained only ever a railroad on paper, it is important to realize that Emporia was determined in the line's earliest conception to be an essential connection. Still a commercial road, some links with towns along the line, that were guaranteed to make a profit had to be made. Emporia had already billed itself and was operating as a market city, and a coastal connection would have been incredibly profitable. This effective advertising had not only urged the connection of these two roads, but also encouraged many others to seek out a station in the town. In a time where profitability in Kansas was initially limited, Emporia presented itself as an economic savior to any road

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<sup>56</sup> Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia: 1882), 63.

<sup>57</sup> Quastler, 30.

that was able to reach it. Yet, very few railroad companies had managed, for all their promising and planning, to make good on this fertile commercial center. The situation was getting desperate, and the first real prospects for a rail connection would come from one relatively eccentric and unquestioningly determined Topekan.

This man was Cyrus K. Holliday. An ambitious dreamer by nature, Holliday had long envisioned the success that a large midwestern railroad could achieve. He could foresee how the rapid settlement of the frontier west would provide a strong economic base from which a fortune could be made. Holliday was a man who had much more grandiose plans, and he did not dwell upon the fears of failure from which so many other entrepreneurs had suffered. His plans initially entailed a connection from Topeka, the capital of Kansas, to the Missouri River near Atchison.<sup>58</sup> Once the river connection was secured to the capital, he would then wind his railroad to the southwest, terminating with Santa Fe, New Mexico.<sup>59</sup> The Santa Fe Trail supported a tremendous amount of traffic. The city of Santa Fe itself had grown quickly as a trading town between the United States and Mexico, but the lack of an effective transportation network had severely limited the economic potential that this booming outpost could realize. Yet heavy and sustained traffic along the Santa Fe Trail continued to grow despite not having access to more advanced transportation services. This persistent growth in traffic coming out of Santa Fe, “gave hope of success to those who contemplated railroads in 1850 and 1860.”<sup>60</sup> Such individuals included Holliday, who understood clearly that Santa Fe was a prime railroad connection, and that any railroad linking to that town would effortlessly tap into the vast

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<sup>58</sup> Dee Brown, *Hear That Lonesome Whistle Blow: Railroads in the West* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1977), 41.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Collins, *Ghost Railroads of Kansas* (David City: South Platte Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>60</sup> L. L. Waters, *Steel Trails to Santa Fe* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1950), 20.

stream of traffic traveling up and down the trail, making any such daring and committed investor unbelievably wealthy.<sup>61</sup> By attaching this traffic to the water-borne trade in Atchison, Holliday envisioned the beginnings of a massive railroad empire, and he was determined that it would be through a railroad *he* developed that an empire of steel would be forced into existence.

However, Santa Fe was hundreds of miles away from his starting point in Topeka, and his initially-proposed railroad, the Atchison and Topeka (A.&T.), chartered on February 11, 1859, suffered from the outset from a dire lack of materials and capital investment.<sup>62</sup> Even before the Civil War, investment in any of the numerous railroads in Kansas had already been difficult to obtain. One reason for the insufficient investment was the sheer number of railroads towards which investors had the option to put their money. During the first boom of Kansas charters, there were many projects that seemed to ooze the promise of greatness to follow. As such, any free capital that was available for investment in Kansas railroads was being over-diversified among too many simultaneous projects, resulting in potential funding being spread ineffectively across the territory. While investors understood that railroads were destined to cross Kansas eventually, they were also aware of “the minor fact that, between Topeka and the Kansas-Colorado line there were fewer than 5,000 people to support a railroad.”<sup>63</sup> With so few to actually access service along a direct route from the border of Colorado to Kansas, any attempt to build such a line would likely end in failure. The amount of potential traffic was so

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<sup>61</sup> Collins, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe, *Charter and By-Laws of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company: Embracing Congressional Land Grant, Kansas Legislative Land Grant, &c.* (Boston: Amidon & Washburn, Printers, 1878), 9.

<sup>63</sup> James Marshall, *Santa Fe: The Railroad that build an Empire* (New York: Ams Press, 1987), 18.

limited that it would be a struggle for multiple railroads to survive concurrently in the territory in the first place. Investors understood this, and attempts made by Holliday to make a route plan after so many others had already been chartered was met with very little support at a time when he was desperate for endorsement.

Issues surrounding investment would be exacerbated by the Civil War, which halted almost all speculation in the line entirely. The war also soaked up the essential materials needed for railroad building in order to propel the northern war machine towards victory back east.<sup>64</sup> Yet Holliday was undeterred by these numerous obstacles. To make his route a reality, he worked tirelessly to secure only a trickle of funding for his railroad. The situation was so dire that despite Holliday's best efforts to get around the project's financial impediments, he was only able to break ground on October 30, 1868, already five years into his land grant obligation.<sup>65</sup> Money rapidly ran out again, as "initial construction costs - readying roadbeds, purchasing rails and equipment, compensating for cost overruns - quickly exhausted funds for continued building."<sup>66</sup> In a report to Holliday on the actual costs of constructing his road, the estimated cost reported was \$10,128 on average per mile without ties, and with ties this average rose to \$11,794.<sup>67</sup> It is because of these seemingly insurmountable costs and minimal expendable capital that it took nearly a year for the railroad make its first significant town connection at Burlingame on September 18, 1869. With money depleted once more, limited operations and continued peddling for investment afforded the rebranded Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe

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<sup>64</sup> Oscar Osburn Winther *The Transportation Frontier: Trans-Mississippi West, 1865-1890* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1964), 94.

<sup>65</sup> Collins, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Dolores Greenberg, *Financiers and Railroads: 1869-1889* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980), 23.

<sup>67</sup> William E. Treadway, *Cyrus K. Holliday: A Documentary Biography* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1979), 185.

(A.T.&S.F.) just enough funding to get across the Shawnee county line, which had put up a small amount of bonds when railroad finally arrived.<sup>68</sup> This injection of capital allowed the A.T.&S.F. to borrow more time. With little equipment, minimal trackage, and little opportunity to make a profit, however, money ran out once more and progress stalled. The A.T.&S.F. was grappling with financial problems that seemed much larger than what the company could handle.

The A.T.&S.F.'s struggles with funding came primarily from the fact that it was so reliant on private aid and investment. At this time, neither the federal nor the state government offered substantial immediate monetary assistance to Holliday or any other private railroad venture. The federal government, while it had dabbled in developing transportation arteries before, faced an extreme amount of public condemnation for providing money to railroad construction in the past. In addition, it had invested in a few of the many canal projects in the early 1800's, and as many of these went into bankruptcy, the willingness of the federal government to invest in high-cost, high-risk transportation projects in Kansas dried up.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, when the railroads first began to look at expanding networks into the Kansas Territory, the only investment available initially was in the form of surveying done by the Corps of Topographical Engineers for several routes, such as one that was initiated to plan out "the most practical and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean."<sup>70</sup> There was also a temporary reduction on imported iron rails into the nation from 1830 to 1843, due to the struggling American iron industry which, in its infancy was not ready to handle

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<sup>68</sup> Keith L. Bryant, Jr., *History of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 16.

<sup>69</sup> Greenberg, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, 34.



the demands of railroad development either in quantity or quality. Tariffs were put in place in order to price out English steel and lend American steel companies an advantage in the booming rail tie market.<sup>71</sup> This brief tariff was hardly the kind of assistance that was actually required by the railroads for construction to continue. In a few decades, grants were made available on both a federal and state level to promote railroad building. While these were grants available to railroads to alleviate construction costs, the land grants were in reality usually awarded only after construction of a line was completed. While these grants did mean that railroads which completed certain criteria would afterwards have some of the cost offset by selling land to new migrants, the profit gained through these sales would not be available to offset costs during periods of actual railroad construction.

Aside from government aid, one of the only other opportunities for funding for a railroad would be to try and solicit investments from the banks and the wealthy. Even with this promising route, the opportunities to receive investment were severely limited. Railroads were usually an expensive and, more often than not, poor investment with high risks involved. After the canal building fiasco in the late 1830's, "Foreigners, alarmed by state refusal to redeem long-term debt obligations, vowed never to invest in the United States."<sup>72</sup> Since foreign investors and banks were pulling away, the only investors left were in the U.S., and they were nervous about throwing more money into a railroad blackhole. The risks inherent in investing in a western railroad were usually enough to scare away investors who had little stake in or even desire to gamble with railroads. Even

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<sup>71</sup> John F. Stover, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads* (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), 32.

<sup>72</sup> Greenberg, 23.

if a railroad offered future land grants as collateral for more loans, this typically held very little to no attraction with lenders.<sup>73</sup> With investors more and more unwilling to provide the A.T.&S.F. with the additional funding it needed to continue building, the situation for the company and Holliday couldn't have been bleaker, as time was running out as well. According to a grant that Holliday had signed on March 3, 1863, he would then have had only ten years to connect to the western border of Kansas. At stake was 3,000,000 acres of "The Finest Climate and Most Prolific Soil in the West."<sup>74</sup> Failure to complete the connection would result in these grants along the length of the line being forfeited, an outcome that would have been fatal for the enterprise.

The key to keeping the dream of the A.T.&S.F. alive would be in the investments that came from those that *did* have a stake in having a railroad connection: those settlers already living in the state. It was becoming clear, even in the early 1840's, that those towns without a railroad did markedly worse than those that did. In the majority of the small prairie settlements of the period, money would usually be assembled readily by settlers who were desperate for the arrival of a railroad. Usually these funds were assembled into a promised amount of funding as soon as a railroad connected a to a county. There were inherent risks for settlers and homesteaders who pledged these funds, because the coming of the railroad did not always mean that their town would receive a coveted connection. Since funds were dispersed after a county line had been crossed, the settlers had no ability to encourage tracks to be laid to their towns in particular. There were many towns that voted "yes" in county bond elections, but would still be bypassed

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<sup>73</sup> Marshall, 34.

<sup>74</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company, *Map of Kansas Cottonwood and Arkansas Valleys*, Lyon County Historical Society.

by the coming railroad entirely, which was a death certificate for most of these small frontier towns.<sup>75</sup> Often times this death was caused slowly by economic stagnation and lack of opportunity. Other times it was because a nearby town did receive such a connection and, as a result, most if not all of a town's population would resettle in order to receive the benefits of the railroad. Therefore, since not having a railroad meant the almost certain death of a town, frontiersmen would still put up the funds regardless of their realistic chances of ever seeing a locomotive come into their town. These circumstances were apparent across the wide expanses of the frontier, and Lyon County was no different. Emporia was doing everything possible to make its county, and the city itself in particular, attractive to any and all possible railroad connections.

With the A.T.&S.F. desperate for funds, Holliday visited many towns and counties along his proposed route. He traveled to cities all throughout Atchison, Osage, Lyon and Shawnee counties, promising economic prosperity, planning routes, organizing elections, and holding town meetings in order to scrape together the funds he needed to keep his road going. The towns rewarded bonds that kept the A.T.&S.F. afloat during these uncertain years, and the town that arguably worked the hardest to raise funds for the A.T.&S.F. was Emporia. When Holliday announced his intention to come and talk about possibly connecting Emporia with a railroad, the whole town was encouraged by the *Kansas News* to attend.<sup>76</sup> Following the successful meeting, Emporia took charge in Lyon County of raising the bonds needed to fund the route. On June 15, 1869, months before it was connected, Emporia hosted a bond election for the county, and this was voted for by

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<sup>75</sup> Winther, 104.

<sup>76</sup> "Railroad Meeting," *The Kansas News* (Emporia: June 20, 1869.), 2.

a sizeable margin.<sup>77</sup> Lyon County would come to pledge \$200,000 dollars should a connection be made, of which sum Emporia donated a large portion. In Lyon County, Emporia would use its larger population to push the vote in favor of bonds, casting more votes for the line alone (457) than did all other voters against bonds in all other Lyon county cities combined, leading to a 669 For / 341 Against vote.<sup>78</sup>

Encouraged by the pledges of funds from Lyon County and others, the line would begin once more from Carbondale towards Emporia.<sup>79</sup> The A.T.&S.F. continued to make progress, grading the route towards Emporia. It is interesting to note that this grading was happening even before the connection with Atchison, one of the company's namesake towns, was secured.<sup>80</sup> This move had caused quite a stir from those in Atchison, who had helped to provide the initial funding for the line, and yet in 1868 the railroad was pushing steadily southwards towards Emporia, and not north towards their city.<sup>81</sup> Emporia was just too important of a city in the grander plans of the A.T.&S.F. to not be a priority over all others. Yet despite the progress that the A.T.&S.F. had been making on its route towards Emporia over several years, and despite all of the struggles that the company had endured to keep the line progressing, it would not actually be the first railroad to make a connection with Emporia.

The railroad that would ultimately beat the A.T.&S.F. into Emporia would arise from the second rail boom that occurred in the state following Civil War in the mid- to late-1860's. Many railroads would be incorporated, and thousands of miles of track lain

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<sup>77</sup> Marshall, 46.

<sup>78</sup> Stotler, 67-68.

<sup>79</sup> Bryant, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>81</sup> Marshall, 63.

in the state throughout the decade. So much track was constructed that by 1890 Kansas was only second to Illinois in the nation in terms of total track mileage.<sup>82</sup> This figure is significant, since this was despite having only a fraction of the population that the majority of other states in the nation enjoyed. As Emporia continued to promote a market atmosphere in the town, and enjoyed a larger population than any other town in east-central Kansas, it once again found itself on the proposed routes for numerous roads. One of these was the Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Galveston (L.L.&G.). While this railroad did not initially include an Emporia connection along its main line, it made sure to include a branch line that would guarantee the eventual connection.<sup>83</sup> This action alone became an important development in the eyes of eastern investors, who saw the connection to Emporia as enormously favorable, bringing the line a sense of guaranteed income and purpose.<sup>84</sup> Ambitions grew as private investors and as counties along the planned route pledged bonds, such as Douglas county, which put up \$250,000 in bonds to encourage the building of the road.<sup>85</sup> Emporia's citizens once more led their own fundraising effort to help with the construction. As the Emporia connection became increasingly important to the future of the L.L.&G., this branch line began to assume increasing priority. In late January, 1867, an article was published in the *Kansas Tribune* that stated "no other idea exists on the part of the directors of the Leavenworth, Lawrence & Galveston Railroad, or of the capitalists who propose to construct the same, than that of the speedy construction of the Emporia branch."<sup>86</sup> The timetable was moved up once

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<sup>82</sup> Stover, 40.

<sup>83</sup> United States General Land Office, *Map of Kansas and Nebraska*, Philadelphia, 1865. Map Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/9868837/>.

<sup>84</sup> Quastler, 149.

<sup>85</sup> "Shall The Galveston Road Be Built?" *The Kansas Tribune* (Lawrence: January 25, 1867)

<sup>86</sup> "The Emporia Branch," *The Kansas Tribune* (Lawrence: January 25, 1867), 3.

more, as it was then claimed that the Emporia branch would be built as soon as the first connection of the main line to Ottawa was completed.<sup>87</sup> This announcement spurred some growth, which “was attributable to the great amount of favorable news that had been circulated about the imminent construction of the L.L.&G.,”<sup>88</sup> To spur construction onwards, the decision was made to buy the L.&E. to accelerate progress towards Emporia. Yet this last attempt to breathe life into the line would mark where the railroad seemingly died. After the L.L.&G. took over, construction was only continued as far as Carbondale, and then construction ended indefinitely.

Desperate for a railroad, native Emporians would take their need for a connection into their own hands. Many in the city, for good reason, looked upon the slow progress of the A.T.&S.F. with worry. It had been many years since that first meeting in the town with Holliday. While the town had been assured of a connection, the continued demand for a railroad during the A.T.&S.F.’s sluggish construction had not diminished. In fact, the dilemma had only been exacerbated as the years rolled by, and desperation for a railroad had led the citizens of Emporia to put money towards many other projects. Nothing came of these investments, and with the need for effective transportation reaching a climax, Emporia assumed a lead role in bringing the long sought-after railroad connection to completion.

Their initiative would result in the Kansas, Missouri, Texas Railroad, (M.K.T., but better known as the Katy). Despite being established after the A.T.&S.F., L.&E., L.L.&G., and numerous other railroads, the Katy was ultimately the first line to reach Emporia. This line, which was initially designed to take advantage of an existing

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<sup>87</sup> Quastler, 149.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 148.

connection with the Union Pacific (U.P.) to build a self-sustaining branch line towards Emporia, was chartered in the town on February 13, 1865.<sup>89</sup> Construction began in Junction City, just a few miles south of the already-constructed Union Pacific Eastern Division (U.P.E.D.) trunk line that ran across northern Kansas. The original route plan was to make a connection to this trunk line, and then run the branch southward to Council Grove.<sup>90</sup> With this completed, it would run through the Neosho Valley, finally ending in Emporia.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, this line was named the Union Pacific Southern Branch (U.P.S.B.), since it was assumed that it would connect to and siphon traffic from the U.P.E.D.<sup>92</sup> The line began well-funded and it would be carefully planned, which resulted in construction commencing with sustained haste.

Unlike the A.T.&S.F., the U.P.S.B. had received generous investments from the beginning. Since the route was planned from the beginning with the intention to connect and siphon traffic off of the U.P.E.D., it was believed to be on a solid footing. Traffic, and thus sustainability, for the branch would be guaranteed. Many investment firms and banks looked favorably upon a line that they felt was assured a profit. Money poured into the line and construction never truly felt any of the delays or setbacks with which rivals had grappled. Despite a disruptive takeover of the project by East Coast businessmen, the line inched towards Emporia steadily. Under its new leadership, the U.P.S.B. now developed more elaborate plans than were initially imagined for the local railroad. After extensive route planning, new trunk lines were designed. These lines included a

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<sup>89</sup> Union Pacific Railway Company (Southern Branch), *Embracing Charter of Company, Congressional Land Grant, Kansas Legislative Land Grant, &c., &c., &c.* (New York: G.F. Nesbit & Co., 1868), 3.

<sup>90</sup> V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>91</sup> Stotler, 62.

<sup>92</sup> Masterson, 11.

connection that would branch off south towards Texas, and a separate branch that would pierce eastward into Missouri. These connections would provide a more direct flow of trade from the southern United States through to the rest of the nation. A heavy amount of freight traffic was assured, as the new railroad would “form a connecting link between the great cattle-raising regions of Texas and the cattle-consuming sections of the North, the value of which can scarcely be estimated.”<sup>93</sup> With new leadership, new goals, and a need to both distinguish itself from the U. P. and more clearly reflect these goals, the name was then changed to the Kansas, Missouri, and Texas Railway.<sup>94</sup> As the construction progressed, the pace began to slow. Operations on the already-constructed segments of the line, as well as diminishing funds in the coffers of the company, slowed the rate of construction. In order to aid in the continuation of the line to their city, “On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 1867, the proposition to issue to \$200,000 of county bonds to aid in the construction of the M. K. &T. railroad, called then the Southern branch of the Union Pacific, was submitted”<sup>95</sup> Thanks predominantly to the magnitude of contributions Emporia was able to make, construction continued steadily. The fevered pace of track laying kept going strong, and in just four years and four months following the railroad’s charter, tracks were laid in the northeastern corner of Emporia, where the *Emporia News* championed headlines proclaiming, “The Iron Horse Snorteth Thro’ the Neosho Valley!”<sup>96</sup> Through the Katy, Emporia had been finally connected to the U.P., and with this came a greater connection to the rest of the U.S. There was a huge celebration, and

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<sup>93</sup> Greenberg, 66.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>95</sup> Stotler, 67.

<sup>96</sup> “Completion of the U.P. Southern Branch Railroad to Emporia,” *The Emporia News* (Emporia: December 10, 1869), 2.



almost the entire town came out to rejoice about the arrival of the railroad and the promised prosperity that they were sure it would bring.

Upon arriving in Emporia, the town was set to become the economic and cultural hub that it had been pushing aggressively to become all along. With the confirmed arrival of a railroad imminent, investment in the town by businesses and wealthy investors was abundant. All industries were positioned and ready to compete on a larger state and national market. This environment of competition and growth was a welcome sight for the Katy, whose expensive race against the Border Tier Line had steadily consumed all available funds. Once the line reached Emporia, it commenced services almost immediately, which included a regular passenger and freight train. Emporia's industries and sizeable population meant that freight and passenger service generated in the town would be lucrative once service commenced. A decent amount of freight traffic coming into and out of Emporia generated income that then played a critical role in keeping the route stable and profitable.

Not long after the Katy, on July 20, 1870, the A.T.&S.F. finally arrived. While the arrival of the A.T.&S.F. was not as wildly welcomed in the town as was the Katy, this route had been a long time coming, and with hundreds of thousands of dollars invested in the line, the citizens of Emporia were pleased to see their investment finally pay off. A big celebration, was planned, and invitations were circulated which announced the festivities that were to happen on September 14, 1870.<sup>97</sup>

Even before the planned celebration, however, the atmosphere was electric when the first A.T.&S.F. locomotive pulled in through the center of town. Emporia had

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<sup>97</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company, *A.T.&S.F.R.R. Celebration*, August 31, 1870. Kansas State Historical Society, Item Number 212970.

struggled for years without the railroad. The returns on Emporia's railroad investments had been a long time coming. Despite the small size of their town, Emporians had pledged thousands of dollars in order to help these two railroads cross into their town. Jacob Stotler makes mention of this, when he admitted the absurdity of how Emporia and Lyon County had, "voted on ourselves a railroad debt of \$400,000. Railroads came high but we had to have them, So we grew and strengthened."<sup>98</sup> This number only represented the two railroads that had managed to succeed, as there were hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonds that were also voted out for other projects. If these lines had reached the criteria to collect the available funds that were put up, the actual number of bonds that Emporia and Lyon County would had offered for railroad connections would have reached closer to \$800,000.

With the railroads in place, there was nothing inhibiting the growth of the city. The critical relationship between both of the connecting railroads and Emporia hardened into a highly successful and symbiotic relationship that would come to define the town and provide the railroads with safe and guaranteed service.

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<sup>98</sup> Stotler, 68.

#### Chapter 4: Impact of the Railroads: Economic

On February 15, 1867, an article published in the *Emporia News* made the following observation:

A southern railroad connection would open to Topeka a vaster field of business enterprise than anything beside is likely to afford. It would at once inaugurate a wholesale traffic fully equal to that at which Lawrence at present enjoys.<sup>99</sup>

This article foreshadowed the immense opportunity the Emporia connection would become. Once the railroads arrived, it was a joint effort by the town and the railroad in order to ensure the long-term success of both. Emporia itself was still suffering from stagnant growth when the first work crews entered the town. Both the A.T.&S.F. and the Katy were running short of both money and materials when the companies entered the town. The Katy, on a better financial footing, was able to continue construction for a brief period. Once the A.T.&S.F. had entered the town it was completely depleted of funds, and for the next year Emporia remained the end of the line.<sup>100</sup> Even with such a rocky start, it would not take long for both the railroads and Emporia to receive significant economic benefits from the connection.

Railroad connections opened the economy of Emporia to an immense amount of outside wealth as speculators and investors funneled tens of thousands of dollars into the town. In fact, even before tracks were officially laid through the city and services began, the town saw immense investment. It was a well-known fact among many opportunists that wherever the railroads connected, the local economy of that town flourished. Once a

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<sup>99</sup> "Our Railroads", *The Emporia News* (Emporia: The Emporia News, 1867), 2.

<sup>100</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe, *John F. Meade Papers*, 59. Lyon County Historical Society, Binder #284.

connection was imminent, it was common for the value of land to inflate as a result. Land speculators and developers would make a grab for any available property in anticipation that the railroads would raise land values exponentially. This was the exact scenario Emporia experienced in the wake of its rail connection. Seemingly overnight, speculation in Emporia erupted as “town lots, homesteads, promising farm lands, and feeder lots adjacent to the heaven-sent railroad, were changing hands so fast at skyrocketing prices that the land office clerks couldn’t keep up with business.”<sup>101</sup> One Emporian wrote to a Topeka newspaper that, “Things are lively here. Lots that went begging at \$500 are readily gobbled up at \$1,000 now. About a hundred men with money are here awaiting the coming of the railroad.”<sup>102</sup> The increase in property values as the railroads approached and connected was staggering. At the beginning of 1867, the value of all of the town lots in Emporia totaled \$125,903. Four years later in 1871, with the Katy and A.T.&S.F. both now connected, the gross value of town lots in Emporia went up to \$560,025.<sup>103</sup>

When it became clear where a railroad would be going, businesses also invested capital to expand existing operations, and to establish new industries across the city as entrepreneurs awaited the railroad and the injection of new customers and goods.<sup>104</sup> Certain businesses would never have been able to develop without the railroad connection. Many general stores that carried a variety of products faced high transportation costs before the products even arrived. Shipping goods required significant

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<sup>101</sup> V. V. Masterson, *The Katy Railroad and the Last Frontier* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 46.

<sup>102</sup> James Marshall, *Santa Fe: The Railroad that build an Empire* (New York: Ams Press, 1987), 46.

<sup>103</sup> Edwards Brothers, *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas* (Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1878), 9.

<sup>104</sup> Marshall, 46.

overhead costs, and with a limited population to sell to, there was no reason to open more stores than the town could support. As the railroads made the business environment in Emporia more competitive, additional businesses selling more exotic goods and services developed alongside the general stores. One good example of this was the various bike shops that suddenly appeared on the streets of Emporia. The bikes, the majority of which were made out of state, became a local craze. Bicycles became part of local traditions, competitions, and festival events. During the Great Fair of Central Kansas from September 26, 1882 to September 29, 1882, bicycle races were advertised as one of the main attractions that year.<sup>105</sup> These were bicycles that were largely sold by local dealers, making local bike shop owners increasingly wealthy as the hobby grew more popular. At the same time, the railroads made money off of transporting new bicycles and parts to the town. The A.T.&S.F. made even more money as it offered at half-fares and the train stopping directly at the fairgrounds.<sup>106</sup> The reciprocal economic relationship fostered between the railroads' and Emporians' was growing at a steady pace.

Neither everything provided to townspeople, nor all traffic generated for the railroads, was generated outside of Emporia. Almost as soon as a rail connection was assured, Emporia's domestic manufacturing and utilization of natural resources expanded tremendously. The railroads were now able to bring in heavy machinery and construction materials that could not have been locally produced or shipped in with any great ease. New factories began to develop almost immediately as a result. In the south of the town a soap manufactory was erected. Despite the abolitionist fervor in the town, in the north,

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<sup>105</sup> *Great Fair of Central Kansas: The Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Emporia, Kansas Exposition to be held Sept. 26 to 29, 1882* (Kansas City: Ramsay, Millett & Hudson Printers Inc., 1882). Kansas State Historical Society, Item Number 210494.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

there was the controversial Emporia Brewery. By the end of October, the number of newspapers rose astronomically, as the heavy printing machinery that was required could not be brought in quickly and cheaply. Because of this, the original news publisher found itself joined by others which culminated in a total of three weekly papers, one daily paper, three real-estate papers, and the *Education Journal*, a monthly publication.<sup>107</sup> In addition, new building materials were being brought in to facilitate all of the new construction. Emporia was not hurt initially by a lack of supplies, as plentiful timber assured that the town would not want for any of the needed supplies to build the first homes and shops. However, it didn't take long for Emporia to outgrow what was naturally available to the town, making the ability of the railroads to bring in trainloads of construction materials a welcome development. In fact, thanks to the easy access to inexpensive, quality building materials, in just nine years after the A.T.&S.F. and Katy had made the Emporia connection the number of buildings in town would rise to around 184.<sup>108</sup>

The railroads were also the instrument which solved the long-existing labor problem that the town had suffered from during its relative isolation. As mentioned before, many of the citizens of Emporia had to learn two or three skilled trades in order for the town to be able to provide for itself. As a consequence, as new industries and commercial shopping areas opened, there was no surplus labor force available to work at these facilities, and many positions were simply left unfilled. As a result, many of the local businesses were far less productive than they could have been. Even after a few years of steady, albeit limited, migration to the city, there was still a shortage of available

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<sup>107</sup> Edwards Brothers. *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas*, 11.

<sup>108</sup> Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia: 1882), 99.

labor available for employment at the various small industries, or to settle and work the many acres of rich farmland. The railroad companies answered this shortage of labor by hiring able farmers. Both the Katy and the A.T.&S.F. aggressively promoted rapid settlement. This investment in the farmlands around Emporia, and in the local workforce, was one that would pay dividends for both lines. The A.T.&S.F., for example, wanted to induce new immigrants to settle in Emporia and on its land-grant holdings, so they held colonization meetings and sold half-price tickets to those interested in visiting, and possibly settling down in, the region.<sup>109</sup> Special trains hosted on the A.T.&S.F. and Katy both were designed to show off the fertile lands of the Flint Hills and Neosho Valley. These adventures into the heart of the nation brought in thousands of visitors who came to view the potential that Kansas lands and cities had to offer.<sup>110</sup> There were also numerous posters, pamphlets, and guide books that were disseminated by the State of Kansas, the U.S. Railroad Commission, and the railroads themselves, all of which grandstanded and championed the superior lives that immigrants would have on the prairie. One such publication gave “Strong and Impartial Testimony to the Wonderful Productiveness of the Cottonwood and Arkansas Valleys.” In the words of the Superintendent, the trip was arranged:

Knowing that the impression abroad of the situation in Kansas was a very erroneous one, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company conceived that the best way to get the facts to the people was to invite a number of the editors of leading papers in principal Western States to take a trip over the road, and see with their own eyes.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Keith L. Bryant Jr., *History of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 67.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>111</sup> Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company, *Kansas in 1875: Strong and Impartial Testimony to the Wonderful Productiveness of the Cottonwood and Arkansas Valleys*, 1.

As newspapers fought off rumors that it made people sick to live in the region, the Santa Fe was also actively lobbying the public to cast aside any fears that the region was grasshopper-ridden and that crops could not grow. They even encouraged editors to publish glowing reviews in the newspapers by inviting them to ride on, “an immense train of elegant coaches, and sleeping cars belonging to the Pullman Palace Car Company, drawn by two powerful Taunton locomotives.”<sup>112</sup> Another newspaper editor noted that the excursion “so provided and arranged that all were accommodated, welcomed and made comfortable, not a lisp of complaint being heard from any source. It was really something to brag about and be proud of.”<sup>113</sup> Certainly, no expense was being spared by the railroad to assure potential settlers that not only was the region fit for farming, but that the most inexpensive and reliable services would assuredly be provided once families took root on the rich farmlands. Emporia newspapers and railroads worked together in an aggressive campaign to cast out all doubt, and these efforts were successful. The population of the region exploded, and Emporia in particular saw exponential growth. On April 5, 1878, the *Emporia News* reported: “The immigration going through on the A.T.&S.F. is tremendous beyond all precedent,” solving one of the longest-lasting problems that had, since its founding, plagued the development of the town.<sup>114</sup>

With the arrival of hundreds of new cattle ranchers, ranching in the region exploded, and Emporia, with its railroad connections, became the natural center for bovine industry in east-central Kansas. Even before the arrival of the railroads four years

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>114</sup> “General News”, *The Emporia News* (Emporia: April 5, 1878), 3.



later, Emporia in 1866 was already seeing a significant amount of cattle trading, as it was estimated that upwards of \$80,000 worth of cattle had changed hands that year alone.<sup>115</sup> With the railroads now able to ship livestock to the major meat markets in Kansas City, and Chicago, the potential to make even greater profits in Emporia grew exponentially. After both the A.T.&S.F. and Katy connected, it was predicted that the lands south and southwest of Emporia, once dominated by buffalo, would before long be swarming with tens of thousands of cattle.<sup>116</sup> The Katy predicted that in one year 250,000 heads of cattle grazed along the railroad's right of way.<sup>117</sup> As the cattle arrived in Emporia, meat processing plants and butcher shops developed in Emporia as well. While Emporians were certainly fond of having such large quantities of fresh beef available, it was the railroads who would reap the bulk of the rewards. The railroads developed huge cattle yards to store all of the incoming cattle traffic, and these were extremely profitable. Cattle trade at Emporia, Dodge City, and other cattle towns had become so profitable that the A.T.&S.F. connected directly to Chicago. When this extension was completed in 1888, the A.T.&S.F. now held a commanding position over the nation's cattle trade.<sup>118</sup> While the railroads made money hand over fist, so did the ranchers of Emporia. The extra traffic generated by cattle trading made Emporia one of the most profitable connections along the A.T.&S.F. system.<sup>119</sup>

However, livestock, commercial, and industrial business was not the determining factors that would make Emporia and the railroads wealthy. The key to the town's true

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<sup>115</sup> Stotler, 63.

<sup>116</sup> I. E. Quastler, *Railroads of Lawrence Kansas* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1979), 203.

<sup>117</sup> Masterson, 64.

<sup>118</sup> *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas* (Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1878), 25.

<sup>119</sup> Robert William Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 207-19.

success was found in its soil. As stated before, Emporia was situated in the heart of one of the most productive growing regions in Kansas, and annually was experiencing record-breaking harvests of wheat and corn.<sup>120</sup> Almost anything imaginable could be grown easily and in generous quantity. This included oats, corn, wheat, sorghum, and rye, as well as many other types of crops.<sup>121</sup> In 1870, Kansas fruit growers sent a delegation to the National Pomological Congress at Philadelphia, where the quality of the state's apples, pears and grapes were taken to compete. In this nationwide contest, "Kansas carried off the prize of the great gold medal, which is now in possession of the State Horticultural Society."<sup>122</sup> In 1883, Kansas produced 172,800,900 million bushels of corn, which was a rate of 36.7 bushels of corn per acre, or nearly ten bushels more than second place Missouri.<sup>123</sup> The railroads offered midwestern farmers the ability to make a decent profit when they committed to utilizing all of their land and resources. Being able to ship these crops to the larger trade centers for exchange across the national market was crucial to making the crops and livestock of the state as profitable as they eventually became.

Initial yields from Kansas were dismal. In 1860, the value of all the farms in Kansas rested at \$12,258,239.<sup>124</sup> The farms already established in the territory were only capable of producing 6,150,727 bushels of corn.<sup>125</sup> In ten years, that yield had

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<sup>120</sup> L. L. Waters, *Steel Trails to Santa Fe* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1950), 173.

<sup>121</sup> C.B. Schmidt. *Official Facts About Kansas: Compiled From Government and State Reports for 1883 and 1884*, (Topeka: 1884), 11.

<sup>122</sup> The Kansas Publishing Company, *Kansas As She Is.: The Greatest Fruit, Stock and Grain Country in the World* (Lawrence: The Kansas Publishing Company, 1870), 32. Kansas State Historical Society. Item Number 212552.

<sup>123</sup> Schmidt, 11.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

improved only to 17,025,525.<sup>126</sup> Railroads, however, were able to make use of large quantities of surplus crops, and farmers were encouraged to grow as much as they were capable. Productivity skyrocketed, and in 1873, as the A.T.&S.F. finally crossed the Colorado border, Kansas had produced 47,000,000 bushels, more than double what it had just three years earlier.<sup>127</sup> In 1883, Kansas farms had risen in value collectively to total \$235,178,936.<sup>128</sup> Naturally, as the productivity of the lands in Kansas rose, so did the revenues for the A.T.&S.F. and Katy. Both companies delighted in the heavier freight traffic that developed. This exchange, not just of grain, but also of livestock, produce, and other food stuffs, aided not only the railroads and Emporia, but also fed into the larger national growth and health of the nation. As Robert Fogel argued,

Railroad connections between the primary and secondary markets of the nation were a necessary condition for the system of agricultural production and distribution that characterized the American economy of the last half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the absence of such railroad connections would have forced a regional pattern of agricultural production that would have significantly restricted the development of the American economy.<sup>129</sup>

Without a railroad connection by which to transport these grains out of and through communities like Emporia, the local economies, and perhaps the national economy, would have suffered significantly. It would only be because of the services of the Katy and A.T.&S.F. that Emporia's farmers and cattle ranchers were able to benefit as much as they did from surplus crops and produce, and in return, the railroads raked in a steady and significant source of revenue from dependent customers.

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>129</sup> Fogel, 19.

Farming became such an essential part of the revenue of the railroads that almost as soon as Emporia had been connected in 1870, the rail companies began to sell off the land grants to farmers. The most aggressive in promoting the agricultural development of the region was probably the A.T.&S.F., which saw from the beginning a need to get as many capable farmers working on the fertile lands as possible. The A.T.&S.F. chose to avoid selling its land grants to speculators or ranchers and instead showed favor towards farmers who were interested in settling in the region. This preference was because the company believed that selling land to farmers would represent the best possible long-term return in use of the land.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, by selling the land to farmers for significantly less than what the land was really worth, the loyalty of the newly-settled citizens of Emporia would be secured.<sup>131</sup> Initially, the return on investment through this strategy was minimal. Thousands of acres of farmland were practically given away. In fact, the A.T.&S.F. even determined that the price at which the land was being sold at would never compensate for even half of the railroad construction costs leading to the region.<sup>132</sup> While other railroads held onto land much more conservatively, holding out for better offers on the property they owned, it was the liberal distribution of its grant lands that helped make the fertile areas near the A.T.&S.F. so bountiful, seemingly overnight. The decision of the A.T.&S.F. to pursue this tactic paid dividends for decades afterwards.

When the A.T.&S.F. sought out new farmers, their tickets “were subsidized, seeds were hauled without charge, shelter was provided, and relief was given in the event of initial crop failures; in short, the Company did everything in its power to encourage

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<sup>130</sup> Waters, 158.

<sup>131</sup> Bryant, 65.

<sup>132</sup> Marshall, 84-85.

settlement and industry.”<sup>133</sup> These actions made farmers steadfastly loyal to the railroad that had gone out of the way to make sure their resettlement was a success, and this loyalty would become a dependable source of high-volume traffic in later decades. As soon as farmers began to produce a surplus of food, the revenue generated for the A.T.&S.F. enabled it to continue expanding and growing. While Emporians before had been limited by their location, the railroads changed this entirely. Surplus grown in Emporia and across the rest of the state made Kansas into one of the most productive states, if not the most productive, in almost every category.

Due to all of the profit gained by providing service to Emporia, a sort of trade war began between the two competing railroads. While the Katy and A.T.&S.F. both found Emporia profitable, the existence of two railroads in the town meant that potential traffic was divided. Even before the A.T.&S.F. arrived, the directors of the Katy recognized the threat this route was placing on their early monopoly. Understanding the impending situation:

On February 3, 1870, Judge Parsons called a special meeting of stockholders in the offices of Ruggles and Plumb in Emporia in order to obtain formal authority for the drastic changes he proposed to make, the bold steps he intended to take. The Santa Fé, he had been informed, was grading into Emporia, reached two months earlier by Bob Stevens’ tracklayers. That line was beginning to pose a threat of competition for Neosho Valley traffic and something had to be done about it.<sup>134</sup>

The Katy had become aware that not only would the A.T.&S.F. become one of its main rivals, but it also needed to expand and actively compete in order to secure as much traffic as it could. While the Katy’s lines were very well constructed, they were not laid with sufficient forethought to efficiency. The Santa Fe’s lines were naturally inclined to

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<sup>133</sup> Waters, 158.

<sup>134</sup> Masterson, 27-28.

offer shorter and better service, and so expansion was the only path forward for the Katy. Meetings between some of the directors led to plans of expansion eastward. They acted on these plans by buying up the defunct St. Louis and Santa Fe Railroad, with plans of connecting this line to Emporia.<sup>135</sup> Katy officers figured that, when joined with their planned route through Texas, the Katy would be able to short cut even the A.T.&S.F. All the while, the people of Emporia benefited from competitive rates as both companies attempted to price the other out of service in the town.

The A.T.&S.F. was also aware of the threat that the Katy posed. Given its always tenuous financial situation, it needed to fight hard to simply break into the Emporia market. The situation with the A.T.&S.F. was essentially the opposite of the Katy. While its rails were poorly laid and its facilities of a much poorer quality, it did have a superior route. Emporia came to represent a significant cattle town for the A.T.&S.F. and as such a source of significant profit. Cattle became such an important source of traffic that freight schedules for the whole rail network were actually rearranged in order to better accommodate the increasing demand for cattle shipment.<sup>136</sup> Freight traffic all along the line from Topeka to Emporia was surprisingly heavy, or as Waters described,

The needs which the new railroad served may be indicated by patronage during the first full calendar year of operation, 1870. Service was offered as far as Emporia. The total number of passengers carried during the year was 33,598. Freight tonnage was 78,917 plus approximately 20,000 tons of Company matériel. Clearly the new line had justification for being. Car loadings were divided as follows: coal, 3,753; livestock, 593; lumber, 1,146; merchandise, 2,617. The rolling stock was more than doubled during the year to handle the swelling volume of business. Four locomotives were added.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>136</sup> Bryant, 21.

<sup>137</sup> Waters, 145.

The Emporia connection was vital to the continued existence of the line, as operations brought stability and enough income to expand and improve service. The A.T.&S.F. reinvested huge sums of cash and man-hours to improve service along the line. While this included acquiring more rolling stock and locomotives, these were only a fraction of the improvements made. For example, before construction began again towards the Colorado border, on which endeavor the whole fate of its land grants rested, the A.T.&S.F. used its new wealth instead to improve its lines between Emporia and Topeka. During the furious pace of tracklaying and grading towards Emporia in the previous years, construction quality had been shoddy. The crews who had built the route into Emporia had “built quickly, cheaply, and poorly; the rails were light, and the roadbed lacked ballast,”<sup>138</sup> The poor quality of construction meant that trains had to run at lower speeds to prevent derailments, and the light rails ensured that heavier trains could not be run, because the rails simply could not support the greater tonnage. Since the Emporia connection now provided heavier traffic, this situation needed a remedy, and in mid-1870, crews “tore up the old light-weight rails on the Topeka-Emporia track, replacing them with new, heavier English iron”.<sup>139</sup> Tracks were straightened, some sections of the line were torn up and new heavy and durable English steel rails helped to improve the speed of service. New stations were erected along the length of the line, some so hastily that stationmasters worked in buildings that were sometimes either unpainted or unfinished.<sup>140</sup> These improvements brought the A.T.&S.F. increased profits, as any investment made in Emporia and the line leading to Emporia paid back tenfold to

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<sup>138</sup> Bryant, 21.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>140</sup> H.J. Briscoe, *Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe, 1776-1976 Time Table*, (Topeka: Gage Park, 1976), 17.

the railroad. These profits became the vital component that helped the A.T.&S.F. continue its increasingly tight race westward towards the Colorado border. Emporia marked the last town of any size when the company looked westward, and before the drive out into no-man's-land began in earnest, it could rely on the financial stability that Emporia provided.

As it experimented for more ways in which to develop their important Emporia connection, the A.T.&S.F. looked directly to the south of Emporia, which lay largely undeveloped. While most of this land was recognized as Indian Territory, as more of the Native peoples in the region were forcibly moved southward into the Indian Territory, fresh new farmlands were opened for development. The A.T.&S.F. wanted to be the first to capitalize on these lands. However, there had been some who questioned the wisdom of building into lands where it was doubtful whether or not there would be enough traffic to justify the expense. The company acted with caution, and it decided instead to invest in a new type of railroad.

During the 1870's, this new type of railroad was still being tested and experimented with. In England, an engineer, Robert. F. Fairlie, developed a railroad with rolling stock and locomotives that were much smaller than standard machines; they ran on smaller tracks that were much closer together than usual. This was the birth of the narrow-gauge railroad, which he claimed could provide railroad service, maintenance, and construction at costs that were much less than typical railroads. He announced that his invention was "The Gauge for the 'Railways of the Future.'"<sup>141</sup> It was the gauge that would bring inexpensive service to localities that would otherwise never have been

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<sup>141</sup> George Taylor and Irene D. Neu, *The American Railroad Network* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 63.



considered by a larger line.<sup>142</sup> This extended the reach of larger railroads into new markets that would become cheap feeders to the main trunk.<sup>143</sup> This report generated much enthusiasm in the U.S., and for the next decade there were numerous railroads that played with the idea of narrow-gauge lines.<sup>144</sup> The A.T.&S.F. was one, and it made the decision to try this experimental railroad on the new line being built south of Emporia. It was seemingly guaranteed that any new rail connections to the city would almost certainly generate a profit, as the town had managed to outperform with even modest investment. Even with a gamble on new technology like the narrow-gauge railroad, traffic generated in Emporia would surely still provide a sustainable amount of income to make the line a success.

The narrow-gauge Kansas City, Emporia, and Southwestern Railroad (K.C.E.&S.W.) was chartered. A call for bonds was put out and Emporia, always willing to have yet another rail route to their city, “In February, 1877, bonds were voted at the rate of \$4,000 a mile to build a narrow-gauge railroad through the county in the direction of Eureka, by nearly a thousand majority.”<sup>145</sup> On December 11, 1880, track-laying began, and by 1884, it had reached Ottawa.<sup>146</sup> While the K.C.E.&S.W. never had a station in the heart of Emporia, one was still built just within the outskirts of town to the south. It connected southwards through Olpe and early benefited from some fairly profitable freight and passenger traffic. It generated sufficient revenue to even justify further

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>145</sup> Stotler, 72.

<sup>146</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe, *John F. Meade Papers*, 67. Lyon County Historical Society, Binder #284.

expansion, which finally terminated in Moline.<sup>147</sup> While the line was never extremely profitable, it still saw some limited success. Over the next few years it was consolidated and then fully absorbed into the A.T.&S.F. on Feb. 15, 1899.<sup>148</sup> Once fully in A.T.&S.F. hands, it abandoned the experiment with narrow-gauge railroads and broadened the line back out to standard gauge. This made the line much more successful, and for many years afterwards service was strong on the line.

All of the railroad development also resulted in hundreds of new jobs in the city that were specific to the railroad alone. Not long after the A.T.&S.F. connected, Emporia would be designated one of its divisional shops. Since it was to be the last stop before the trek westward, the shops in Emporia would be what kept the locomotives running between Topeka and the end of line. This designation resulted in many new structures, which included a two-story station, workshops, freight depot, and railyards, which were erected along the main line in the heart of the city. These facilities would have to be rebuilt repeatedly as the traffic in Emporia expanded. Less than a decade after the first roundhouse was erected, it had to be rebuilt again to accommodate more locomotives as Emporia's role in servicing the A.T.&S.F. expanded.<sup>149</sup> These new facilities brought increasing demand for new track crews, survey teams, firemen, engineers, and other rank-and-file railway employees who could will the need for more skilled labor in Emporia. Even the Katy initially wanted to build some large maintenance shops in Emporia as

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<sup>147</sup> Albert R Greene, James Humphrey, Geo. T. Anthony. *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners, for the Year Ending December 1, 1889* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House: Clifford C. Baker, State Printer. 1889), 182.

<sup>148</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe, *John F. Meade Papers*, 67. Lyon County Historical Society, Binder #284.

<sup>149</sup> "Local News," *The Emporia News* (Emporia: The Emporia News, Oct. 10, 1979), 2.

well, which included its own large roundhouse.<sup>150</sup> Even though this development never came to fruition, it still maintained a well-traveled station and small light facilities that employed a sizeable number of crewmen to service locomotives, take care of station responsibilities, and attend to other duties that the Katy required. All of the extra rail work, and subsequent employees who worked in these facilities, increased the money circulating in Emporia's local economy. The political and commercial leadership of Emporia turned the surplus cash around, reinvesting and continuing with its economic and cultural projects of their founder's utopian vision. Certainly, the economic aspect of this vision had become a reality. The economy of Emporia was now thriving.

However, whenever the railroads had troubles, Emporia suffered similarly. The 1890's would not be a kind decade for either the railroads or the town. The Panic of 1893 caused an economic downturn forcing many railroads across the nation to default on their obligations or entering bankruptcy and receivership talks. During this time, "40,000 miles of line – or more than a fifth of the total, representing about \$2.5 billion of capital – were soon in trouble."<sup>151</sup> Among many of the big name lines impacted by this decline in Kansas at the time was the Santa Fe. The Santa Fe was already overladen with debt, and Emporia was directly affected by the threatened collapse of this vital service. Some of the railroad jobs and other industries in the town serviced by the railroads had to cut positions, which caused a sudden and sharp spike in unemployment. In 1898, there was also financial panic that followed the closing of the First National Bank in town. Thousands of men and women who had counted upon the long-trusted financial

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<sup>150</sup> "More Prosperity," *The Emporia News* (Emporia: The Emporia Weekly News, November 14, 1879), 3.

<sup>151</sup> John F. Stover, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads* (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), 48.

institution found their savings wiped out.<sup>152</sup> The man in charge of the bank, was found lying “in a pool of blood, a hole in his head and a pistol by his side – a mute confession to the fact that he was unable to replace the havoc that fate had made in his affairs.”<sup>153</sup>

Uncertainty spread rapidly throughout the ranks of Emporia’s citizenry, as unemployment and closing businesses seemed to spell impending doom.

Yet the hardy citizens of Emporia, and the reorganization of the A.T.&S.F., ensured that both would survive the 1890’s and its repeated economic blows. The town rallied around William Allen White, and other prominent local leaders, who arranged a large fair on September 28 and 29, 1898. This fair was designed to re-instill the confidence of Emporians in their local economy, and to get money moving once more. It was a success, and confidence was further restored as the A.T.&S.F. changed hands. Under the guidance of Edward P. Ripley, the route rebounded, and “The Santa Fe in 1900 was a system of 7,425 miles, with revenue of \$46 million and a 60 percent operating ratio.”<sup>154</sup> The recovery of the A.T.&S.F. spelled out a bright future for both Emporia and the A.T.&S.F.

By the end of the century, Emporia too was reflecting the dreams of its founders. Pictures of the town in 1895 reflect “two- and three-story brick buildings with enticing facades”, which were, “bringing in customers daily to purchase their supplies.”<sup>155</sup> Even amid financial uncertainty, the overall optimistic attitude towards market friendly ideals, had made the town much larger and more developed than perhaps even the founders had

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<sup>152</sup> “The Town’s Tragedy,” *The Emporia Weekly Gazette* (Emporia: Nov. 17, 1898), 5.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>154</sup> Stover, 91.

<sup>155</sup> Steven Hanschu and Darla Hodges Mallein, *Images of America: Emporia* (Charleston: Acadia Publishing, 2015), 26.

believed possible. In return, the town had provided both railroads with the financial security that was needed for each to become large empires. While later developments, such as the connection to Chicago and even later in its connection to Santa Fe would have greater long-term economic benefits, the initial role played by Emporia in keeping the line alive during its earliest years of operation cannot be ignored. The Katy, in its race against another railroad to the Indian territory, would also count upon the traffic being generated in Emporia to provide it with enough funding to beat the larger and much better funded "Border Tier." The success of both the railroads depended on the existence of the other. Without this relationship, success in any other imagined scenario was dubious at best.

### Chapter 5: Impact of the Railroads: Society and Culture

While the economic impact of railroad connections to Emporia were certainly significant and are indisputably crucial to the prosperity of the town, the impact of the railroads on the society and culture of Emporia must also be understood as being just as influential. The railroad would have a penetrating and transformative effect on the cultural and political influences of the town. The railroads opened up Emporia to a whole new world of knowledge and ideas as influential speakers, new political movements, and a heightened desire for education made Emporia into a sort of microcosm of national issues and cultural exchange.

The first transformation of Emporia's society was with the coming of the migrants. Like most immigrants arriving in the United States, there were tens of thousands who moved into the frontier regions in the hopes of establishing their own small communities on the prairie, and Emporia benefited greatly from the injection of a large number of new citizens. In 1867, the town's population was still at just around 600 citizens, even a decade after it had been founded.<sup>156</sup> Following the arrival of the railroad and all of the migrants and railroad workers who followed, by 1877 the town's population had risen to around 4,000.<sup>157</sup> It was the kind of growth that had eluded Emporia before. It was expansion that was so rapid and encompassing that those demographics which had previously benefited from the residual gains of the town's economic growth, now were able to reap the benefits directly.

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<sup>156</sup> "Emporia: Its Central Location- Its Prospects, Population, business Houses, Etc., Etc.," *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Feb. 15, 1867), 3.

<sup>157</sup> Emporia 1877 City Directory, Lyon County Historical Society.

Before the Civil War, Emporia had no African-American families living within the town's borders. During the war, the first ex-slaves escaping the plantations of the South arrived. With all of the posturing and rhetoric that had been preached by the people in parts of Kansas against the practice of human bondage, these regions of the state naturally became an attractive location for many ex-slaves after the war. Once the war was over, thousands fleeing the South saw the fertile plains of Kansas as the best place to start a new life. Settlement still remained low in Emporia. In large part, this was because of poor relations the railroad had with African-Americans, and extensively the blame must be shouldered by these enterprises. Emporia itself had been a rather progressive town, and many in Emporia's black community found their lives uninhibited. Many found work at the various businesses that were desperate for employees, and some who settled in Emporia would go on to open their own businesses. Yet both railroads kept a highly abrasive attitude towards Emporia's African-American community, and toward other communities along the line. Both companies rarely hired these citizens for work on the railroad. While the Katy did eventually offer some African-Americans employment as station employees, the A.T.&S.F. severely limited other employment opportunities at all levels, to the point where African-American laborers would usually only be brought in for remedial jobs and temporary positions.<sup>158</sup>

The exception to this was during strikes. During various strikes in Emporia, the A.T.&S.F. hired many from Emporia's black community to serve as temporary yard scabs to replace workers who walked the picket line.<sup>159</sup> During these times, Emporia's

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<sup>158</sup> John H. Ducker, *Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869-1900*, 28.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

African-American citizens gave a good account of themselves and proved to all who doubted that they could function as well as any other in working railroad jobs. In some cases, the railroads even allowed them to work in the skilled positions of engineman or tracklayer.<sup>160</sup> Yet being hired on as scabs brought with it many downsides. White striking workers would become furious towards any scabs who minimized the effect of their strikes. When minorities were called upon to break a strike, local race relations were particularly strained.

In later years, the situation in Emporia began to change for the better in regard to the opportunities that were available to its minority railroad workers. Near the end of the century, the A.T.&S.F. actively hired more African-Americans. As the facilities on this line and on the Katy expanded steadily to handle increasing traffic demands, both would hire a steadily higher percentage, and ultimately, the railroads became the single biggest employers of African-Americans in the city.

The A.T.&S.F. and Katy would also provide many new and unique opportunities to the women of Emporia. The Katy hired many women all along their line to work in its stations, and in Emporia, the practice was no different. Women were allowed to handle ticket sales, finances, and pay distribution, just to name a few occupations. While the A.T.&S.F. in Emporia did not hire women for any of its Emporia positions, the Harvey House did. Fred Harvey had contracts with the A.T.&S.F. by which he operated his restaurant chain all along the railroad's route. The Harvey System of restaurants that was strung along the A.T.&S.F. recruited young women to serve as waitresses in upper-class dining. Originally, dining while riding on the railroad was a rushed and chaotic endeavor.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.



Food was usually of poor quality, of little quantity, and there was never enough time to sit and eat a meal in peace. Everything was served in restaurants close to the tracks that “were dirty little dumps, and people would get sick.”<sup>161</sup> The Harvey Houses changed this deplorable situation almost entirely. These restaurants offered a much cleaner, faster, and finer dining experience that was extremely popular with all its patrons. To keep these diners running, Harvey employed an army of talented women to serve in a fine dining atmosphere. Being able to work at the Harvey House provided new opportunities for women to travel and to experience living on their own without family or a husband controlling them. Emporia was the county seat, and with its elegantly-designed train station also came heavy passenger traffic. The Harvey House in Emporia would see hundreds of customers a day as a result, and would be required to employ many women from Emporia. Harriett Cross, an Emporia native and former Harvey Girl, described how the house in Emporia paid her a good wage from which she could live, and let her use the laundry facilities as well as paying for room and board.<sup>162</sup> The Harvey House opened up opportunities for Emporia’s young women to travel to other towns to work if it was desired. It offered an alternative to being married at a young age and let women work and enjoy autonomy rather than feeling beholden to family or spouse.

The coming of the railroads would do more than just introduce Emporia to new economic opportunities. It would also result in the formation of a whole new and unique social class within the town. Hundreds of railroad workmen would be resettled into Emporia, and a heavy railroad influence would become cemented in the town. Both

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Harriett Cross, Harvey House Employee in Emporia Kansas, Feb 17, 1972, interviewed by Ann Davis, 2. Lyon County Historical Society.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.,19.

companies maintained a passenger station and freight depot. After designating Emporia a divisional yard and shop area, the A.T.&S.F. established many new workshops and support infrastructure in the town.<sup>163</sup> With this designation also came the need to bring in a large number of railroad men to handle the servicing of the locomotives, rolling stock, and track to handle construction, repairs, and to provide long-running trains with replacement crews.<sup>164</sup> In Emporia, the station staff alone at the turn of the century numbered “thirteen clerks, six station laborers, five train dispatchers, and twenty-three switchmen, as well as flagmen, baggagemen, and miscellaneous others for a total of sixty-three.”<sup>165</sup> To keep up with these demands, hundreds of railroad crewmen, coming from out of town, set up new lives along the tracks running through the heart of town.<sup>166</sup>

Emporia, as a divisional headquarters, retained a large working-class population. Life for the average rail worker in Emporia had been pleasant for years. There were good wages for the town’s skilled railroad laborers, and living wages for the unskilled positions, when the railroad first arrived. Numerous local chapters of different railroad brotherhoods were established, but no need to unionize really ever presented itself in the first years of service. Instead, the railroads catered to these brotherhoods, they hosted various benefits, performances held by traveling shows, and picnics. There were also some brotherhood-specific events that were hosted as well, such as when the second annual ball for the Order of Railroad Conductors was hosted at the Hotel Whitley in the heart of Emporia.<sup>167</sup> With cordial relations in the town, and good working conditions

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<sup>163</sup> Ducker, 3.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>165</sup> John H. Ducker, *Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869-1900*, 72.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>167</sup> Order of Railroad Conductors, *Program of the Second Annual Ball of the Order of Railroad Conductors, Division No. 330* (Emporia), 1. Kansas State Historical Society, Item Number 212352.

usually maintained, there was never a need to flex any muscle to keep the workforce in check. If a strike occurred, Kansas railroads had been able to break these actions by hiring scabs, threatening unemployment, and occasionally through exercising limited violence. Yet these strikes, regardless of scale, ensured the railroad companies suffered a significant financial hit when they had to deal with angry brotherhoods.

Unfortunate natural disasters would strain relations in Emporia, however, between the brotherhoods and the employers. In the 1870's, operations along the line presented numerous challenges. Cinders generated by the wood-burning locomotives started several large wildfires.<sup>168</sup> In 1874, an unbelievable plague of grasshoppers devastated Kansas, eating through the livelihood of both Kansas farmers and the railroads. Both the Katy and the A.T.&S.F. suffered greatly during this infestation, with both also cutting wages and personnel. These were actions that would polarize their own workforces against their employers.<sup>169</sup>

In 1877, a great railroad strike was organized to protest the wage cuts, long hours, poor management, employee abuse, and hazardous work environment found all across many of America's railroads, and the A.T.&S.F. would be greatly impacted. Following the Panic of 1877, the A.T.&S.F. began the month of August with an over 5% wage cut. Conductors were targeted specifically, as their wages were "slashed drastically from a top salary of \$120 a month to \$75."<sup>170</sup> While this strike involved a high number of employees, it lacked the backing of the more skilled brotherhoods, and the conductors returned to work with the lower wages still intact. However, in 1878, a much larger and

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<sup>168</sup> H.J. Briscoe, *Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe 1776-1976 Time Table* (Topeka: Gage Park, 1976), 19.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

more effective strike began after the engineers were hit with a 10% wage reduction.<sup>171</sup> This would be a poor decision on the part of the company. On April 4, 1878, a new strike commenced that included many of the less skilled brotherhoods alongside the more skilled Brotherhood of Conductors and the immensely influential Brotherhoods of Locomotive Engineers and Fireman.<sup>172</sup> As a result, the Engineman's Strike of 1878 was much more devastating. All along the A.T.&S.F.'s rail line, significant percentages of workers didn't report for shifts, or took up their tools to prevent the train from running. In a few cities, whole sections of the labor force stopped showing up for work entirely.

Charles F. Morse, then superintendent of the A.T.&S.F., reported that there were no demands issued, something that he had not expected. In order to get the workforce moving trains again, Morse put out a statement, which made it clear that,

While it will be a matter of extreme regret to me to lose the services of old and tried employees, I wish it to be distinctly understood that this Company will not be dictated to by its Engineers, or other of its employees and that each man who voluntarily refuses service to-day, will not be re-employed under any circumstance.

You are called on, before it is too late, to consider your own welfare and that of your families before severing your connection with this Company.<sup>173</sup>

Better organized, the Emporians resisted these usual tactics as exercised by the A.T.&S.F., and things in Emporia became progressively worse. In a letter to the governor George J Anthony, Charles F. Morse disclosed events in Emporia. Morse, desperate to keep service, attempted to bring in new workers to replace the strikers. This was not

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>172</sup> Charles F. Morse, *Report of Strike*, Topeka: May 21, 1878, 1. Kansas State Historical Society, Item Number 208101.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

received well by the Emporians, who attacked any man attempting to water down the effectiveness of the ongoing strike. They held trains hostage, disabled locomotives that attempted to leave the town, and attacked the replacement crewmen.<sup>174</sup> When lawmen were called out to guard the few remaining engineers willing to operate locomotives, these men were attacked as well.<sup>175</sup> One sheriff was injured so badly that he was hospitalized for several days. In order to permanently stop trains from running through Emporia, three engines were run off the rails, blocking the main A.T.&S.F. artery.<sup>176</sup> Other damages included breaking locomotive headlights, draining the water tower that supplied the steam locomotives, and attacking anyone whom they believed were trying to keep the railroad running.<sup>177</sup> The situation was getting more-and-more out of control, as employees on the next day continued to attack other workers, in one case striking a man over the head with a piece of iron. The violence was driving fear into those still willing to work, and action had to be taken.<sup>178</sup>

Desperate for some sort of resolution, the A.T.&S.F. turned to the state for assistance. The state militia was sent in to force the strikers into silence and to protect those engineers and locomotives that attempted to run trains out of Emporia.<sup>179</sup> When asked to disperse, the striking railroad workers refused. A huge brawl erupted in the middle of town. One innocent bystander was shot and killed, several more were wounded, and multiple arrests happened before the fight was over.<sup>180</sup> Beaten, bloodied,

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>176</sup> William Strong, *Letter Detailing Developments In A Strike of Engineers* (Topeka, 1878), 3. Item Number 220808.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>178</sup> Morse, 7.

<sup>179</sup> "A Tempest in a Teapot", *The Emporia News* (Emporia, April 12, 1878), 2.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

and exhausted, the railroad men worked out an agreement with the Santa Fe. While wages were not restored, many of the strikers who had lost their jobs for going on strike were allowed to go back to work. For the A.T.&S.F., the strike had been a much more expensive affair. Emporia's resistance had cost the line significantly in lost revenue and stopped service. For several days, almost all trains were halted in the town. This was at a time when it was estimated that more than 100 trains a day were running through Emporia, which represented a huge loss for the company.<sup>181</sup> It is debatable whether the many other smaller towns involved in the strike would have ever had the ability to cause as much pain to the Santa Fe as the strike in Emporia had. After the strike ended, it was clear that, while the town and railroad were able to work well together, each had an intrinsic capability to inflict pain if perceived wrongdoing was detected.

The presence of the railroads in Emporia caused other controversies within the town as well, as political ideas regarding these companies took a very strong position in public life. Emporia, with its many newspapers and State college, was found as home to many critical thinkers and activists of the time. As such, it was not uncommon for the town to be swept up into political movements, such as the Populist movement of the 1890's. Populism was not just unique to Kansas, as many communities across the nation were swept up in the fervor of government reform. Yet, Emporia would especially feel squeezed by the national debate. This was in no small part due to the presence of political agitators and writers that promoted these new ideas. James D. Holden, a writer and provocateur, was a leading local writer and thinker on many populist issues. For most of the decade, Holden published numerous books and articles, which projected the populist

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<sup>181</sup> Emporia Republican, *Organ's Souvenir of Emporia, Kansas*, 11. Lyon County Historical Society.

ethos on local problems. Holden was a champion for returning control and power over the different functions of society to farmers and the working class, rather than having it consolidated in the hands of the rich. As such, his works fought against systems which, he perceived, were designed to oppress the masses. In 1891, he would publish his first work in Emporia, titled, “*Metallic Money and Hard Times: Why They are Inseparable*,” in which he railed against the “specie basis” that was adopted in civilized nations and which functioned as, “the invisible lever with which they have for centuries, with mysterious power, exacted from the toiling millions, without compensation, so large a percentage of the fruit of labor.”<sup>182</sup> As such, when the national government voted to demonetize and prohibit the further coinage of silver, they denied the common man increased wages and prosperity for all of the ‘producing classes’<sup>183</sup>

He was not alone in town with his beliefs as well, as other prominent residents also publicly championed the Free Silver movement. Perhaps the best known of all of these, and even more well known than Holden, was Preston Plumb himself. Many years following the settlement of Emporia, he had risen in status and was elected a Senator. In the halls of Congress, he lobbied without waver for the free coinage of silver, even though his ownership of several silver mines in Colorado almost certainly influenced his thoughts on the matter.<sup>184</sup>

While this drove Holden to write frequently on the Free Silver campaign for several years, his resentment towards wealthy oppressors naturally turned his gaze

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<sup>182</sup> James D. Holden, *Metallic Money and Hard Times: Why They Are Inseparable* (Emporia: The Reform Publishing Company, 1891), 8.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>184</sup> William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 269.

towards the railroads. Holden could see once more the ‘invisible hand of oppression’ as farmers were forced to pay high rates in order to make a living off of what they produced. With no other alternative available, farmers were forced to pay whatever rates railroads were demanding. Once more, the capitalists were making money on the backs of those common men who actually produced products for society, as opposed to capitalists who leeches off of their efforts. His animosity towards this perceived abuse led him to write his attack on the railroads: “*Free Freight and Government Railways.*” Holden made the argument that railroads were more than just a luxury. The American railroad network enabled the rich and powerful, “to govern the distribution of the necessities of life, as well as to determine their own compensation for transporting the product to market.”<sup>185</sup> Yet, the railroads had existed, especially in the West, on the back of American tax dollars, which paid for government subsidies to build the large networks in the first place<sup>186</sup>. So, while these companies ran under private ownership, they were actually supposed to be ‘public in character.’

In his examples, he attacked the A.T.&S.F. directly. Having been funded significantly by government land grants through the state, the company was particularly vulnerable against this claim. Holden attacked the entire A.T.&S.F. system for exorbitant transportation rates. This included that claim that two-thirds of the cost of coal was actually caused by inflated railroad rates.<sup>187</sup> Additionally, he claimed that it was unfair to charge different rates for the transport of a single commodity over various lines. Holden

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<sup>185</sup> James D. Holden, *Free Freight and Government Railways: A Proposition to Restore to Society Essential Rights of Which it has Been Wrongfully Divested; and to Make Men Generally the Beneficiaries of Government, Instead of its Victims.* (Emporia: The Reform Publishing Company, n.d., ca 1891), 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



also charged railroads with favoritism, giving cities with a large population, manufacturing, and wealth better and more competitive rates, while penalizing all the other communities that a railroad serviced.<sup>188</sup> This, couldn't be allowed to stand, for it represented, at least to Holden, a power which, "not only despoils the agricultural classes, but injuriously affects all who are engaged in vocations which are dependent upon the prosperity of the farmer."<sup>189</sup>

Emporia, with a large farming population, took hold to Holden ideas with ease. It was obvious that the railroads were abusing those whom they served, and as Holden continued to make the case against the railroads, local attitudes soured. While the town had once celebrated the arrival of the railroad, they now perceived that it had placed shackles around their necks. The solution to this dilemma would be dramatic reform, in which railroads were not simply regulated, but instead taken under direct control by the government.<sup>190</sup> Freight traffic should be hauled at no charge. Without a middle-man purposefully driving up the costs of shipping, both manufacturers and consumers would find prosperity.

However, there were obvious problems with this idea. Obviously, the shipping of freight was never going to be actually 'free.' Once under government ownership, tax dollars would be required in order to pay for the maintenance of locomotives, rolling stock, fuel, and the many other typically heavy costs that go into running a railroad. While Holden claims that the costs of transport would be removed from the overall value of a product, he did not elaborate on where the money would come from to subsidize

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 20.

these lost revenues. Yet, the promised gains by the common farmer and consumer turned Emporia, and most of the state, into a breeding ground for populist support and agitation for reforms. In Emporia, the debate over populism was visible on the streets. In 1896, as Holden finished printing several more books and articles on the need for populist reform, another powerful voice in Emporia spoke out against the populist ethos.

Almost certainly Emporia's most well-known citizen, William Allen White, was a well read and opinionated republican, who moved into Emporia as the young owner of the *Emporia Gazette* in 1895.<sup>191</sup> In the editorial section, he regularly spoke out against the Populist platform, including Free Silver and Free Freight, which turned White and his newspaper into political pariahs.<sup>192</sup> Aside from the occasional boycott of his newspaper and sometimes harsh words towards his stance on the issues, the debate raging over populist ideas in Emporia had remained relatively docile. Yet, on August 15, 1896, White was harassed by populist agitators on his way to work, or as White remembered, "They ganged me-hooting, jeering, nagging me about some utterances I had made. I was froggy in the meadow and couldn't get out, and they were taking a little stick and poking me about."<sup>193</sup> After having been mobbed and threatened on the street to his office at the *Gazette*, he sat down to write the editorial, and what came out was 'pure vitriol.'<sup>194</sup> The editorial was a scathing attack on the Populist Party, titled, "*What's the Matter with Kansas?*" In it, he attacked many of the principles that Holden, along with many other populists, had held dear. He attacked those men who, "bellow about the crime of '73, who hate prosperity, and who think that because a man believes in national honor, that he

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<sup>191</sup> White, 259.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

is a tool of Wall street.”<sup>195</sup> He continued, accusing the populists of wanting to legislate the lazy into a life of ease, all the while chasing away anyone who experiences success. White’s editorial would earn him local and national fame, as he swung back at those who would wish to punish success. White offered the evidence of failure in the face of Holden’s belief that the future would be prosperous under populist theory. This debate, which involved both Emporia’s large farming population and its important railroad connections, would divide the town well into the turn of the century.

Yet the railroads meant more than just the politics of strikes and reform, however. The founders of Emporia had always envisioned that their town would become a cultural center as much as it would be at the center of politics and commerce. From the beginning, the town had worked hard to promote the arts, to bring in new visitors to the town, and to establish places where performers and speakers from around the world could come and enlighten or entertain fellow Emporians. Of course, this included many noted and famous leaders and politicians. On July, 5, 1880, for example, President Ulysses S. Grant rode the train to Emporia to participate in the city’s 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations.<sup>196</sup> He had a tour of the town, made a speech in Soden’s Grove, and was honored by what would seem to have been the entire town.<sup>197</sup> Harkening back to the days of the Civil War and Emporia’s abolitionist roots, the President’s arrival electrified a town that was now able to experience in person one of their greatest heroes. Following General Grant’s visit to Emporia, the *Emporia News* wrote how,

Emporia will ever cherish with the fondest pride the recollections of this notable day in her history, when she honored herself by doing homage to a

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<sup>195</sup> William Allen White, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (Emporia: Emporia Gazette, August 15, 1896) Kansas State Historical Society, Item Number 219539.

<sup>196</sup> Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia: 1882), 77.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

brave son of the republic whose name is illustrious abroad and is enshrined in the hearts of fifty million of freemen in his own land.<sup>198</sup>

Other Presidents would also visit Emporia, including Theodore Roosevelt, who came and made a speech from a train on July 2, 1900.<sup>199</sup> There was also a joint address which was about the state of the Native peoples in the Midwest, made on September 26, 1879 by President Rutherford B. Hayes and General William Tecumseh Sherman at the A.T.&S.F. depot.<sup>200</sup>

In 1881, the construction of the Whitley Opera House was another important landmark to Emporia's goal of becoming a cultural center.<sup>201</sup> The railroads were frequently bringing in performing groups and musical acts, and the Whitley Opera House provided the right venue to host these events. These events included many traveling bands and orchestras that would come and serenade Emporia's with sounds from the rest of the world. On Jan 8, 1890, this included a visit by Julia Ward Howe, known famously for composing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," who sang the famous hymn with the Normal School Choir.<sup>202</sup> The Whitley Opera House was more than just a performance center, however, as it saw many influential and important historical characters come and speak, perform, and introduce Emporians to new ideas and to progressive movements. On Oct. 9, 1887, Susan B. Anthony and Anna B. Shaw came and spoke at the opera house to discuss women's suffrage. Another women's suffrage advocate, Henry Ward Beecher, had come even earlier, on September 21, 1883, for the same reasons. There were an

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<sup>198</sup> "Our Illustrious Guest", *The Emporia News* (Emporia: July 9, 1880), 2.

<sup>199</sup> Charles E. Webb, *Emporia, The Athens of America, Is Just Ahead...: A Datebook of Famous Visitors to Emporia* (Emporia: Emporia State University Endowment Association, 1978), 250.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 350.

<sup>201</sup> Ted F. McDaniel, *Our Land: A History of Lyon County, Kansas: A Bicentennial Publication*, ed. Alberta Brinkman (Emporia: Emporia State Press, 1976), 152.

<sup>202</sup> Webb, 11.

untold number of acting troupes as well. The Whitley Opera House saw hundreds of performances, which included a near-monthly performance of “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” which began when the opera house was first constructed. One of these performances was even led on March 18, 1899 by John F. Stowe, nephew of Harriett Beecher Stowe, who produced and directed a version of his aunt’s famous literary work.<sup>203</sup> Some famous intellectuals of the time also came through Emporia and lectured as well. Among these lecturers included R.A. Proctor, a noted astronomer, who came to speak to the town about what existed beyond Earth.<sup>204</sup> There was also a visit by William Jennings Bryan, who walked off the train and gave an impromptu speech to the students and teachers on the campus of the State Normal School.<sup>205</sup> All of these visitors added significantly to the rich and vibrant culture of the town.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 327.

## Chapter 6: The Legacy

In the conclusion to his book detailing the important events in Emporia in its first twenty-five years of existence, Jacob Stotler wrote, “From the small beginnings to date, we must conclude Emporia has done as well as any town in the state, and far better than most of those that started in the race with her.”<sup>206</sup> Stotler, when he penned his brief history, was proud of the achievements of his town to that point and, like Brown, had mentioned at the turn of the century that Emporia had become so much more than what the founders had envisioned for their little foray into community-building. Their little town would grow into one that had a lasting legacy, and it is one that still is felt in the town today.

There can be no doubt that the railroads played an instrumental role in what Emporia was ultimately to become. In 1877, a city official had to admit that, “in addition to its many advantages, Emporia has superior railroad facilities,” giving an appropriate and well-deserved acknowledgement that all of the development had not just been through the deeds of Emporians.<sup>207</sup> Emporia and its connecting railroads had, in the towns’ formative years, forged a tight bond. Indeed, many lasting legacies of this closely-knit relationship have cast long shadows on the region. One observed legacy would have to be that Emporia had been the promised land for many railroads in their first few years of operation. Both the A.T.&S.F. and the Katy found desperately needed stability during those first years when both lines were standing on shaky financial ground. While these routes would become remarkably wealthy in the following months and years, there were so many other lines that never reached Emporia. However, the benefits for the Emporia

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<sup>206</sup> Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia: 1882), 99.

<sup>207</sup> Emporia 1877 City Directory, Lyon County Historical Society, 1.

connection become clearer in the examples of those lines that never reached the promised land. For such a story, one needs to look no further than the seemingly cursed Lawrence & Emporia. The Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Galveston, then owner and operator of the L.&E. branch, would lose much of its incoming investment after losing the race to the Southern Border to the Katy. This was a fatal blow to the L.L.&G. Rapidly approaching disaster and desperate to bail out the company, the company sold the rights of the L.&E. to the Union Pacific, which reassumed operations.

In the 1880's, the U.P. began to look for ways of penetrating into the A.T.&S.F. traffic. The President of the U.P., Charles Francis Adams, claimed that the L.&E., with additional construction, "offered the most effective way to strike directly into the heart of A.T.&S.F. territory."<sup>208</sup> Track improvements and better equipment were brought in to renovate the line, making it much more profitable. The *Emporia Republican* reported, "There is every indication that the line will be built this season" to Emporia.<sup>209</sup> The *Lawrence Daily Journal* reported on February 9, 1887, "the Union Pacific now has a party out locating the proposed extension of the Carbondale southwest toward Emporia," and how "the citizens of Emporia are taking active measures to encourage the building of this line."<sup>210</sup> It also wondered, with a somewhat derogatory tone, "would it not be a good thing for Lawrence to at least take some action in the matter?"<sup>211</sup> However, plans fell apart once again, as in late 1887, "the Union Pacific's line between Lawrence and Carbondale clearly had fallen on bad times."<sup>212</sup> With citizens in both Emporia and

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<sup>208</sup> I. E. Quastler, *Railroads of Lawrence Kansas* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1979), 316.

<sup>209</sup> *Emporia Republican*, *Organ's Souvenir of Emporia, Kansas*, 11.

<sup>210</sup> "Surveyors at Work-Daily Trains on the Carbondale", *The Lawrence Daily Journal* (Lawrence: The Lawrence Daily Journal, 1887), 2.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>212</sup> Quastler, 315.

Lawrence encouraging the expansion of the line, and under the stewardship of the large U.P., the completion of the line seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Yet in late 1877 the coal mines in Carbondale closed, and as the financial anchor of the line dried up, so did the enthusiasm of the U.P. to continue the project.<sup>213</sup> With prospects for making the line profitable becoming increasingly forlorn, and with investment needed elsewhere along the U.P. network, the company sought a new operator for the line.

Still, the hope for a direct Emporia and Lawrence connection did not die. An effort began once more to continue operations, and the L.&E. was leased from the U.P. on June 18, 1887 annually for just \$1,000 per year.<sup>214</sup> Nine men, four from Emporia and five from Lawrence, bought the line, and it was reorganized as the Lawrence, Emporia, and Southwestern Railroad (L.E.&S.W.).<sup>215</sup> Even while running the railroad on a tight budget, the line was unable to make a profit.<sup>216</sup> With their company increasingly falling into the red, another buyer was sought to take this burden off their hands. They found a buyer in the Kansas City, Wyandotte, and Southwestern Railway (K.C.W.&S.W.). After just two years of running the line, the L.E.&S.W. handed over operations eagerly, possibly making evident that “the managers had not been pleased with the financial experiences of their little railroad.”<sup>217</sup> Signing over use of the line was a wise decision, for the L.&E. did not perform any better while under control by the K.C.W.&S.W. either. This line would struggle too. By August 1899, the railroad went into bankruptcy. The receivers of the line determined that, “the line had no future use and that it should

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<sup>213</sup> Robert Collins, *Ghost Railroads of Kansas* (David City: South Platte Press, 1997), 67.

<sup>214</sup> Albert R. Greene, James Humphrey, Geo. T. Anthony, *Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners, for the Year Ending December 1, 1889* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House: Clifford C. Baker, State Printer, 1889), 438.

<sup>215</sup> Quastler, 316.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.



therefore be salvaged and the assets distributed to the creditors.”<sup>218</sup> Such was the fate of the dream to lay rail between Emporia to the home of the town’s founders.

Despite being taken under ownership by numerous companies, and despite the many attempts that were made to bring the line into the black, the L.&E. lacked the connection to a substantial and economically-supportive town. In its infancy, the A.T.&S.F. had also terminated in Carbondale for a number of years, but it had kept up the pace of construction, pushing onwards until it had reached Emporia. If the line had remained with its terminus in Carbondale, the railroad may have shared a similar fate to the L.&E. Similarly, if the L.&E. had managed to make the connection with Emporia, then there is a good chance that the line would have stayed alive, and maybe even flourished. However, the line had depended almost solely on freight from Carbondale, and when this traffic ceased, so did the justification to keep the line in operation. While there were plenty of pre-conditions that doomed the line, not connecting to Emporia, a substantial and diverse market, was perhaps the biggest mistake that was made. In contrast, both the Katy and A.T.&S.F. did manage to make the connection, and owed their initial existence and successes to Emporia. The Katy, which had begun in a town meeting in Emporia, would grow to become an incredibly important midwestern railroad. After winning the race to the Indian Territory in 1871, it would then win the federal contract that permitted it to be the only road allowed to travel across the territory.<sup>219</sup> This allowed the line to reach southward and spread its roots all throughout Texas, becoming an influential cattle and freight line. However, not long after making it into Texas the line

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>219</sup> John F. Stover, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads* (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), 110.

would fall into receivership. After several attempts at reorganization, the Katy would never really pull itself out of its financial quagmire. Declining traffic in the region simply meant the company was hemorrhaging money that it would never be able to earn back.

In the 1960's and 70's, the line joined other railroads in financial peril. Decades of over regulation, decreased freight and passenger traffic, as well as a decreasing quality of locomotives, rolling stock, and track meant that its bankruptcy was a foregone conclusion. Yet, even in the midst of certain collapse, the Katy kept limited service through Emporia. Small motorized railcars known as "doodlebugs" would make passenger service more manageable and realistic to keep in operation. However, it was far too late for the Katy, and in the late 1980's, the railroad finally declared bankruptcy. Its local Emporia lines would almost all be bought up by the A.T.&S.F., or were salvaged to try and pay what it could of its debt. This inevitably included removing the old passenger station, which had stood for decades at the corner of East 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and East Street. Regardless of the local historical significance of the building, it too would be demolished, and the land was sold to private development. Today, the only remaining evidence of the Katy's past in Emporia is a small segment of track that services a mill on the east side of town near the Bungie Silos. Such was the rather unremarkable end to what used to have been considered an absolute blessing.

The legacy of the A.T.&S.F., particularly in Emporia, would be much better in comparison to the slow death of the Katy. Thanks to the bonds voted on by the citizens of Emporia and Lyon County, and the subsequent heavy traffic that the line developed, the A.T.&S.F. would struggle out of its infancy to become an outstanding success. With the connection to Emporia bringing noteworthy income and stability, more investment from

confident lenders in the east would open capital for the A.T.&S.F. In the coming years, enough money was coming in from investments and traffic revenue that the line continued on to the western border of Kansas. It did so just in time, for, “by December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1872, the state line was finally reached, securing the Grant,” just a few days short of the contract’s end date.<sup>220</sup> The A.T.&S.F.’s development would not end at the border, and track layers would push onwards to Santa Fe. It was through this connection that the A.T.&S.F. would continue to grow and become one of the largest railroads in the nation. Emporia would grow with the A.T.&S.F., becoming an important commercial center on the line. The A.T.&S.F. consistently made up a weighty percentage of Emporia’s workforce, which provided livelihoods to all demographics. The company donated to local elections and community events, provided technical training, and would become as active in the welfare and success of Emporia almost as much as the city’s own citizens were.

However, like the Katy, the A.T.&S.F. would not fare well throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Faced with the similar problems of unsustainable overregulation, decreasing traffic, deferred maintenance of trackage, decaying equipment, expensive operating costs, and plummeting profits, the A.T.&S.F. became financially unstable. While the A.T.&S.F. was able to fare the period better than most lines, it was still hurt deeply by declining traffic. Some services began to decline or were cut entirely. While originally it was believed that more than one hundred trains a day passed through Emporia, this number declined sharply as cost-cutting measures were adopted to alleviate the hemorrhaging of cash the company was suffering. These measures included adopting a diesel railcar

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<sup>220</sup> Collins, 9.

service, named “The Little Ranger” to take over passenger service from Emporia to Winfield.<sup>221</sup> This schedule also demonstrated that passenger service had then also been cut to just three trains a day. When Amtrak finally offered to alleviate this extreme financial burden from the A.T.&S.F., it unknowingly had sealed the fate of Emporia’s passenger rail service. When Amtrak began to seek ways to cut its own operating costs while keeping service only on the high-volume lines, the passenger service to Emporia was ultimately cut. More than a century after passenger service had begun, it had unceremoniously and suddenly come to an end.

After acquiring assets from the Katy and some other roads, the A.T.&S.F. consolidated its equipment, and began to trim the fat from their services further, which led it to pull up much of the rail line to the north and south of Emporia. This period also saw a shrinking of the railyards and service facilities. In the 1980’s the servicing station, roundhouse, and repair shops were abandoned and torn down, and the large sorting yard to the east of the town was similarly salvaged. In 1996, the Burlington Northern merged with the A.T.&S.F. to form the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe. (B.N.S.F.). This merger would help keep the railroad in Emporia alive. While it is still just a shadow of its former self, it is making a comeback. The line in Emporia is central to the shipping of container freight from coast to coast, and a large railyard in the town still keeps many employed under the railroad’s continued service. While most of the old shops are gone, along with a greatly decreased yard capacity and discontinued passenger service, the sounds of train horns can still be heard on an hourly basis. The remaining railyard

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<sup>221</sup> Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company. *Emporia Passenger Schedule and the Little Ranger*, Lyon County Historical Society.

remains an important sorting and storage hub on the line, and several industries in the city still retain split tracks that help to get their goods hauled off to national and international markets.

If one looked for the remains of the A.T.&S.F., the railyard and the tracks running through the town are largely all that remains of the old A.T.&S.F. The elegant old passenger station, once a landmark for Emporia, was suddenly and unexpectedly set ablaze in late 1998. The fire would ravage the once beautiful station. Condemned and deemed unable to be saved, it was demolished. However, there are memorials and traces of the railroad town's rich heritage across Emporia. One of the old freight depots remains today as an antique store by the main line in the center of the town. A park was established near where the old roundhouse used to be and is named after the company in a tribute to the larger influence Emporia used to play for the railroad. On the east side of town, an old steam locomotive and caboose are on display in Fremont Park. Both are former equipment used by the A.T.&S.F., and stand as a sort of tribute to when hundreds of similar locomotives would have been seen running daily in and out of the town.

Emporia enjoys its own lasting legacy that was generated by its connection to the railroads. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Emporia had already secured a position of importance in Kansas. The town had become an important political, economic, social, cultural, and educational city, and today still operates as a kind of unofficial capital over east-central Kansas. If all of Emporia's founders had managed to live to see where their town was at by 1900, it would be certain that all would have been proud to know the status that their township would achieve. It was a success that was based on the willingness of Emporians to seize opportunities and attack obstacles with undying

energy, admirable qualities that the town had been imbued with even when it was only a handful of buildings. Emporians always dreamed big, and were unique in being able to commit to long-term projects that turned dreams into a reality. While the prestige of the town had diminished with the loss of most of the railroad operations in town, it regained it elsewhere. The increased influence of the city's various higher learning institutions has ensured that Emporia remains a highly respected town, known for its diverse social life, industrious spirit, dedication to education, and a population that has a generally friendly and generous demeanor, with strong moral foundations.

The goals of Emporia and its connecting railroads were intertwined from the conception of both. Emporia without the railroad connection would have almost certainly remained little more than another small prairie settlement, a common fate for so many other communities across the American West. Without Emporia, both the Katy and the A.T.&S.F., which were both involved in time-sensitive building projects, would surely have witnessed failure. The Katy, once it had reached Emporia and started to demonstrate it was making successful connections, received enough investment and revenue service to win its race to the Indian Territory. In the case of the A.T.&S.F. Emporia was even more important, as the struggling line found stability and success once they had put rails down into the heart of the city. The investment and revenue gained from the connection to Emporia would help drive the line along, as it crossed the border of Colorado with just days remaining. However, since Emporia was established and aided the railroads, and with the railroads able to bring the wider world to Emporia, both sides of this cohesive partnership were able to accomplish their goals for their future. It was a unique

relationship in how much both sides depended on the other, and with the right conditions, both parties would achieve the goals that each enterprise set out to achieve.

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