

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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for the

Master of Arts
(degree)

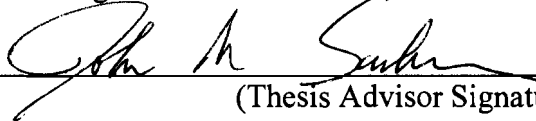
in History

presented on

December 10, 2004

Title: Charles Vernon Eskridge and Kansas Politics, 1855-1900

Abstract approved:



(Thesis Advisor Signature)

Charles Vernon Eskridge was an influential leader in Kansas politics in the middle and late nineteenth century. By mixing politics with business, Eskridge epitomized the Gilded Age local politician. He arrived in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1855 and worked on the *Herald of Freedom*, an abolitionist newspaper. In 1857, he moved to Emporia, Kansas, where he became one of the town's early leaders. From 1858 to 1874, Eskridge served in numerous state and local elected offices. Factional infighting in the Kansas political community forced him from elected political office. He effectively manipulated politics for personal gain. Through numerous business ventures, Eskridge amassed considerable wealth and influence. In 1882, Eskridge founded the *Emporia Republican*, which became one of the state's leading newspapers. As the editor of a party organ newspaper, Eskridge was able to reestablish himself as an influential local political leader. Through the *Republican*, Eskridge articulated his views and political vision to all who would read it.

In the 1890s, Eskridge faced a decline in subscribers that weakened his influence in the state's politics. Though he anticipated the Kansas Republican Party's move to a progressive reform agenda, he was overshadowed by a new generation of leaders, particularly his competitor William Allen White of the *Emporia Gazette*. In 1899,

Eskridge was forced into bankruptcy as a result of the failure of an Emporia bank that he was heavily invested in. Faced with financial ruin and failing health, Eskridge committed suicide in 1900.

Though Eskridge never fully realized his political aspirations, his political career is a representative example of the influence of the local politician and newspaper editor. Eskridge was a careful manipulator of both politics and business. In his career, politics and business intersected at every level. In this way, Eskridge exemplifies the local Gilded Age politician.

CHARLES VERNON ESKRIDGE AND KANSAS POLITICS, 1855-1900

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Social Sciences

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree


Master of Arts

by

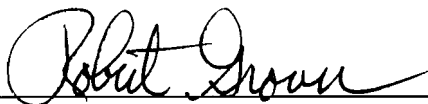
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December 2004

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Approved by the Department Chair



Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the extensive assistance that my thesis committee provided to me throughout the writing process. Dr. John Sacher has offered his assistance on this project and has profoundly influenced my graduate studies. Some day, I hope to be a professional historian of his caliber. Dr. Karen Manners Smith's careful editing and wise counsel have made this a better thesis. She has not only edited my work, but she has taught me how to be a better writer. Dr. Sam Dicks suggested the thesis topic to me when I was an undergraduate student and has provided much assistance during the process. He has served as a mentor in both my undergraduate and graduate study. I am greatly indebted to him for his generosity. These three historians have set a high standard for me to follow.

I am also grateful for the assistance I have received from the following people. Mr. Timothy Rives, archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration's Kansas City, Missouri location found C.V. Eskridge's bankruptcy papers in the archives. At the Emporia State University Archives, Barb Robins, Jennifer Galliardt, and Max Krause helped me find source material. Jacque Fehr, senior administrative assistant in the Department of Social Sciences, has helped me in many ways throughout my two years as a graduate assistant.

My family is a constant source of encouragement. My parents, Robert N. and Loretta Childers, have unfailingly supported me at every step of my education. I am especially grateful to my wife Leah, for her unending support. Though she is a mathematician, she has patiently read and listened to far more information about Charles

Vernon Eskridge than she ever bargained for. In that respect, and in many others, she is a good and patient wife.

I have enjoyed the assistance of many people in writing this thesis. However, this thesis is ultimately my creation and I accept responsibility for it.

PREFACE

In all the obituaries that memorialized the life of Emporia politician and newspaper editor Charles Vernon Eskridge, one phrase stands out as particularly descriptive of his life and career: “He mixed politics with business.”¹ In this manner, Eskridge indeed was representative of his contemporaries. He married his diverse business interests with politics and political power in his efforts to succeed. In this respect, Eskridge was a typical small-town politician. But as the history of Gilded Age politics suggests, such a union was dangerous. Eskridge became an influential Kansas politician, but his position of power was often in peril. This thesis asserts that as a typical local-level politician, Eskridge gained influence, power, and wealth; but those trappings of status were fleeting. Eskridge was forced from political office by the sting of factionalism and he was forced from his position as one of the state’s leading newspaper editors by stiff competition. While Eskridge anticipated the new direction of twentieth century Kansas Republican politics, he was not a part of the progressive transformation. Eskridge’s political career shows the fragility of status for a local-level politician in the nineteenth century.

This thesis is biographical by nature, but it is not intended to serve as a comprehensive biography of Eskridge. Rather, the thesis centers on Eskridge’s political career. The following chapters are a chronological examination of the major events, battles, and ideas that Eskridge faced, supported, and repudiated. In this manner, this work chronicles his life, but also seeks to explain his role in the complex world of nineteenth century Kansas politics.

¹ *Kansas City Journal*, quoted in *Emporia Gazette*, 16 July 1900.

The first chapter concentrates on Eskridge's early career, from his arrival in Kansas in 1855 to the late 1870s. Eskridge quickly rose through the ranks to become an influential political and business leader in the state. He mastered the art of local politics through serving in a series of local and state level elected offices. In the 1870s, Eskridge was forced from political office through a series of bitter factional battles. Because Eskridge chose to focus his political strength on his efforts to speculate in town settlement southwest of Emporia, his own constituency questioned his ability to serve their needs. I argue that Eskridge lost the Emporia electorate by losing sight of their interests. By using his political power to further his personal business interests, he lost the people's support.

The second chapter focuses on Eskridge's transition from elected political officeholder to party organ newspaper editor. For Eskridge, the change was nothing less than a political renaissance. Editing the *Emporia Republican* revived his political career and allowed him to reach a wider audience than ever before. The newspaper served as Eskridge's political diary; in its columns, Eskridge articulated his position on every issue that was important to him. The newspaper allowed Eskridge to carry on the factional battles that he had fought in years past without relying on other newspapers to print his writings. The *Republican* was a self-declared party organ newspaper, but its politics were primarily influenced by Eskridge's interpretation of the Republican Party platform and of politics in general. In the late 1880s, as Eskridge faced a loss of subscribers, he began to lose the wide audience that had made him influential once again. Ironically, the very communities that he helped to build developed their own newspapers and institutions no longer needed Eskridge's *Republican* as they prospered.

The third chapter analyzes Eskridge's transition from factional politics to anticipating the progressive reform movement that William Allen White and the "Boss-Busters" championed in the first decade of the twentieth century. Eskridge was not a Populist, but he sympathized with many of their causes. I argue that this was not only desirable for Eskridge, who was at heart a classic Western Republican, but was also essential for his political and business interests. Emporia and the surrounding region resoundingly supported Populism in its heyday. Eskridge embraced many of the reform initiatives, but he carefully distanced himself from the Populist movement. The Progressive Republicans took up the reform mantle after 1900. Eskridge anticipated its arrival. In a brief epilogue, I chronicle the end of the *Emporia Republican* and the legacy of his rivals Jacob Stotler and William Allen White.

A word about sources is necessary. Because Eskridge's papers were never collected and preserved, there are few extant letters from him, and most of these are not valuable to understanding the man. His newspaper is the closest thing that researchers have to a "diary" of his life. Because he was a printer, Eskridge understood the nature of the newspaper as a medium of communication. I have relied heavily on the *Republican*, as well as competing Emporia and Kansas newspapers from this era to reveal his thoughts, ideology, and attitudes. I have utilized the abundant literature on Gilded Age politics as well as other secondary source material to place Eskridge in the context of his era and of Kansas politics.

Because this thesis focuses on one local politician, its scope is limited. Nevertheless, the political career of Charles Vernon Eskridge illustrates and reveals larger trends in Kansas politics in the second half of the nineteenth century. By showing

the continuity and change in Eskridge's career, I hope to illustrate the larger forces in Kansas politics that were static and shifting. These forces certainly acted on Eskridge, but in some ways, he acted on the forces, too.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
PREFACE.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
 <u>Chapter</u>	
1. ESKRIDGE’S EARLY POLITICAL CAREER.....	1
2. PARTY ORGAN: ESKRIDGE AND THE <i>REPUBLICAN</i>	29
3. A VOICE STILLED: ESKRIDGE’S FINAL YEARS.....	51
4. EPILOGUE.....	72
BIBLIOGRAPHY	74
APPENDICES	79
Appendix A: Search Light and “The Genesis of our Squatter Sovereignty”: Charles Vernon Eskridge’s Reminiscences of Early Emporia and Lyon County History	79
Appendix B: Emporia Newspapers	102

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
TABLE 2.1: First Southwest Kansas Newspapers	46

CHAPTER ONE

ESKRIDGE'S EARLY POLITICAL CAREER

Nineteenth century Americans coveted the skill of oratory. People listened to speakers for hours as a form of entertainment as well as a means to learn about issues and ideas. When Charles Vernon Eskridge gave the Fourth of July Speech at Americus, Kansas, in 1869, the audience not only witnessed some stirring oratory, they also learned their lieutenant governor's political philosophy, for Eskridge's Fourth of July speech was one of the most explicit statements of his beliefs that he had made to date.¹ In the speech, Eskridge repeatedly invoked the republic's revolutionary heritage in glorifying the nation's experiment with self-government and its battle against slavery. He spoke as a booster, stating that "the industrious tiller of the soil has but to 'tickle the ground with a hoe and it laughs with a harvest.'" He spoke as a proponent of education: "Educate deeply, soundly, thoroughly, and the great blessings of a free government may be safely conferred upon those who shall come after us." He spoke as a Radical Reconstructionist, describing the unrest before and during the Civil War when he recalled that territorial Kansans "determined that no shackles, no chains, no involuntary servitude, except for the punishment of crime, should retard the development and blight the future prosperity of this vast, beautiful region..." Eskridge's words were spoken in the middle years of Reconstruction, but principles such as these had been the guiding force behind Eskridge's political philosophy from the beginning of his political career.

¹ An abridged version of the speech was printed in the *Emporia News*, 9 July 1869. The quotes in this paragraph are from this source.

Eskridge was born in Fauquier County, Virginia, in 1833 to parents of modest means.² His father Charles worked as a laborer, but it appears from existing census records that he had a hard time holding employment throughout his life.³ While no evidence suggests that C.V. Eskridge's immediate family owned slaves, census records do suggest that his extended family owned a small number of slaves.⁴ This may have impacted Eskridge's views on slavery and civil rights later in life. The family moved to Ohio in about 1834, where they stayed for four years. Eskridge's brother John was born in Licking County, Ohio, in 1835. In about 1838, the family relocated to Fulton County, Illinois, where they settled permanently. Evidence suggests that their home life was not happy. Both C.V. and John Eskridge ran away from home in their teenage years. At age fourteen, C.V. ran away to St. Louis, Missouri, where he worked as a cabin boy in a Mississippi River steamboat. But within the year, he returned home and took up the printer's trade. Brother John also ran away at the age of fourteen, but he did not return home and eventually made his way south to New Orleans. Eskridge remained in Fulton County, Illinois, where he worked as a printer at several local newspapers before he relocated to Kansas.⁵

When Eskridge arrived in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1855, he was a man on the make. Like so many of the people who moved west in his time, Eskridge saw the territory as a place where opportunities abounded. He was driven by ambition; he wanted success and

² Sources regarding Eskridge's early life are scarce. See *Emporia News*, 11 March 1870; *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 19 June 1900; *Emporia Gazette*, 16 July 1900; and *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), 853-854.

³ The 1850 Census lists the fifty-four year old Charles Eskridge as unemployed, while the 1860 Census lists him as a jailer. See 1850 U.S. Census, Lewiston Township, Fulton County, Illinois, 191; 1860 U.S. Census, Lewiston Township, Fulton County, Illinois, 1.

⁴ The censuses from 1820, 1830, and 1840 show Eskridges in Fauquier County who held a small number of slaves. See U.S. Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, 1820, 1830, and 1840.

⁵ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 9 August 1900.

recognition and actively sought it out. So he entered the arena of politics. Eskridge's greatest political ability was his skillful blending of his business and political interests. It would become a hallmark of his career and make him a man of distinction in Kansas. Entrepreneurial men often blended politics and business together in this time period. In this sense, Eskridge was a typical successful man of his time. He used his business instincts to make money and gain influence; he followed up with successful bids for political office. Starting small and working his way up, Eskridge sought and gained election to offices at the local and state level. Through his active political involvement, Eskridge solidified his position as an influential figure in Kansas politics in the 1860s.

The atmosphere in Lawrence upon Eskridge's 1855 arrival was highly charged in the wake of the March 30 election for the territorial legislature. In a territory that held 2,905 eligible voters, over 6,000 votes were cast. Missourians had invaded the territory to force the election of a proslavery slate of legislators.⁶ In the midst of the politically charged atmosphere, Eskridge gained employment as a printer at the *Herald of Freedom*, one of Lawrence's abolitionist newspapers.⁷ The job and the politics fit Eskridge well, as he unequivocally sided with the free staters. Living in Lawrence and working at the *Herald of Freedom* would have placed him in contact with many of the Free State officials, who undoubtedly helped to shape his lifelong political outlook. Eskridge spent his short tenure at the Lawrence newspaper printing and corresponding with papers in Illinois in an effort to gain free soil, anti-slavery emigrants to Kansas. It was at the *Herald of Freedom* that he made the contact that would lead him to Emporia. Editor

⁶ See Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 50-68. The election figures are found on page 59.

⁷ The newspaper advertised for a printer on 7 April 1855. This is most likely the job Eskridge accepted. See *Herald of Freedom* (Lawrence, KS), 7 April 1855, 21 April 1855.

George Washington Brown was the chairman of the Emporia Town Company, an organization that was developing a town near the junction of the Neosho and Cottonwood Rivers some eighty miles southwest of Lawrence.⁸ Eskridge was made the town company's land agent when he relocated to Emporia in the spring of 1857. His arrival in Emporia allowed him the freedom to make a name in a new place. Eskridge capitalized on the opportunity by actively participating in Emporia's political and business development during Kansas's territorial era.⁹

When Eskridge arrived in Emporia, the town was just beginning to populate. The town company was chartered in February 1857. By spring, a small hotel and two stores were built and the *Kansas News* commenced publishing. As town agent, Eskridge marketed real estate to settlers from Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.¹⁰ His job principally involved carrying on a correspondence with newspapers in these states, particularly communities that he would have been familiar with. Marketing in Illinois was especially easy for Eskridge, since he was already in active correspondence with several newspapers there. Through advertising, complete with a little bit of boosterism and embellishment, Eskridge marketed lots in Emporia and some of the smaller towns in Breckinridge County.¹¹ As an early settler and the agent for the Emporia Town Company, Eskridge quickly established himself as one of the town's leaders. Knowing

⁸ The Emporia town venture is mentioned in the *Herald of Freedom*. See 21 February 1856, 14 March 1857, 9 May 1857. The partners of the Emporia Town Company were George Washington Brown, Preston B. Plumb, G.W. Deitzler, Lyman Allen, and Columbus Hornsby. See Ted F. McDaniel, ed. *Our Land: A History of Lyon County, Kansas* (Emporia, KS: Emporia State Press, 1976), 141-143.

⁹ For his early political involvement, see *Kansas News*, 10 April 1858, *Kansas News*, 6 November 1858; *Emporia News*, 31 December 1859. For his early business activities, see *Kansas News*, 21 August 1858. (This once common spelling of "Kanzas" was changed in the summer of 1858 to the now familiar Kansas--at least on the banner of the *News*.)

¹⁰ For descriptions of Emporia's beginnings, see Virginia Welch Forbeck, "The Early History of Emporia, Kansas" (Master's thesis, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, 1942), 7-15. *Kansas News*, 21 August 1858.

¹¹ Breckinridge County later became Lyon County. See below, p. 6.

that an infant town depended on recognition, traffic, and institutions, Eskridge worked hard to develop these amenities. In addition to his work as a real estate agent, Eskridge worked in the Hornsby and Fick dry goods store.¹² Hornsby and Fick had moved to Emporia from Lawrence, where they had been affiliated with Brown and the *Herald of Freedom*. Hornsby later left the firm and Eskridge became partners with Fick, whom he eventually bought out. The dry goods store stood on what would become the city's prime intersection. The Corner Store, located at the northwest corner of the city's prime intersection, Sixth Avenue and Commercial Street, was a success.¹³ By 1860, the twenty-seven year old Eskridge had a net worth of \$5,000; in contrast, his sixty-five year old father was worth \$1,200.¹⁴ Eskridge's success as a merchant would pave the way for his political aspirations.

Like many of the men who moved west, Eskridge's political agenda was influenced by the conflict of the nation in the late 1850s. Eskridge was a Republican, which was reflected in his associations and his political dealings. Kansas in the 1850s was a hotbed for Free State politics. Those who belonged to Free State political organizations later joined the Republican Party. The ensuing Border War heightened suspicions that the Slave Power wished to subvert the rights of free-state men to control their destiny. In Kansas, such ill feelings were exacerbated by the March 30, 1855 election that seated a "bogus legislature."¹⁵ Kansas was increasingly seen as a center of national importance to the sectional struggle over slavery. Local leaders connected

¹² *Herald of Freedom* (Lawrence, KS), 16 May 1857.

¹³ This was the prime intersection in Emporia where the first businesses were located.

¹⁴ 1860 U.S. Census, Emporia, Breckinridge County, Kansas, 54; 1860 U.S. Census, Lewiston, Fulton County, Illinois, 1.

¹⁵ Craig Miner, *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 62-64.

themselves to larger issues and used their view of affairs to mold a community that they felt represented their ideals for the nation as a whole. Eskridge was no different. He may have been a local booster, but national issues were often on his mind and in his rhetoric. In the Civil War and postbellum era, the Republican Party dominated Kansas politics. Kansas politicians were usually Republican, and many of them advocated measures that came to be identified with Radical Reconstruction. The Civil War experience profoundly affected Kansans political attitudes for a generation.

For someone in a new territory with ambition and opinions, political office-seeking was not altogether difficult. Eskridge was a member of the Free State party and represented Breckinridge County at its functions, including a party convention where he opposed the proslavery Lecompton constitution.¹⁶ Eskridge also established himself as a proponent of education. As early as 1858, Eskridge was participating in citizens' educational meetings and proposing that "it is the duty of our law-makers to provide for the most liberal and wholesome system of FREE SCHOOLS at the earliest possible period."¹⁷ This early involvement in education would become a hallmark of Eskridge's political career. Whether he was motivated by his own lack of formal education or by a shrewd knowledge of the benefits of a formal educational system, Eskridge used his political clout to help design and maintain a school system for Kansas. These contributions are among the most significant of his political career.

Eskridge's won his first elective office in 1858; he was elected the county clerk and recorder of Breckinridge County. The county seat was originally located at a settlement called Agnes City, in the county's northwest corner. Within a short period of

¹⁶ *Kansas News*, 6 November 1858.

¹⁷ *Kansas News*, 10 April 1858.

time, the seat was relocated to Americus, a small town approximately ten miles northwest of Emporia. Emporians protested when the county Board of Supervisors voted to levy a tax to build a courthouse and jail at Americus. Many Emporia residents, Eskridge included, recognized that the city would benefit from holding the county seat.

Furthermore, they denied that Americus was the true county seat and insisted that a referendum be held to vote on where the county seat would be located. They protested the tax as unfair, going so far as to assert that the board did not represent the citizens and invoking the Revolutionary era doctrine of no taxation without representation.¹⁸ So began a small county-seat war in Breckinridge County. Some Emporia citizens offered the county free use of suitable buildings for county business for five years should the county seat be relocated to Emporia.¹⁹ Such a formula was not uncommon; in fact, when Kansas gained statehood and began to establish state institutions, many communities competed for the prizes by offering free land and tax assistance to the state. A November 1860 countywide referendum decided the issue. Emporia was declared the winner by 155 votes and the county seat was relocated.²⁰

Many stories about Eskridge's involvement in the county seat war have circulated through the years, including a colorful tale told by a former employee of Eskridge. George Simons recalled that Eskridge told a story that he and two other men went to Americus in the dead of night to steal the county records.²¹ On their trip back to Emporia, fellow conspirator W.T. Soden fell into the Neosho River. When the third man

¹⁸ *Emporia News*, 31 December 1859.

¹⁹ *Emporia News*, 13 October 1860.

²⁰ *Emporia News*, 10 November 1860.

²¹ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 12 June 1938. Many contemporary sources dispel this tale. See Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County: Historical Incidents of the First Quarter of a Century, 1857 to 1882* (Emporia, KS: privately printed, ca. 1898), 38; *History of the State of Kansas*, 847; Forbeck, "The Early History of Emporia, Kansas," 55-61.

asked Eskridge to stop, Eskridge reportedly said, “To hell with Soden. He can take care of himself. I’m saving the records.” The story is false; Simons recalls the year as 1862, but the county seat dispute was settled two years before that. Furthermore, Eskridge recalled in a reminiscence he wrote in 1899 that, as county clerk and recorder, he kept all the records in his bedroom in Emporia.²² Though old stories rumor otherwise, Eskridge did not play a central role in the county seat dispute. But as Emporia’s town agent, he would have directly benefited from the relocation.

Eskridge did not remain county clerk for long. He found his niche in the state legislature. He was first elected to the territorial legislature in 1859 and after Kansas gained statehood, he was elected to the state legislature in 1862. One of the first items of business Eskridge took up in the legislature was renaming Breckinridge County. The county had been named for John Breckinridge, the vice president under James Buchanan. But when Breckinridge sided with the Confederacy, the county’s name quickly lost its allure. Eskridge proposed in the legislature that the name be changed to Lyon County, to honor Union General Nathaniel Lyon, the first Union General killed in action, who died at the Battle of Wilson’s Creek, Missouri in August 1861.²³ Eskridge’s bill passed and the county assumed the more politically correct moniker.

In the House of Representatives, Eskridge quickly took up the mantle as a proponent of education. In 1863, he sponsored two successful drives to enhance educational opportunities for Kansas and particularly Lyon County. In January 1863, Eskridge and his friend Preston B. Plumb introduced a bill in the House of

²² See Appendix A.

²³ *House Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas for 1862* (Lawrence, KS: State Journal Press, 1862), 26.

Representatives to have the state university placed in Emporia.²⁴ But Emporia faced stiff competition from Lawrence. After much wrangling and plenty of allegations of chicanery, Lawrence was awarded the state university. Eskridge immediately charged that some of the Lawrence supporters had bribed legislators and called for an investigation. According to one source, a colleague suggested to Eskridge that he submit a bill to establish a normal school. Eskridge supposedly responded, “What the hell is a normal school?”²⁵ The bill quickly passed. According to Lyman B. Kellogg, the first president of the Kansas State Normal School, “The legislature was willing to do anything it could to salve the defeat [of the Emporia university bill], and the bill was passed without opposition and with very little consideration, the legislature believing a normal school to be a good thing if Massachusetts had it.”²⁶ Kellogg’s analysis is somewhat true; according to Eskridge, L.D. Bailey, who later became a justice on the Kansas Supreme Court suggested locating a normal school at Emporia and helped him draw up the bill, which was based on laws from other states.²⁷

At the same time that Eskridge was wrangling for the university, or at least a normal school, he also introduced a bill that allowed two Lyon County school districts to issue bonds for school construction.²⁸ The law passed, allowing those school districts to

²⁴ For information regarding the Lawrence-Emporia fight for the university, see C.S. Griffin, “The University of Kansas and the Years of Frustration, 1854-64,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 32, (Spring 1966): 1-32.

²⁵ This widely circulated story has several variations in details. See *Emporia News*, 11 June 1869; Lyman B. Kellogg, “The Founding of the State Normal School,” *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society* 12, (1911-1912): 95. Not only is this account of the normal school’s founding somewhat romanticized, but Kellogg was not in Emporia when the university fight happened.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Kellogg refers to the fact that Western politicians often envied Eastern ideas, especially in education. For Eskridge’s recollections of the normal school battle, see Appendix A.

²⁷ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 7 October 1897. See also *A History of the State Normal School of Kansas for the First Twenty-Five Years*, (Emporia, KS: n.p., 1889), 13-16.

²⁸ *House Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas for 1863* (Lawrence, KS: State Journal Press, 1863), 47, 316; “An Act to Authorize School Districts No. 1 and 21 to Issue Bonds,” *General Laws of the State of Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: State Journal Press, 1863), 95.

construct new school buildings with bonds. The following year, a colleague introduced another bill that allowed all Kansas common schools to issue bonds for school construction.²⁹ For a politician of Eskridge's relative inexperience, passage of these bills was a major achievement, especially since they created a national precedent for funding the construction of school buildings. They earned Eskridge praise from his constituents that reverberated throughout his political career. By securing the location of a state normal school at Emporia, Eskridge had done his part to ensure that his district got its fair share of the state's institutional offerings. Though Eskridge secured the normal school for Emporia in 1863, the actual work of opening the school in Emporia took two more years. Meager funds and the continuing Civil War slowed the school's progress.³⁰

Eskridge did not participate in combat in the Civil War. He was appointed to the Governor's military staff as colonel on February 19, 1863.³¹ The appointment allowed him to continue his duties as a state representative while also allowing him to say he served in the military, even though his service was behind a desk in Topeka. The Civil War split some families, pitting brother against brother, and the Eskridges are an example of that phenomenon. John T. Eskridge, who like his brother had also run away from home at a young age, served the Confederacy in the Fifth Louisiana Infantry. Unlike his brother, though, John Eskridge amassed an impressive war record. He was captured and released twice, once paroled and once exchanged for a Union prisoner. He was captured a third time in Petersburg, Virginia, on April 3, 1865. By June of that year, he had sworn

²⁹ *House Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas for 1864* (Lawrence, KS: John Speer, 1864), 64; "An Act to Authorize School Districts to Issue Bonds," *The Laws of the State of Kansas Passed at the Fourth Session of the Legislature* (Lawrence, KS: John Speer, 1863), 43-44.

³⁰ Classes first convened on February 15, 1865. See *A History of the State Normal School of Kansas for the First Twenty-Five Years*, 14.

³¹ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas*, Vol.1, 1861-1865 (Leavenworth, KS: Bulletin Co-operative Printing Company, Chicago, 1867), viii.

an oath of allegiance to the Union and was released.³² Though the two men were brothers, one was a dedicated Unionist and the other a Confederate. In his extant writings, Charles Eskridge made no mention of his brother's war record, but family connections must have prevailed over political beliefs. In the 1870s, John Eskridge followed his brother to Emporia and became a shoemaker.³³

As a politician, Eskridge grew in stature in the Emporia community and in Topeka. Legislators recognized his political abilities. But at the same time he was making friends, he was also making some enemies. Eskridge faced reelection in November 1863 for his seat in the legislature. His opponent was fellow Republican Jacob Stotler, who worked for the *Emporia News* and became its editor and owner. Stotler was an ill-tempered man who often played political games with his rivals. In September, he announced that he was going to withdraw from the race for state representative, with one condition: "If by any means the ex-Honorable Charles V. Eskridge should be a candidate for Representative, and it is thought best by the people of the district that I do so, I will run against him."³⁴ Eskridge did run for reelection as a representative—and won. His election fueled the personal and political feud between Stotler and Eskridge that simmered and boiled intermittently for the next thirty-five years.³⁵

³² Andrew B. Booth, ed., *Records of Louisiana Confederate Soldiers and Louisiana Confederate Commands*, Vol. 2 (New Orleans, LA, 1920; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1984).

³³ Source material is scarce regarding John T. Eskridge. See *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), 854; *Emporia News*, 19 November 1875. He died on 5 February 1918 in Emporia. See *Emporia Times*, 7 February 1918. His will is also on file in the Lyon County Clerk's office in Emporia, KS.

³⁴ *Emporia News*, 5 September 1863.

³⁵ For examples, see *Emporia Ledger*, 13 April 1879; *Emporia News*, 25 April 1873, 24 July 1874, 1 January to 19 February 1875, 9 April 1875, 4 April 1879, 7 November 1879.

Eskridge also faced criticism from a politician from neighboring Chase County. Samuel Newitt Wood was a well-known figure in Kansas in the Civil War era and beyond, having participated in some of the border war clashes in the Lawrence area. Most notably, Wood had sparred in 1855 and 1856 with Samuel Jones, the proslavery sheriff of Douglas County, Kansas, who sought to arrest Wood on bogus charges.³⁶ The eccentric Wood was a perennial foil to Eskridge. The two carried on a political feud much as Stotler and Eskridge did, but without the intense personal dislike that often existed between those two men. Wood and Eskridge relished being gadflies and upsetting their contemporaries, who often accused them of bolting from the Republican Party. They were immersed in booster interests, and both men had insatiable ambition. Though Wood and Eskridge frequently sparred in the newspapers, they held the same general interests.³⁷

Throughout his business and political career, Eskridge faithfully supported the extension of railroads as a means to encourage and sustain growth. Like many of his contemporaries, Eskridge was involved in numerous railroad speculations, many of which never materialized. Such ventures could be lucrative or disastrous to the speculator. Nevertheless, Eskridge recognized that the location of railroads was crucial to a town's survival. One of the first ventures he was involved in was the Lawrence and Emporia Railroad, which was a branch of the Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Galveston Railroad. The ultimate goal of this line was to connect Kansas with the Gulf of Mexico. Eskridge was the stock commissioner for the Lawrence and Emporia branch, which meant that his job was to seek investors. He was a director of the town company that

³⁶ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 80, 100-101.

³⁷ For examples, see *Emporia Ledger*, 16 March 1876; *Emporia News*, 10 March 1876 to 23 June 1876, 11 April 1879 to 7 November 1879.

developed Cresswell, located in Cowley County, which was seven miles from Indian Territory on the Osage Indian reservation and was on the projected rail line.³⁸ Eskridge served as a liaison between the railroad and the state and federal governments to obtain land grants for the construction of the Lawrence and Emporia line. One of the difficulties in constructing the railroad was obtaining land from the Osage Indians. William Sturges and James F. Joy were negotiating a treaty with the Osage to receive land for the entire venture. But many Kansas newspapers, including Stotler's *News*, saw the Osage treaty as a swindle.³⁹ Stotler's real objection had little to do with the Osage Indians. Instead, he was upset that the treaty did not promise Emporia a rail line. Eskridge lobbied for a treaty addendum to secure one million acres of land, an unrealistically large amount, to help fund the enterprise and to secure that a line would run through Emporia. In July 1868, Eskridge and his associates were claiming victory; the so-called Sturges treaty with the Osages was amended to include the land grant for the Emporia line and ensure that the settlers would get cheap land.⁴⁰

Two years later, Eskridge and his associates were still wrangling over the details. In February, the *Emporia News* claimed that Cresswell was ready for development and "that the land [the Osage Indian reservation] will be dedicated to civilization within the next thirty days."⁴¹ Though Eskridge and Cresswell's settlers awaited the removal of the Osage Indians, they were touting the fact that the town was only eight miles from the

³⁸ The directors of the Delphi Town Company, which developed Cresswell (later Arkansas City), included Henry Brace Norton, who located the site, Lyman B. Kellogg, W.T. Soden, and other prominent Emporians. See Lyman B. Kellogg, "Recollections [1915]," MS, chapter six, University Libraries and Archives, Emporia State University, Emporia, KS.

³⁹ Paul Wallace Gates, *Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954), 204.

⁴⁰ *Emporia News*, 31 July 1868; Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871*. (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 121-126.

⁴¹ *Emporia News*, 25 February 1870.

Indian Territory border and as a result, “it must be the center of a great traffic with the Indian tribes and military posts.”⁴² Paradoxically, settlers wanted the Indians’ land, but they also wanted their trade. Yet three months later, the issue was unsettled. Eskridge wrote an open letter to Senator S.C. Pomeroy, urging his involvement in clearing the Osage from Cowley County. “The best lands are now all occupied by settlers, and the Indians should go, [not] ‘stand upon the order of their going, but go at once.’” He continued: “Will such a demonstration have to be made as can only be made by a general uprising of the people, before our representatives and congress will open their eyes to the justice of their demands?”⁴³ Through much negotiation, the Osage were removed from the state in 1870. The settlers got their land at \$1.25 an acre. But the Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Galveston railroad was weakened financially by the delays.⁴⁴ The railroad venture, as well as a failed bid to establish a ferry company on the Arkansas River near Cresswell, made Eskridge money and won him influence.⁴⁵ Though he sold his interests in the town company at an early date, he remained involved in the area’s development.⁴⁶ In the end, Eskridge’s ventures gained him many friends in southern Kansas who supported his political career and may have made him some money as well. Though this venture is but one example of many speculations that Eskridge and many other influential Kansans were involved in, it does show how Eskridge used politics as a vehicle for his business ventures and vice versa.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Topeka Commonwealth*, 24 May 1870.

⁴⁴ Miner, *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State*, 110-111. Gates, *Fifty Million Acres*, 208-210.

⁴⁵ The Arkansas River Ferry Company was established in January 1870 by several prominent Emporians, including Preston Plumb, Henry B. Norton, Lyman B. Kellogg, and Eskridge. The company almost certainly never functioned. See George Root, “Ferries in Kansas, Part IX—Arkansas River,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 5 (February 1936): 22-32.

⁴⁶ Kellogg, “Recollections [1915],” chapter six.

In 1867, the Kansas legislature debated a constitutional amendment to enfranchise African-Americans in Kansas. Sam Wood proposed an amendment to allow women to vote as well. A debate on female suffrage in Kansas ensued. Eskridge weighed in on the topic and established an anti-suffrage stance that he held for the rest of his life. Many of Eskridge's contemporaries, including Jacob Stotler and Preston Plumb also opposed female suffrage, but were not as vocal. However, Eskridge and many of his contemporaries did support allowing women to vote in school board elections, since education was within a woman's sphere of influence. Among other things, Eskridge referred to female suffrage as a "pernicious proposition...the most impudent, frivolous, uncalled for proposition ever crammed into the throats of the people by a *shystring* legislature."⁴⁷ This widely quoted statement has been called by one historian "an indication of what was to become the caliber of much suffrage journalism."⁴⁸ Eskridge asserted that some members of the legislature, chiefly Sam Wood, amended the bill to include women in an effort to defeat the black suffrage initiative, "for those members most zealous in their opposition to negro male suffrage, were most clamorous for the proposition to allow both black and white women to vote."⁴⁹ Eskridge saw female suffrage as corruptive to women in general and feared that women would be subject to trickery and voter fraud. He also feared the effect that female suffrage would have on the family. What would happen if wife and husband believed differently? After all, Eskridge admitted that "[i]t is possible for a man and his wife to differ."⁵⁰ He believed

⁴⁷ *Emporia News*, 12 July 1867, 7 June 1867.

⁴⁸ Sr. Jeanne McKenna, "With the Help of God and Lucy Stone," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 36 (Spring 1970): 18.

⁴⁹ *Emporia News*, 7 June 1867.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

that female suffrage would “sow the seeds of discord at every hearth stone in the State.”⁵¹

In contrast, Eskridge claimed that African Americans needed the vote to preserve their freedom. Without the franchise, the South could force blacks back into servitude.⁵²

Eskridge faced criticism from some of his colleagues for his stance on female and black suffrage. He was accused of leveling baseless criticism on women while offering unqualified support for black suffrage. James Rogers of Burlingame criticized him for not discussing the matter fairly and candidly, stating that Eskridge’s slurs in the press “are no arguments to me, why my wife, my mother, my sisters and my daughters, should not have a voice in making those laws which they are bound to obey.”⁵³ Rogers had a point. Eskridge’s statements regarding women’s suffrage were often peppered with petty slurs against women as well as the legislators who supported female suffrage. At least in Rogers’s eyes, such rhetoric failed to adequately address the issue. Sam Wood concurred, stating: “Those who insist on representing women at the ballot box, ought to carry the idea, and if a woman steals represent her in jail; if she commits murder, let them represent her on the gallows.”⁵⁴ Wood and Rogers made the same point: if women were citizens, why shouldn’t they vote? Eskridge did not make the same logical deduction.

Examining Eskridge’s record on female suffrage requires detachment from modern beliefs on gender equality. Reading Eskridge’s statements on female suffrage reveal as much or more about Eskridge than the issue. He obviously viewed the male as the family political leader. Furthermore, his views on the effects of allowing women to vote suggest that he adhered to the belief that the world was often too rough for women

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Emporia News*, 1 September 1866.

⁵³ *Emporia News*, 14 June 1867.

⁵⁴ *Emporia News*, 12 July 1867.

to interact in; in other words, Eskridge was a believer in the doctrine of separate spheres. But though he denounced female suffrage, he sincerely believed in rights for African-Americans.⁵⁵

In contrast to his stand on women's rights, from the time he arrived in Kansas in 1856 to his death in 1900, Eskridge was a staunch opponent of slavery and inequality. As his writings reveal, Eskridge believed that the safest way to keep African-Americans free was to arm them with the power of political involvement. Eskridge stood with many fellow Radical Republicans in this assertion. "If the people defeat negro suffrage north," he said, "it cannot be forced south, and the policy of Andrew Johnson prevails, and the negro remains the bone of contention between the two sections of our country as before the war."⁵⁶

The amendments failed to pass a referendum, in spite of the organized support for their passage.⁵⁷ The 1867 Kansas suffrage struggle helped to drive both the women and African-American suffrage movements permanently apart.⁵⁸ After the women suffrage amendment's defeat in the November 1867 election, I.S. Kalloch's *Ottawa Home Journal* printed a poem called "Who Killed Female Suffrage?" The poem's first stanza states:

Who killed Female Suffrage?
I says Colonel Eskridge,
With a rough old sledge,
I drove the entering wedge
That "busted" Female Suffrage.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Emporia News*, 1 September 1866, 18 October 1867, 9 July 1869, 11 October 1872.

⁵⁶ *Emporia News*, 18 October 1867.

⁵⁷ Craig Miner, *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 126-128.

⁵⁸ See Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 79-104.

⁵⁹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 15 March 1894. The poem "Who Killed Female Suffrage?" was modeled after the old English nursery rhyme "Who Killed Cock Robin?" See also McKenna, "With the Help of God and Lucy Stone," 25-26.

The issue of women's suffrage periodically reappeared in nineteenth century Kansas politics, and whenever it did, Eskridge was ready to fight against it.

Eskridge's work for railroad construction and his fight against women's suffrage gained him recognition in the state. In September 1868, he was nominated to run for the office of lieutenant governor on the ticket with Republican gubernatorial candidate James M. Harvey.⁶⁰ Harvey and Eskridge won the election that November. The position of lieutenant governor itself held little significance, except as a stepping stone to the governorship. Eskridge's duties were few; his chief task was to preside over the state senate. In November 1870, Eskridge did not seek reelection as lieutenant governor, and instead ran for another term as state representative from Emporia. Eskridge lost the Republican nomination to Robert M. Overstreet. Though the reasons why he lost are unclear, it appears that Overstreet simply enjoyed wider support in the election.⁶¹

The state legislative elections in 1871 were particularly rancorous in Emporia. Overstreet ran for reelection and was endorsed by Stotler's *News*.⁶² But Eskridge again opposed him for the Republican nomination and won the election. From March through November of 1871, the columns of the *News* carried the chronicle of the feud between Stotler, Overstreet, and Eskridge. It appears that the quarrel's catalyst was the removal of Lyman B. Kellogg as president of Emporia's Kansas State Normal School. However, Kellogg was the victim, not the cause, of the dispute. Eskridge and Kellogg were allies, while Stotler and Overstreet took the side against Kellogg in a trumped-up fight over teachers' salaries and a fence that was erected at the school by Eskridge.⁶³ Politics was

⁶⁰ Some brief information about Lieutenant Governor Eskridge is in *Emporia News*, 11 March 1870.

⁶¹ *Emporia News*, 4 November 1870.

⁶² *Emporia News*, 4 November 1870.

⁶³ *Emporia News*, 24 March 1871, 31 March 1871, 1 September 1871.

almost certainly behind the matter. The controversy forced Kellogg to leave Emporia, and Eskridge continued to attack Stotler and Overstreet. The feud intensified in the press. Both sides attacked the other with personal insults, a technique that was fast becoming Eskridge's preferred method of debasing the opposition's arguments. In a particularly damaging charge, Stotler claimed that Eskridge had been expelled from the Methodist church in Emporia. Eskridge then attacked the *News*, calling it "Jake's \$12 per annum imposition" and charged that Stotler was a drunk away from home.⁶⁴ He also accused Overstreet, a Presbyterian minister, of pretending to be a Union man in Kansas, when in reality he had been a rebel in Texas, where he owned slaves. Eskridge, responding to Stotler, wrote in the *News* about Overstreet:

Suppose I should prosecute this *ex*-rebel chaplain—this *ex*-temperance tippler—this *ex*-slave holder—this *ex*-member of the Normal School Board—this *ex*-member of the Legislature—I say, suppose I should prosecute *rev.* R.M. Overstreet for libel, what evidence would I offer to prove his guilt? I would march him into the court room and say: stand up, sir, and let the jury look at you.⁶⁵

On the twenty-eighth of September, 1871, Eskridge announced his candidacy for state representative. Overstreet did not run against him; instead, Lemuel T. Heritage was selected by Stotler's faction to oppose Eskridge for the nomination.⁶⁶ Heritage was well-respected in Emporia, but he lost the November election to Eskridge by a clear majority.

The *Topeka Commonwealth* opined:

As a measure of political strength here, it is generally admitted to be a great victory for Mr. Eskridge over his opponent. The *Emporia News* and the *Emporia Tribune* were both against him, and the *Ledger* (democratic) [*sic*] neutral. So his overcoming the opposition of all the papers, and such men as *ex*-Governor Crawford, Stotler, Col. Robinson of the Robinson House, all the Bancrofts, and

⁶⁴ *Emporia News*, 24 March 1871.

⁶⁵ *Emporia News*, 8 September 1871.

⁶⁶ *Emporia News*, 29 September 1871, 27 October 1871.

the most popular man in the district they could bring against him—Capt. Heritage—is a victory of which Gov. Eskridge may be proud.⁶⁷

The *Commonwealth's* analysis shows that while Eskridge remained popular among the people in his district (and in southern Kansas as well), he lacked support among many of the state's power brokers. The *News* stated that “there was too much confidence in Heritage's strength and Eskridge's unpopularity.”⁶⁸ Eskridge won the election, but he was making powerful enemies in the state. In the wake of the bitter election, the *Augusta Republican*, a paper in the southern region where Eskridge enjoyed support, suggested he run for speaker of the House, but he declined the offer.⁶⁹

In light of Eskridge's service as a legislator and as lieutenant governor, many people thought the next logical step for Eskridge's political career was the governorship. Indeed, Eskridge indicated he felt the same. Eskridge ally Lyman B. Kellogg wrote in the *Arkansas City Traveler* that he supported Eskridge for governor. Eskridge responded that he would seek the nomination.⁷⁰ Because Eskridge had supported and often speculated in southern Kansas's development, he enjoyed the region's support. The *Oswego Register* remarked: “And because of his local interests, his intimate acquaintance with the history and the wants of southern Kansas, and his unequivocal position in favor of the settlers upon these neutral lands, in opposition to the monopolies, he stands peculiarly and strongly recommended to us.”⁷¹ But the support of southern and southwestern Kansas was not enough. Eskridge never held a majority in the nominating

⁶⁷ *Topeka Commonwealth*, 10 November 1871. Eskridge gained the honorific title of “Governor” after his election to the office of lieutenant governor in 1869. Newspapers in this era did not commonly capitalize the names of political parties. While the *Commonwealth* italicized the names of newspapers, most editors printed the names of other newspapers in regular font and capitalized the name of their own newspaper.

⁶⁸ *Emporia News*, 10 November 1871.

⁶⁹ *Augusta Republican*, in *Topeka Commonwealth*, 16 November 1871; *Emporia News*, 15 December 1871.

⁷⁰ *Emporia News*, 31 May 1872.

⁷¹ *Oswego Register*, quoted in *Emporia News*, 30 August 1872.

balloting, and lost the Republican nomination to Thomas Osborn of Leavenworth.⁷² The loss may have been merciful to Eskridge; Osborn's administration faced difficulty in dealing with the Indians, including the Osages, from whom Eskridge's rail interests sought to gain valuable land tracts.⁷³

In the wake of Eskridge's failed gubernatorial bid, the *Emporia News* mentioned Eskridge as a possible successor to U.S. Senator S.C. Pomeroy. In the contentious Eskridge-Heritage campaign in 1871, the *News* had remarked that "[h]e who thinks Charles does not look on Washington with a 'sinister i' is slightly mistaken. He scents the battle from afar off."⁷⁴ But rumors of a possible senatorial bid for Eskridge were a non-starter; John J. Ingalls replaced Pomeroy in Washington and the *News* withdrew its endorsement.⁷⁵ Perhaps Eskridge realized that the support he enjoyed was not enough to gain such higher offices. Eskridge had reached the high point of his political career in his tenure as lieutenant governor. He returned to the legislature twice after 1872 and sat on the Emporia city council, but Eskridge never held the governorship or became a U.S. Senator. His career as an elected politician had peaked.

Though Eskridge's political career, specifically his interests in higher offices, was foundering, he continued to hold influence in the Emporia and southwestern Kansas regions. In the 1872 presidential campaign, Eskridge supported the reelection of Ulysses S. Grant and the Radical Republicans over Horace Greeley's Liberal Republicans. His endorsement of Grant, however, was hardly enthusiastic. "There may be better men for the presidency than General Grant, but they are not candidates. There are other

⁷² *Emporia News*, 6 September 1872.

⁷³ Miner, *Kansas: A History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000*, 110-111; 118-120.

⁷⁴ *Emporia News*, 10 November 1871.

⁷⁵ *Emporia News*, 1 November 1872, 17 January 1873.

organizations, but none more consistent or truer to the interests of the country than the republican party of to-day.”⁷⁶ Eskridge’s speech at a Republican rally in Plymouth, Kansas revealed the ideology behind his Radical Republicanism. “We want the South to understand that the war is over—that there is no chance to revive it...”⁷⁷ He continued by preaching the Radical Republican party line: equal rights for white and black Americans, the enforcement of the Reconstruction Constitutional amendments, and the protection of government power from Southern interests. The ideas he espoused in the speech fit the rhetoric he had preached in years past. For Eskridge and fellow Radical Republicans, the Union could only be preserved by active Northern domination of politics.

Eskridge continued to promote an active internal improvements program in the 1870s. Eskridge supported government indebtedness for railroad initiatives as a vehicle for economic development. He believed that bonding railroads was advantageous if the taxable value of the region where the railroad was placed increased accordingly. He espoused this view in supporting bonds for the Kansas City, Emporia, and Walnut Valley Railroad in 1873.⁷⁸ This rail line was an attempt at reviving the failed Lawrence and Emporia bid from 1870. Not coincidentally, this venture would have benefited Eskridge and his southern Kansas interests; Arkansas City, which Eskridge was invested in, was located in the Walnut River valley. Stotler and the *News* opposed the bond proposal, as did Lyon County voters in an April 1873 canvass. The *News* triumphantly proclaimed the defeat of Eskridge’s pet project: “No More Debt in Lyon County. Eskridge’s ‘Old

⁷⁶ *Emporia News*, 11 October 1872.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Emporia News*, 11 April 1873.

Sow' Won't Have any More Pigs.”⁷⁹ An examination of the *News's* columns around this time suggests that Emporia voters may have been growing tired of Eskridge and his associates' plans to use local money to catalyze development in the southwestern region of Kansas.⁸⁰ Eskridge's business interests were influencing the way he used his political power.

The people of southwestern Kansas supported his efforts, but Lyon County and eastern Kansas often did not feel the same. When Eskridge's name swirled around as a potential candidate for Congress, the *News* remarked: “There is a deep-seated feeling permeating the masses that the laboring classes are not represented in congress--*they know it--and they know that these men do not represent those interests.*”⁸¹ Stotler was insinuating that Eskridge did not represent the people of Lyon County and eastern Kansas. While his name was bantered around as a Congressional candidate, people in Butler County were also encouraging him to run for Governor again. One person wrote the *Emporia Ledger*, stating: “I know of no man who deserves the suffrage of the State more than him, and who would be more likely to receive the undivided support of the Southwest.”⁸² The writer revealed the question at hand unintentionally: did Eskridge represent Emporians any more or had his interests led him elsewhere?

Eskridge made a noisy return to local politics through a seat on Emporia's city council. The issue that put him in the papers this time was liquor and prohibition. The debate over liquor licensing commenced in Emporia in 1874 when a Mr. Volmer

⁷⁹ *Emporia News*, 25 April 1873.

⁸⁰ In addition to the articles cited above, see *Emporia News*, 24 July 1874, where Eskridge addressed citizens at Arkansas City on finance, transportation, and the tariff; and 14 August 1874, a letter to Governor Thomas Osborn asking for relief for the “frontier counties” that had suffered from the grasshopper plague. The *News's* columns reveal Eskridge's intense interests in the southwestern Kansas region.

⁸¹ *Emporia News*, 28 August 1874. See also *Emporia Ledger*, 23 July 1874.

⁸² *Emporia Ledger*, 19 March 1874.

requested a license to open a saloon and the city decided to grant licenses.⁸³ Eskridge voted to grant the license. He took a pragmatic opinion on the liquor issue: “As long as there is a brewery at the edge of town and four or five drug stores and *wholesale* establishments in town, I ask you to exercise a little practical sense, and say whether it would not be better to regulate and control its use, and make it pay a revenue to the city?”⁸⁴ Eskridge argued that by establishing a licensing procedure, Emporia could promote temperance by regulation. His remarks stirred a great debate in Emporia over the licensing issue, which, of course, allowed the Stotler and Eskridge factions to fight another battle against each other. Charles “Volmer” Eskridge, as the *News* addressed him, was himself accused of duplicity. One citizen accused him of running for the council as an anti-license candidate and after winning election, stated that he was in favor of licensing. The *News* accused Eskridge and the city council of duplicity on the issue. Eskridge blamed Emporia’s citizens for their indecisiveness.⁸⁵ Whether the citizen’s claim is correct is impossible to prove. The fight became personal and petty in nature. Eskridge accused former Emporia mayor William Jay, the lead spokesman against Eskridge’s liquor proposal, of drunkenness and Jay reciprocated.⁸⁶ Other personal accusations were made by both parties in their efforts to gain power in the city. The liquor license fight was an opening salvo for Emporia’s April 1875 mayoral elections, in which Eskridge was a candidate.⁸⁷ Eskridge placed third in the election, with the top two vote getters receiving 200 more votes than he did, and Stotler’s *News* gleefully reported his defeat to a temperance man who entered the race late. That fall, Eskridge left city

⁸³ *Emporia Ledger*, 5 November 1874.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Emporia News*, 1 January 1875, 8 January 1875.

⁸⁶ *Emporia News*, 22 January 1875.

⁸⁷ *Emporia News*, 2 April 1875.

politics and made another bid for the state legislature.⁸⁸ He won election to his final term in the Kansas House of Representatives that November.

The 1876 legislative term was an overall disaster for Emporia and Eskridge. Eskridge continued advocating railroad improvements by proposing a law to allow municipalities to aid railroads, which, as the *News* quickly pointed out, was not necessarily popular with Emporians.⁸⁹ But Eskridge received criticism for a proposal he made to remove the state capital from Topeka to a more western location. His political grandstanding won him nothing but enmity from the influential *Topeka Commonwealth*. The *Emporia Ledger* summed it up well: “The fact is that Mr. Eskridge in advocating the removal of the State capital, committed an unpardonable sin against Topeka... [the *Commonwealth*] has made a special effort to make him unpopular and cripple his influence.”⁹⁰

The idea of moving the state capital was absurd, but Eskridge’s political maneuvering caused him more trouble on another more important issue. The Kansas State Normal School at Emporia was the state’s preeminent teacher training institution, but since its creation, two additional normal schools had been established at Leavenworth and Concordia. These schools were smaller and less successful than the Emporia school, but they still requested and received appropriations from the state. That practice ended in 1876 when the legislature voted to end all appropriations to the three normal schools.⁹¹ The law ordered the Leavenworth and Concordia schools to close immediately, but allowed the Emporia school to remain open. But how would it be funded?

⁸⁸ *Emporia News*, 9 April 1875, 22 October 1875.

⁸⁹ *Emporia News*, 11 February 1876.

⁹⁰ *Emporia Ledger*, 16 March 1876.

⁹¹ *House Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas for 1876* (Topeka, KS: Geo. W. Martin, Kansas Publishing House, 1876), 1345.

What all parties quickly realized was that legislature did not dispute the necessity of normal schools, but they did dispute the manner in which Kansas's schools were operated. The *Topeka Commonwealth* hinted at the argument: "We assume it to be an agreed manner that the Normal Schools rightly conducted are a necessity of the times and that the common school system cannot be carried out and made to accomplish what it is intended to do without the Normal department."⁹² The Leavenworth and Concordia schools were leeches on the state's purse strings. But Emporia's normal school was not inculpable. Chase County's Sam Wood openly criticized the state normal school and its leadership. Wood believed that the school had strayed from its purpose; instead of serving as a teacher-training institution, the normal and its leadership had higher aspirations: to become a university. However, in the legislative wrangling over the normal schools, it was Wood who proposed the amendment that mandated the closing of the Concordia and Leavenworth schools, but not the Emporia school.⁹³ Wood remarked in the *News* that "the last Normal School you ever had was when [it was] in the charge Profs. Kellogg and Norton."⁹⁴

The debate continued, centering on Eskridge's legislative actions in the 1876 session. Many argued that Eskridge's unpopularity in the legislature cost Emporia the favorable treatment it needed in the normal school situation, though killing the Leavenworth and Concordia normal schools probably saved the Emporia school from closing in the future. Sam Wood cited mismanagement at the normal school as one cause of the loss of an appropriation. But he also stated that "[h]ad Eskridge been able to have met charges on the floor instead of resorting to individual abuse, he might have saved the

⁹² *Topeka Commonwealth*, 3 March 1876.

⁹³ *House Journal* (1876), 1345.

⁹⁴ *Emporia News*, 16 June 1876.

Normal.”⁹⁵ The *Topeka Commonwealth* also commented on Eskridge’s unpopularity.

“If, after the defeat of the Concordia and Leavenworth schools, Emporia had a representative who was popular in the house, and was capable of grappling with the facts that stared everyone in the face the school at Emporia might have been saved...”⁹⁶

Though the *Commonwealth* was biased against Eskridge because of his bid to remove the state capital to a more western location, the paper raised an issue that others echoed.

Eskridge, the once great political wrangler, had failed to wrangle Emporia out of this mess.

Eskridge tried to defend himself in the *News*, but his rebuttals only proved the charges that the *Commonwealth* and Wood made against him: he resorted to personal attacks. Eskridge called the “Chase County Skunk,” Sam Wood, “a moral, political and financial bankrupt, treacherous, deceitful and false, unworthy of credit, confidence or respect.”⁹⁷ Wood responded with charges that the normal school was not carrying out its mission to train teachers. Instead, Wood and the *Commonwealth* charged that the school was being used by some Emporians (of which Eskridge was undoubtedly one) to gain status and wealth in the state.⁹⁸ Ultimately, the Emporia normal school eked out a meager existence until 1879, when the state resumed appropriations. But Eskridge’s enemies used the scandal to damage his political career. Their efforts were successful. Eskridge was politically wounded by the appropriation scandal and did not seek another term to the legislature.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Topeka Commonwealth*, 3 March 1876.

⁹⁷ *Emporia News*, 28 April 1876.

⁹⁸ *Topeka Commonwealth*, 3 March 1876; *Emporia News*, 16 June 1876, 23 June 1876.

Eskridge spent the remainder of the 1870s on the political sidelines. When the normal school's facility burned in 1878, and Emporia and Lyon County were asked to raise \$20,800 for its reconstruction, Eskridge resurfaced. He was part of a group of citizens that insisted that the normal school's president, Charles R. Pomeroy, resign before the city and county would approve bonds for the normal school.⁹⁹ Eskridge, along with many of the town's leaders, succeeded in forcing Pomeroy to resign and the bonds for rebuilding were approved.¹⁰⁰

At the end of the 1870s, Eskridge was a beaten politician. He was unpopular with many of the state's power brokers and was increasingly unpopular in Emporia and Lyon County. Though nineteenth century politics often resembled a cat fight, people were growing tired of Eskridge's brand of politics. Eskridge was no longer the rising political star that he had been in years past. For a man with plenty of recognition and wealth, Eskridge was in need of serious rehabilitation at the end of the 1870s.

⁹⁹ *Emporia News*, 11 July 1879, 18 July 1879.

¹⁰⁰ *Emporia News*, 11 July 1879, 18 July 1879.

CHAPTER TWO

PARTY ORGAN: ESKRIDGE AND THE *REPUBLICAN*

Charles Vernon Eskridge's publication of the inaugural edition of the *Emporia Republican* on January 21, 1882, marked his strongest effort to blend politics and business. The transition from elected political office to a newspaper editor's position made good sense for Eskridge. His image was in need of recasting after suffering several political setbacks in the 1870s. Operating the *Emporia Republican* not only gave Eskridge a good business opportunity, but also allowed him to use the newspaper as a political rostrum to articulate his views. As historian David Dary noted, newspaper editors in the old West often used the partisan press to elevate themselves to civic and political leadership roles.¹ This was common practice in the era of party organ newspapers. Eskridge used the editor's role to revive his career in politics. Though Eskridge did not seek elected office again after he became the *Republican's* editor, he skillfully used the position to articulate his views and to win influence. Editors were not elected officials, so Eskridge had great latitude in choosing and explaining his positions to the public. The editor's role was perfect for Eskridge, who knew the printer's trade and also had insatiable political ambition. Through the purchase of the former *Emporia Ledger* and the subsequent rebuilding of that paper into the *Emporia Republican*, Eskridge reestablished himself as a strong voice in Kansas politics.

¹ David Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 48.

The *Emporia Ledger* was originally founded in 1871 by a group of Democratic businessmen who wished to establish a party organ in Emporia.² The venture struggled from the start. The paper changed hands several times and in 1873 it became a Republican newspaper. By the end of 1881, editor and proprietor H.W. McCune was ready to sell the paper. According to McCune, Eskridge approached him with an acceptable offer for the paper.³ Eskridge also purchased former *Ledger* owner W.F. Chalfant's steam printing office, and a book bindery. He acquired the different businesses using his own financial resources, but within a year of his purchases, he consolidated all the different operations into the Emporia Republican Company, a joint stock company capitalized at \$30,000.⁴

McCune owned both the *Ledger* and the *Emporia Journal*, which he consolidated with the *Ledger*. McCune had usually supported Eskridge politically, particularly in 1880, when Eskridge made a failed bid to obtain the Republican nomination for the state legislature. The *Emporia Kansas Sentinel*, another Eskridge ally, accused the Stotler "ring" of defeating Eskridge's campaign for nomination.⁵ The *Ledger* generally echoed the *Sentinel's* allegations against the Stotler faction during this time period, accusing Stotler of "taking advantage of his position as the editor and proprietor of a newspaper to malign and abuse citizens who disagree with him even on political matters."⁶ When

² See *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), 847; *First Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas, for the Years 1877-8* (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1878), 204; *Emporia Ledger*, 5 January 1882.

³ *Emporia Ledger*, 5 January 1882. H.W. McCune, who arrived in Emporia in 1869, edited several newspapers, including the *Ledger* and the *Emporia Journal*, both of which were Democratic sheets. His politics, more than his editorial acumen, may explain his limited success. McCune moved to Chicago after selling the *Ledger* to Eskridge.

⁴ Emporia Republican Company charter, Kansas Secretary of State, Corporation Filings, box 100, folder 3, State Archives, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

⁵ *Kansas Sentinel* (Emporia), 3 November 1880.

⁶ *Emporia Ledger*, 19 June 1880.

McCune was ready to sell out, Eskridge was a logical buyer. He not only had the money, the connections, and the experience to run a newspaper, but he also shared McCune's politics. The *Ledger* published its last issue on January 12, 1882.

The *Emporia Daily Republican* made its debut on January 21, 1882; the weekly edition was first published on the January 26, 1882. The daily was published in the morning. Eskridge wanted to publish a morning paper so that he could beat Stotler's evening *Emporia News* to the day's news. But Stotler beat Eskridge to the punch; on January 19, 1882, the *News* became a morning paper.⁷ In explaining the change, Stotler cited every reason but the fact that Eskridge was publishing the *Republican* in the morning. But Eskridge was still able to trump the *News* by carrying Associated Press wire dispatches in the morning daily edition, while Stotler only carried telegraphic reports. By November 1882, Eskridge had purchased full membership in the Associated Press.⁸ By holding AP membership as well as a telegraphic franchise, Eskridge capitalized on the allure of regional and national news, rather than just local opinion, to attract readers.⁹

Many newspapers issued a statement of principles when they commenced publishing. They would announce their party affiliation and their interests in the community. Eskridge made his statement to the Emporia community in the closing issues of the *Ledger*.¹⁰ He pledged his newspaper to be "Republican to the back-bone, and that will be Republican, too." Eskridge often made the assertion that he believed in a

⁷ *Emporia Daily News*, 19 January 1882.

⁸ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 2 November 1882.

⁹ Historian David Dary discusses the growing significance of telegraphic news to the reading public in the post-Civil War era. See Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 143.

¹⁰ *Emporia Ledger*, 5 January 1882, 12 January 1882. Reprinted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 26 January 1882.

united Republican party that was undivided in purpose. He specifically articulated this through his newspaper. “[The *Republican*] will recognize no ‘half-breeds,’ no ‘stalwarts’ nor divided councils; but, unity of purpose in the practical application of the great principles of the grand old party in the administration of county, state and national affairs.” Eskridge vowed to fight for the Republican cause locally and nationally, but as historian David Dary contends:

The pages of newspapers published in the West between the late 1860s and about 1900 reflect the fact that there was little real difference nationally in the policies of the Democrats and the Republicans. Both avoided the chief issues of American life and in their political campaigns for support relied on trite phrases such as ‘party loyalty.’ Perhaps precisely because of this, local politics and political reporting in this period are more colorful.¹¹

The columns of the *Republican* often reflected this lack of national debate, especially through Eskridge’s coverage of the intense factional battles that characterized Emporia and Kansas politics in this era. Indeed, national politics were different from local politics in this era. In Emporia, where resistance to the Republican Party was insignificant, factions within the party battled for political office. On the national level, Republicans shifted from an ideologically driven party to a professionally managed organization. “The organization itself, not the issues that once created it,” commanded party loyalty.¹² The Democrats stood weakly as the opposition party.

Eskridge stated that the *Republican* “will not indulge in personal abuse of any of our citizens...Its columns will not be open to personal controversies except when manifestly necessary to insure [sic] fair play.”¹³ The *Republican’s* readers would soon

¹¹ Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 55.

¹² Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 484-487.

¹³ *Emporia Ledger*, 5 January 1882, 12 January 1882. Reprinted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 26 January 1882.

witness that promise broken. But overall, Eskridge's compact with his readers brought nothing new to Eskridge's political philosophy. He now had his own pulpit to preach from, instead of relying on allies and Stotler's *News* to publish his letters. Now, Eskridge could compete against Stotler on his terms. Though Eskridge claimed that the *Republican* was purely a business venture, it was quite clear that Eskridge meant to compete directly with his longtime rival Jacob Stotler.

In operation and setup, the *Republican* was typical of newspapers of its time. The *Emporia Republican* was actually comprised of two newspapers, the *Daily Republican* and the *Weekly Republican*. The daily was issued every morning but Monday, so the Sabbath could be observed. The weekly, which was printed on Thursdays, served as a digest for the week's news and was popular with rural subscribers. Most of its articles were reprinted from the previous week's daily issues. In addition to the two editions of the newspaper, Eskridge also ran a book bindery and a job office, which was a print shop. These operations supplemented the newspaper trade by bringing in print business from the public. Through the consolidation of these different functions under the auspices of one company, Eskridge sought to offer Emporia what he termed a "complete printing establishment."¹⁴

Eskridge immediately began the task of promoting his new venture in the *Republican's* columns. Editors across the state took notice of Eskridge's new paper. The *Olathe Gazette* stated that the *Republican* promised to be "good and candid and favor prohibition and stand 'by the rights of man.'"¹⁵ The reference to endorsing prohibition must have caught the eye of Emporia's prohibitionists, especially since Eskridge had

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Olathe Gazette in Emporia Weekly Republican*, 9 February 1882.

supported licensing saloons in 1874. Changing positions aside, Eskridge's colleagues recognized that not only did he intend to compete with Stotler's *News*, but also with newspapers across the state, especially the *Topeka Commonwealth*.¹⁶ Emporia and Lyon County took notice as well; less than two months after the *Republican* commenced publishing, it became the official county paper. This was not just a symbolic title. As the official paper, the *Republican* published all the county's legal notices, which was a significant amount of business.¹⁷

The *Emporia Republican* enjoyed success in its first year. In May 1882, Eskridge announced plans to build a three-story office building for the newspaper.¹⁸ In June, the *Republican* made itself front page news when it declared that it had the largest circulation in southern Kansas.¹⁹ The newspaper absorbed the *Dunlap Chief* and the *Americus Herald*, which were smaller newspapers within a short radius of Emporia. In November, the *Republican* became a full member of the Associated Press. At that time, the paper and its printing operations employed over thirty workers and sustained a payroll of \$2,000 a month.²⁰ Eskridge spent nearly \$4,000 on a new steam printing press to equip his new building.²¹ Completed in January 1883, the \$15,000 (approximately \$273,000 in 2004 dollars), three-story brick building held the editorial offices and the print shop as well as some space to rent. But most importantly, the building was a showpiece to the community, complete with an iron cornice with a gilt eagle atop it and the words

¹⁶ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 9 February 1882.

¹⁷ When the *Republican* first commenced publishing, the *Kansas Sentinel* was the official city paper. The official county paper was the *Emporia News*. See *Emporia News*, 23 February 1882; *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 23 February 1882.

¹⁸ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 18 May 1882.

¹⁹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 22 June 1882.

²⁰ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 2 November 1882. Unfortunately, no business records for the *Republican* survive, so the only figures available are those which Eskridge supplied in the newspaper.

²¹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 16 November 1882.

“Emporia Republican” written below.²² Eskridge was spending large amounts of money to build and expand his enterprise, a point he made frequently when he solicited for advertisers and business.²³ The *Emporia Democrat* noted that:

The only serious drawback we see to [the *Republican's*] success as a business venture is a lack of sufficient advertising patronage, due to the fact that there is but little wholesale business carried on here, and that local advertisers cannot afford to pay the rates which a paper of a large circulation is entitled to when such circulation does not benefit them beyond their own town.²⁴

The *Emporia Kansas Sentinel* concurred. Its editor stated that running the *Republican* “is certainly a big undertaking in a city of this size, and in our judgment it will not be a paying one for some time.”²⁵ The editors of the *Democrat* and the *Sentinel* raised an important point. Was Emporia big enough to support the kind of paper that Eskridge intended to build? Eskridge’s response was implicit in his actions; Emporia would have to grow to match the *Republican*. But could Eskridge’s finances wait for Emporia to grow? One thing was clear—Eskridge was spending large sums of his own money to finance the operation of the *Republican*.

Eskridge’s debut in Emporia’s newspaper business produced one of the effects he desired—a newspaper war began in earnest between Eskridge and Jacob Stotler. Stotler’s first move was to face Eskridge directly by making the *News* a morning paper. The *Kansas Sentinel* took notice of Stotler’s actions and clearly explained the rationale behind publishing a morning paper. Local readers preferred an evening paper; not only was it more convenient to read the paper in the evening, but publishing in the afternoon allowed a newspaper to offer the latest news coverage to readers. But a morning paper

²² *Emporia Daily Republican*, 15 January 1883.

²³ *Emporia Daily Republican*, 15 January 1883; *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 2 November 1882, 16 November 1882.

²⁴ *Emporia Democrat*, 17 January 1883.

²⁵ *Kansas Sentinel* (Emporia), 11 January 1882.

had its advantages as well. Newspapers that published in the morning could send the paper to outlying communities the same day and therefore enjoy a larger subscription base. Eskridge favored the latter approach and Stotler felt he had to compete directly with him.²⁶ The *Kansas Sentinel* framed the coming conflict between the *News* and the *Republican* in apocalyptic terms. “The silence which now exists between them is but the ominous stillness which precedes the terrible storm soon to burst forth in awful fury...One must in all probability be tucked away under the daisies, and when the smoke of the carnage clears, which will remain?”²⁷ Ignoring hyperbole, Stotler and Eskridge were both fighting for the survival of their papers. Eskridge intended to defeat Stotler when he purchased the *Republican*, and Stotler meant to put up a fight. Both fought each other on familiar territory—through the newspapers.

Eskridge quickly accused Stotler of improprieties in handling the Emporia post office. Stotler had become Emporia’s postmaster in 1874 despite charges that he forced a Civil War veteran’s widow from the job for his own political gain.²⁸ Stotler’s enemies, including Eskridge, immediately seized on the opportunity to castigate him for his blatant manipulation of political patronage. Eight years later, Eskridge attempted to use allegations regarding Stotler’s management of the post office to score a political victory against the *News*’s editor. Eskridge alleged that the *News*, a “subsidized post office newspaper” was an organ of corruption and that it had outlived its usefulness. “We re-assert the fact that the REPUBLICAN has done more for Emporia and this portion of the state during the ten months of its existence than the little postage stamp up the street has

²⁶ *Kansas Sentinel* (Emporia), 25 January 1882. The article “The Newspaper War” is an excellent analysis of the battle between Stotler and Eskridge for supremacy. It also shows how the competing papers were operated.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See *Emporia Ledger*, 24 September 1874 to 15 October 1874.

accomplished in the twenty-five years it has been published.”²⁹ But Eskridge’s post office “expose” and his other assertions about Stotler’s corruption were largely unsubstantiated.³⁰ Nothing came of the charges against Stotler, or several other allegations regarding corruption in Emporia politics that Eskridge made. What Eskridge was trying to do was establish a record as an anti-ring newspaper, which, in the Emporia context, would be an anti-Stotler paper.³¹

Just as Eskridge was using the *Republican* to fight his battles with Stotler, he also used his newspaper to articulate his political beliefs and opinions. Eskridge expressed his political philosophy not only through the medium of the editorial, but also through commentary on the news of the day and through his selections of what was newsworthy. One of his earliest editorials was an endorsement of prohibition in Kansas. “With our regard for religion, morality, and the best interests of society, we must be counted squarely with the Prohibition party.”³² But the *Republican’s* support of prohibition seemed more based on Kansas’s prevailing political climate rather than on concern for society. Furthermore, Eskridge’s stance was incongruous with his earlier position of licensing and regulating saloons for a source of revenue.³³

Eskridge also articulated his views on monetary policy. He objected when the rival *Topeka Commonwealth* endorsed discontinuing the coinage of silver. The *Commonwealth* also supported efforts to curb the printing of greenback dollars. Eskridge consistently supported an open monetary policy and reminded the *Commonwealth* that

²⁹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 16 November 1882.

³⁰ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 11 May 1882.

³¹ See *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 11 May 1882 to 25 May 1882.

³² *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 2 February 1882.

³³ See previous chapter.

past Kansas Republican Party platforms had done the same.³⁴ In the fall of 1882, Kansas Republicans faced defeat at the hands of the Democrats. Eskridge asserted that

the democratic majority is composed of republican voters... They have resorted to democracy not because they prefer it to republicanism, but because they demand a republicanism that is superior to democracy, and believe that a defeat of their own party is the only way to purge it of the parasitical growths which a long and flourishing lease of power has fastened upon it.³⁵

Eskridge's critique of the Republicans in 1882 reveals his dissatisfaction with a growing factionalism in Kansas Republicanism. He accused Republican newspapers and politicians of not solidly supporting the Republican prohibitionist John P. St. John for state governor, insinuating that their lack of support was what had led to the election of Democrat George Glick.³⁶ The *Emporia News* concurred, stating that Glick had been elected "by the grace of the Republicans."³⁷ Eskridge repeatedly chastised party leaders for failing to unite behind the party platform and support a single slate of candidates. He asserted that factional issues such as prohibition, suffrage, railroads, and bossism needlessly divided the party.³⁸ Because local Republican Party leaders played a significant role in crafting party policy through local political conventions and other means, they held a significant stake in the party's success.³⁹ Eskridge used his newspaper as leverage to influence Kansas Republican politics.

After the disappointing 1882 Republican Party defeat, Eskridge concentrated on two things: influencing local politics and defeating Jacob Stotler in the Emporia newspaper war. Eskridge accused Stotler of stealing material out of the *Republican* and

³⁴ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 22 June 1882, 31 August 1882.

³⁵ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 16 November 1882.

³⁶ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 16 November 1882, 21 December 1882.

³⁷ *Emporia Weekly News*, 16 November 1882.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Public participation in Gilded Age politics was common in the Midwestern states. See Allan Peskin, "Who Were the Stalwarts? Who Were Their Rivals? Republican Factions in the Gilded Age," *Political Science Quarterly* 99 (Winter 1984-1985): 707.

republishing it without proper citation.⁴⁰ He repeatedly criticized Stotler's "subsidized sheet," accusing Stotler of using his postmaster job to keep the *News* afloat. But Eskridge himself faced allegations about newspaper subsidies. The *News* and other smaller area newspapers often intimated that the *Republican* was subsidized by the railroads. The *Madison News* opined: "The Topeka Capital, Emporia Republican and other large dailies in Kansas are busy just now trying to prove that they are not railroad papers; that they have not been subsidized." In spite of the likelihood that the *Republican* did indeed receive railroad subsidies, Eskridge repeatedly denied the allegations. "We can assure our friend," he responded to the *Madison News*, "that this paper is not a subsidized sheet, but, free and untrammelled as the air he breathes."⁴¹ Nevertheless, the rumors never went away despite Eskridge's continual denials.

Eskridge continued to promote the *Republican*, mainly by harassing the *News*. By framing his criticism of Stotler as a public service, Eskridge simultaneously carried on the newspaper war and attempted to build the *Republican's* reputation as a crusading newspaper. In one particularly stinging rebuke, Eskridge wrote, "We really entertain no ill will towards the *News* and many times, when our duty to the public seemed to require an exposure of its misrepresentations and deceitful course, we have refrained from doing so, partly because of our sympathy for its insignificance and partly because of a disposition to let the little thing have its way..."⁴² But again, Eskridge bristled in the face of charges from Stotler that the *Republican* was a railroad organ. He flatly denied that the railroads contributed to the newspaper's coffers and called the accusations "another effort on the part of the *News* to deceive the public that it may advance thereby its own

⁴⁰ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 23 November 1882.

⁴¹ *Madison News*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 23 November 1882; *Ibid.*

⁴² *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 26 April 1883.

interests.”⁴³ In fact, Eskridge claimed that the *Republican* was an invaluable public institution within the community. In a bold example of his hubris, Eskridge wrote that “The services the REPUBLICAN [have] rendered the tax payers of Lyon county, and the republican party, entitle its words of advice and counsel to respectful consideration.”⁴⁴ The message was clear; Emporia needed the *Republican* and needed to get rid of Stotler’s *News*.

On January 3, 1884, a special edition of the *Emporia Republican* hit the streets. Though publishing a larger holiday edition was common practice, at sixteen pages, the *Republican*’s New Year’s edition was the largest paper published in Emporia up to that date.⁴⁵ The paper was a tribute to Eskridge and to itself. A large picture of the new *Republican* building was on the front page along with a short history of Emporia’s newspapers. Eskridge also reprinted the statement of principles that had appeared in the *Emporia Ledger* two years earlier with the headline “The ‘Emporia Republican’—Have We Not Kept Our Promise?” Eskridge “recalled” how, only two years before, “The proprietors of all daily newspapers in Kansas at once addressed themselves to the necessity of brushing down the cob-webs and scrubbing up the long neglected and bedaubed appearance of their respective journals in order to hold their circulation and appear respectable in their efforts to compete with the REPUBLICAN...”⁴⁶ In addition to the self-praising articles, Eskridge’s New Year’s edition carried information about Emporia, especially the railroads that came through the city. A fold-out map showing the state’s rail routes was placed in the issue. As might be suspected, Eskridge was proud of

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 20 September 1883.

⁴⁵ The *News* published a smaller holiday newspaper on 27 December 1883.

⁴⁶ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 3 January 1884.

the fact that Emporia was becoming an important railroad junction. He may have claimed that he was no pawn of the railroads, but he certainly supported them and often involved himself with companies that wished to establish routes to and from Emporia.

In February 1884, the Kansas City and Emporia railroad was completed. The railroad had faced several delays in its construction, but the promoters, particularly Emporia banker and K.C. & E. president H.C. Cross were able to work out the difficulties.⁴⁷ The line connected Emporia with its “new neighbor,” Ottawa, and continued on to Kansas City, Missouri.⁴⁸ Like many other smaller rail lines in this time, it was built for one purpose, to be bought out by a larger railroad. The Kansas City and Emporia was bought out by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad as a cutoff line so that trains could avoid the extra twenty mile distance of going through Topeka on their way to Kansas City or Emporia. Eskridge was a part of the K.C. & E. venture and enthusiastically supported it in the *Republican*, declaring that the K.C. & E. road would be “everything” to Emporia. But Eskridge inadvertently revealed the nature of the project in his article.⁴⁹ The road was built poorly and would need work to make it permanent and lasting. Such was often the case with smaller railroad ventures of this type.

Eskridge faced difficulty in dodging rumors that often swirled about him. Beginning in the 1880s, rival newspapers periodically questioned whether Eskridge was truly a Republican. Eskridge’s responses were often evasive. While he would state that he had no intention of bolting from the Republican Party, he commented on his

⁴⁷ *Emporia Weekly News*, 3 May 1883.

⁴⁸ *Emporia Weekly News*, 7 February 1884.

⁴⁹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 7 February 1884. See also *Emporia Weekly News*, 7 February 1884.

dissatisfaction with the party's status quo. In 1884, several smaller Kansas newspapers noted that Eskridge often took independent stances. The *Oxford Register* stated:

The Emporia Republican ought to entirely sever the strings that attach it to the republican party, and run up to its mast-head the independent flag. The time is fast approaching when party ties will hold only the weak, narrow-minded journalist within the traces; the strong, forcible writers will be more independent in their views—will take the lead instead of following behind.⁵⁰

Eskridge did take stances that seemed to be at odds with the Republican party line, although he consistently asserted that he was only holding the party accountable to its platform. But what Eskridge's contemporaries most likely perceived was the increasingly divergent factionalism that was endemic to Kansas Republican politics. Because Kansas politics was dominated by the Republican Party, competition often came from factions within. On the national level, Gilded Age Republicans have often been classified as "Stalwarts" or "Half-Breeds." Stalwarts were characterized by their party regularity and by their hostility to reform. They were known as machine politicians who were allied with powerful leaders such as New York's Roscoe Conkling. In other words, they were led by political bosses. Half-Breeds were usually allied with James G. Blaine of Maine. Several presidents, including Rutherford B. Hayes, James Garfield, and Benjamin Harrison were defined by this label. Half-Breed politicians were disillusioned with machine politics. Historian Allan Peskin has analyzed these labels, and while he rejects the Half-Breed label, instead calling them non-Stalwarts, he offers a picture of what politicians in these factions stood for.⁵¹ In spite of factionalism, party loyalty was integral to the Gilded Age political process. "To a degree unmatched since, party loyalty

⁵⁰ *Oxford Register*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 1 May 1884.

⁵¹ Allan Peskin, "Who Were the Stalwarts?" 703-716.

was a test of manhood; partisan allegiance represented a means of self-identification.”⁵²

Eskridge reflects this principle well; in his rebuttal to the *Oxford Register*, he affirmed that “Personally we cannot perceive wherein the democratic party in either its rank and file or in its leadership, is superior to the republican party.”⁵³

Eskridge recognized factionalism’s paralyzing effect within the Republican establishment in Kansas, especially after the election of Democratic governor George Glick in 1882, and proposed a solution. Each faction within the Republican Party felt they had an answer. By Peskin’s definition, on the national level, Eskridge was a non-Stalwart, especially measured by his anti-boss political stands from the early 1880s. But defining Eskridge on the local level is more difficult because of the breadth of smaller, insignificant issues. Eskridge ardently supported railroad development. He advocated a loose monetary supply. He was a prohibitionist, although some questioned his sincerity in the cause. Nevertheless, he supported the prohibitionist Republican gubernatorial candidate, S.O. Thacher, in 1884.⁵⁴ When Thacher withdrew from the race and John A. Martin became the front-runner, Eskridge criticized him, stating that “Col. Martin cannot run as an anti-prohibitionist on a prohibition platform.”⁵⁵ Though it actively supported prohibitionist measures, Stotler’s *News* supported Martin over Thacher.⁵⁶ But the *Fort Scott Monitor* pressed Eskridge on the matter by raising a question that many Emporians who remembered his stance on liquor licensing wanted answered. The editor of the *Monitor* wrote: “One of the amusing features of Kansas politics is the owl-like wisdom

⁵² *Ibid.*, 703.

⁵³ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 1 May 1884.

⁵⁴ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 1 May 1884.

⁵⁵ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 5 June 1884.

⁵⁶ *Emporia Weekly News*, 8 May 1884.

with which the Emporia Republican advises prohibitionists as to their duty. When did the Republican become so devoted to the cause of prohibition?"⁵⁷

The election season of 1884 gave Eskridge one more chance to attack Jacob Stotler. Stotler sought the nomination to run for state representative. Eskridge refused to ratify the nomination of the county Republican central committee on the grounds of improprieties at the convention. In the *Republican*, Eskridge and others alleged that votes were fraudulently tabulated by the leaders of the convention.⁵⁸ Whether actual improprieties existed is impossible to prove, but instead, it appears that Eskridge's actions were another way to carry on his feud with Stotler. Many Kansas newspapers came to Stotler's defense. The *Topeka Commonwealth* alleged that certain corporations in the state had conspired with Eskridge to form an "illegitimate opposition" to put Stotler out of business.⁵⁹ Eskridge vehemently denied the claims in a notarized affidavit which was printed in the *Republican*. He reaffirmed that "No railroad corporation nor the 'head of one,' ever had a dollar in the REPUBLICAN." Other newspapers echoed the *Commonwealth's* sentiments, but the editor of the *Wilson County Citizen*, who claimed that Eskridge insisted on "writing himself down an ass," offered the most stinging, but perceptive criticism about Eskridge's choice not to agree to Stotler's nomination.

The Emporia Republican proposes to do a particularly nice job of discriminating between national and county politics. It expects to prove at the same time that it is the height of presumption and bigotry to bolt a national ticket, and the proper caper to bolt a county nomination simply because the successful candidate happens to be a rival in business. It is a very delicate case of hair-splitting, the true animus of which is visible to everybody.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Fort Scott Monitor*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 5 June 1884. See also *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 3 July 1884.

⁵⁸ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 31 July 1884, 7 August 1884, 28 August 1884.

⁵⁹ *Topeka Commonwealth*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 4 September 1884.

⁶⁰ *Wilson County Citizen*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly News*, 4 September 1884.

But such a plot was unnecessary. On September 4, Stotler announced in the *Emporia News* that he was leaving Emporia “for personal reasons” and was relocating to Wellington, Kansas, to edit the *Sumner County Press*.⁶¹ Though the *Commonwealth* viewed Stotler’s departure from Emporia as an underhanded deal orchestrated by Eskridge, it implicitly admitted what Eskridge knew well, that the *Republican* had surpassed the *News* as Emporia’s leading newspaper. But Stotler’s departure did not mean the end for the *Emporia News*. A new editor took Stotler’s place and attempted to run the *News*. Stotler’s departure marked the end of his intense feud that existed with Eskridge, a feud that, like many editorial quarrels in Western newspapers, was good for business.⁶²

As the *News* struggled to survive in the Emporia community, so did the *Republican*. Emporia had a difficult time supporting two dailies. But the *Republican*’s problems reached beyond Emporia and Lyon County. Eskridge relied on the support of outlying communities for subscribers. One of the reasons he published a morning daily was so that the trains could transport the paper to remote subscribers on the day it was published. Eskridge particularly relied on subscribers in Butler, Sedgwick, Sumner, and Cowley counties for business. Eskridge had heavily invested in business ventures in the old “southwest” region and was well known by the people in that area. He proudly proclaimed that “No paper in the state has done more than the REPUBLICAN to present the advantages of western Kansas to the people of this country.”⁶³ However, by the mid-1880s Eskridge was becoming a victim of the success he had promoted. As the towns in this region grew, they developed their own markets and institutions, including

⁶¹ *Emporia News*, 4 September 1884. See also *Emporia Democrat*, 3 September 1884.

⁶² Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 22.

⁶³ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 2 September 1886.

newspapers. As these communities gained their own newspapers, they lost their need for news from Emporia. Table 2.1 shows the names and dates of the first newspapers in the four southwestern counties as well as the first daily newspapers.

TABLE 2.1
FIRST SOUTHWEST KANSAS NEWSPAPERS ⁶⁴

County	First Newspaper and City of Publication	Date	First Daily Newspapers and City of Publication	Date
Butler	<i>Walnut Valley Times</i> El Dorado	March 4, 1870	<i>Daily Walnut Valley Times</i> El Dorado	March 1, 1877
Cowley	<i>Cowley County Censor</i> ** Winfield	August 13, 1870	<i>Daily Republican-Traveler</i> Arkansas City <i>Winfield Courier</i> Winfield	April 11, 1887 April 7, 1885
Sedgwick	<i>Wichita Vidette</i> Wichita	August 13, 1870	<i>Wichita Daily Beacon</i> * Wichita <i>Wichita Daily Eagle</i> Wichita	September 1, 1879 May 20, 1884
Sumner	<i>Oxford Times</i> Oxford	June 22, 1871	<i>Wellington Daily Press</i> Wellington	February 20, 1886

* The *Arkansas City Traveler* was first published within two weeks of the *Censor*.

** The *Daily Beacon* was published in Wichita for less than a month in 1872.

Several trends that had a direct impact on Eskridge's newspaper business are shown in the table. As one would suspect, the establishment of newspapers in Kansas counties followed the distinct settlement phases of the state.⁶⁵ In the southwest region,

⁶⁴ See G. Raymond Gaeddert, "First Newspapers in Kansas Counties, Part 2 of 4: 1865-1871," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 10 (May 1941): 124-149; Kansas State Historical Society Newspaper Database, <http://www.kshs.org/library/news.htm>. See also Aileen Anderson, ed. *Kansas Newspapers: A Directory of Newspaper Holdings in Kansas* (Topeka, KS: Kansas Library Network Board, 1984). Information regarding daily and weekly newspapers and publication dates is found in the latter two sources.

⁶⁵ See Gaeddert, "First Newspapers, Part 4 of 4, 1879-1886," 408-411 for a chronological list of first Kansas newspapers by county. For maps showing the settlement phases of Kansas counties, see Homer E.

settlement occurred in about the year 1870. The newspapers soon followed. But in the case of these four counties, establishing a daily newspaper took an average of twelve years. In Cowley County, where Eskridge has significant influence, the first daily newspaper was published fifteen years after the first newspaper began. By 1886, all these counties possessed an established daily newspaper. Consequently, there was no longer a need for a daily newspaper such as the *Republican* to be shipped into these communities. Without accurate subscription data, this effect is hard to quantifiably measure, but the pages of the *Republican* focused less on the southwest region in the late 1880s and 1890s, whereas prior to that date, Eskridge printed many articles and advertisements that related to the region. Facing a diminished advertising and subscription base, the *News* stumbled after Stotler's departure. In February 1887, the *News* claimed that their subscriber base had doubled, but by the end of the year the editor began regularly using advertisements to ask subscribers to encourage their friends to take the newspaper.⁶⁶ The introduction of the *Emporia Daily Democrat* in October 1887 further gutted an already over-exploited market. The *El Dorado Republican* pessimistically reported its arrival: "The Emporia Democrat appears with a daily edition which will in due course of time starve to death."⁶⁷ In the face of stiff competition and flagging support, a series of editors attempted to keep the *News* competitive though a variety of means. The *News* even announced in 1888 that it was becoming independent in politics, bowing to what it perceived as a new vogue in newspaper publishing.⁶⁸

Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas*, 2nd ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 38-41.

⁶⁶ *Emporia Weekly News*, 3 February 1887.

⁶⁷ *El Dorado Republican*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly News*, 13 October 1887.

⁶⁸ *Emporia Weekly News*, 18 October 1888.

Gimmicks aside, however, the city of Emporia could not support multiple daily newspapers without a strong base of outlying subscribers or a larger population. In December 1889, the *News* merged with the *Democrat*, creating the *Emporia Weekly News-Democrat*. Editor J.F. O'Connor made one last stand, improving the newspaper's offices and creating a job office to compete with the *Republican*. But the market was oversaturated. In May 1890, after thirty-three years of publication, the *News-Democrat* announced its closing. "Owing to the prevailing dullness in business, and the stringency in money matters, the publication of two daily papers in Emporia has been found to be unprofitable, even burdensome."⁶⁹ The newspaper was sold to Eskridge, who consolidated its operations with the *Republican's*. With the consolidation, Eskridge left the morning daily business and published his daily in the afternoon.⁷⁰ By doing so, he admitted that business from outlying communities had effectively dried up. The major benefit to Eskridge in buying the *News-Democrat* was that he regained the Associated Press franchise, which he had lost at some point in the 1880s.⁷¹ With the consolidation, Eskridge claimed a subscriber base of 5,000 weekly patrons.⁷²

But all was not well for the *Republican* either. Eskridge still was unable to confront the changing subscriber and advertiser patterns. The *Republican* needed business. Further evidence of the difficulty in running a profitable newspaper became evident in July 1887, when the *Emporia Globe*, under the headline "Tweedism in Emporia," attacked the *Republican* for gouging the city on printing costs.⁷³ The title of

⁶⁹ *Emporia Weekly News-Democrat*, 1 May 1890.

⁷⁰ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 1 May 1890.

⁷¹ It is unclear when or if Eskridge lost the AP franchise. If he did lose the franchise, it must have been between 1888 and 1890. See "Organ's Souvenir of Emporia, Kansas" (Emporia, KS: 1888), 23. In the collection of the Emporia State University Archives, Emporia, KS.

⁷² *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 22 May 1890.

⁷³ *Emporia Globe*, 28 July 1887.

“official city paper” was more than honorific; with it came the city’s legal printing as well as extra subscribers. The *Globe* campaigned to obtain the city printing and attempted to undercut Eskridge’s own bid, but the city council awarded the printing contract to the *Republican*. The *Globe* responded with a series of attacks on Eskridge, even attacking his Civil War military record.⁷⁴ In the end, the *Globe*’s assertions that Emporia was “being swindled for the benefit of the *Republican*” went unheard, but their efforts to gain the city printing contract show the often desperate nature of the newspaper business in this era.⁷⁵

As the 1880s closed, Eskridge and his *Emporia Republican* faced hard times. In spite of the decade’s prosperity, the newspaper faced flagging business. Outlying communities were rapidly developing and did not need to get their news from Emporia’s newspapers. They were producing their own daily and weekly newspapers. The very areas that Eskridge had worked so hard to develop and profit from were developed and consequently did less business with Emporians. Changing times were forcing Eskridge into a difficult financial and political position. If the *Republican* was indeed Eskridge’s political rostrum, how could Eskridge thrive as a party organ editor with declining subscriber rates? He was finding himself unable to adapt to the new business and political climate.

Eskridge did perceive a significant political change in Kansas politics. Growing discontent among Kansas farmers was giving rise to a new movement aimed at addressing their political concerns. Eskridge sympathized with the farmers’ plight. In December 1889, Eskridge began publishing a Farmers’ Alliance Department in the

⁷⁴ *Emporia Globe*, 4 August 1887.

⁷⁵ *Emporia Globe*, 11 August 1887.

Republican.⁷⁶ While he did not take a hand in editing the articles, he did publish them on behalf of the alliance. In the 1890s, Eskridge began addressing their political concerns in the *Republican's* columns. While Eskridge was certainly not a Populist, he did sympathize with many of the farmers' concerns. His career in the 1890s would be marked by the changing attitudes and beliefs inherent in Kansas politics.

In spite of the difficulty Eskridge faced in the late 1880s, in that decade he had built and maintained one of the state's notable newspapers. Through time and a great deal of personal investment, Eskridge smashed his competition and built a strong newspaper. Not only had he built a successful newspaper, but like many Western editors, Eskridge also revived his political career by using the *Republican* to articulate his partisan positions.⁷⁷ However, the question that the *Kansas Sentinel* and the *Emporia Democrat* raised in 1882 still lingered. Could Emporia support the kind of newspaper that Eskridge wanted to publish?

⁷⁶ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 19 December 1889.

⁷⁷ Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 48.

CHAPTER THREE

A VOICE STILLED: ESKRIDGE'S FINAL YEARS

At the end of the 1880s, Eskridge was being forced to reassess his position in the Kansas political and business communities. The fiercely competitive Emporia newspaper business was slowly strangling many of the city's smaller newspapers. But Eskridge was not immune from the changing business climate. The development of the outlying communities that Eskridge had once worked so hard to develop cost him much-needed business. As these communities developed their own newspapers and other institutions, they relied less on Emporia businesses and institutions to supply their needs. Consequently, Eskridge saw his business decline in the late 1880s and 1890s. Because Eskridge's business was tied so closely with his politics, a decline in subscribers also meant a decline in his ability to politically influence Kansans. Eskridge's political, financial, and personal failures in the 1890s offer a body of supporting evidence that mixing politics with business was dangerous indeed.

In the final years of his life, Eskridge's *Emporia Republican* was displaced by William Allen White's *Emporia Gazette*. Furthermore, Eskridge faced financial ruin at the hands of one of his political allies, banker Charles S. Cross. The unexpected failure of Cross's First National Bank of Emporia in 1898, in which Eskridge was heavily invested, came as a death blow to Eskridge's financial position, forcing him into bankruptcy. Ultimately the actions of these two men, the latter a friend and the former a foe, unseated Eskridge from his dominant position in the twilight of his life. Despite these failures, Eskridge's career in the 1890s can be seen as a harbinger of the

progressive Republican reform agenda that changed Kansas politics in the following decade. Eskridge proposed reform from within the Republican Party, whereas the Populists attempted to create a new party. Eskridge's significance in his final years rests in his call for reform, which anticipated the reconstitution of Kansas Republican politics. His life ended before he could articulate more than broad policy goals, but men like the rival editor White took up the reform mantle. While Eskridge was able to anticipate the future of Kansas politics, he was forced off of the political stage by his past.

Local politics continued to interest Eskridge. The issue of women's suffrage reappeared in the early 1890s with much fanfare in the *Republican*. Certain groups in the state again proposed to amend the Kansas Constitution to give women the franchise. Eskridge stood by the position he had held in years past—that suffrage for women was wrong. He reiterated the points he had made in years past and did not elaborate further or waver.

We are opposed to woman suffrage for woman's sake. We are opposed to it because it is inconsistent with Republican government—because it is opposed to Christian religion—because it is opposed to the sanctity of the marriage contract—because it is subversive to the maintenance of the family as now instituted—because it is subversive of society as now organized.¹

While other newspapers, including the *Topeka Capital* saw woman suffrage as inevitable, Eskridge refused to admit defeat. Though Eskridge's intransigence on the subject was clear, his coverage of the issue in the *Republican* reveals that Kansans were actually debating the merits of the issue. Many were asking whether suffrage was a natural right. One man wrote to the *Republican* asking whether it was good policy to grant suffrage to women.² He asserted that allowing women to vote would make no real difference in the

¹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 19 April 1894.

² *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 17 May 1894.

outcome of elections, but that it would involve women in their own governance. Even Susan B. Anthony, who had participated in the 1867 suffrage campaign, weighed in against Eskridge, calling him “that man who fought the question most bitterly and vilely twenty-seven years ago.” His own daughter also dissented with his views and helped organize a Women’s Republican Association that advocated giving the franchise to women.³ The rhetoric continued through the end of July 1894, but Eskridge continued to object to the proposition.

While Eskridge continued to champion his politics in the *Republican*, he began to face what would become the strongest challenger to his dominance in the Emporia newspaper field. Initially, the *Emporia Daily Gazette* was no match for the *Republican*. The *Gazette* was founded in 1890 as a Populist newspaper.⁴ The next year, William Yoast Morgan purchased the paper and made it a Republican paper in competition with Eskridge’s *Republican*.⁵ Under Morgan’s control, the paper struggled to remain operational in its early years. In 1895, Morgan sold the paper to William Allen White for \$3,000; a figure that Morgan himself admitted was high. Eskridge mocked in the *Republican* that “W.Y. Morgan played an immense joke on this community when he sold the *Gazette* to a lunatic.”⁶ White worked feverishly to improve the paper, an effort that brought greater circulation. Yet White found “it was difficult to convince advertisers of [his gains in circulation] when directories like Rowell’s continued to rank the *Gazette* as

³ *Topeka State Journal*, quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 14 June 1894; *Emporia Weekly Gazette*, 20 October 1892.

⁴ William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White*, (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 256.

⁵ *Emporia Daily Gazette*, 21 May 1892.

⁶ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 22 August 1895.

under one thousand circulation, along with the faltering *Republican*.”⁷ A year after Eskridge’s death, White would vent his frustration to an advertising agency, saying that “I [did] not like playing second fiddle to a paper that has less than one third of the circulation of the *Gazette*.”⁸ Historian Sally Foreman Griffith implies that other newspapers, including the *Republican*, falsified their circulation statements. Without the *Republican*’s business records, the claim is impossible to prove, but as she notes, the practice was hardly uncommon in the time. In spite of the difficulty, White built his paper into a viable competitor and eventually outpaced the *Republican* in a move reminiscent of Eskridge’s prior defeat of Jacob Stotler’s *News*.⁹

White held Eskridge in low esteem and vice versa. White’s description of Eskridge in his autobiography is a careful but negative assessment of his old competitor. White’s observations show that he understood the nature of the Emporia business community and hierarchy far better than he may have let on. Furthermore, though White tried to distance himself from the factional struggles in Emporia, he knew exactly how the system worked.

The editor of the *Republican* was a man in his sixties who had served the town in the Legislature, who had secured the location of the State Teachers College in Emporia, who was an acknowledged leader of the Republican party in Kansas, and vicegerent of the Santa Fe Railroad, which named a town for him on one of

⁷ Sally Foreman Griffith, *Home Town News: William Allen White and the Emporia Gazette* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 81. For Eskridge’s rebuttal to some of White’s claims, see *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 10 August 1899.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ The following is a table of circulation records for the *Republican* and *Gazette*.

	<u>Year</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Gazette</u>
Circulation	1890	2,000	<500
	1896		900
	1903		2,000

Circulation figures are often incorrect and are hard to obtain. Finding accurate records for the *Republican* is difficult as no records for the paper survive. See Griffith, *Home Town News*, 36, 43, 72; *Kansas Historical and Descriptive Review*, Vol. 2 Eastern Section (Topeka, KS: J. Lethem, 1890), 130. The *Emporia Standard*, 25 October 1890, states that the *Republican*’s circulation decreased from 2,000 in 1885 to 600 in 1890.

its branches in an adjoining county.¹⁰ He was a dignified man with a rather large head who covered the bald frontal area of his skull with long hair from the side and dyed it, and who always wrote the resolutions at the Republican county convention. He was of the samurai caste in Kansas Republicanism, receiving remuneration from the Santa Fe as needed for his paper's pay roll, and was a spokesman of the [First National] bank, the Cross-Martindale bank. When it was closed, a few years later, a sheaf of the old editor's blank notes, accommodation paper, was found in the bank which they slipped into the note case to polish up the record for the national bank inspector.¹¹

White recalled his efforts to ignore Eskridge and his diatribes in an earlier autobiography he wrote but never published.

My silence first amused, then annoyed, later astounded, and finally paralyzed that purple rage, the sedate and punctilious old Governor.... Again and again he sallied forth from his tower, the three storied building, topped with a sheet iron eagle screaming on its pinnacle. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, for five years he thundered with all his works at the Gazette and its puerile editor who would not fight fair, but would sneak up between hostilities with charges against the other faction printed in an innocent, repressed and news like manner. Naturally the Gazette got the public sympathy.¹²

White recognized Eskridge when Eskridge made news, but he did not respond to the attacks that Eskridge made against him in the *Republican*. More interesting is the intensity of White's words toward Eskridge, written approximately twenty-seven years after Eskridge's death. White may have galled Eskridge first, but it certainly seems that Eskridge lastingly galled White.

Eskridge did his best to provoke White into a newspaper war. The *Republican* frequently carried stories about the *Gazette* and "Silly Willy" White in hopes of getting a feud going in the style that Jacob Stotler and Eskridge had enjoyed years before. One of the more significant feuds came in April 1899 when White was caned by an Emporia

¹⁰ The town is Eskridge, Wabaunsee County, Kansas and was named for him because he bought the first town lot. See Laura French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County* (Emporia, KS: Emporia Gazette Print, 1929), 27.

¹¹ White, *Autobiography*, 263-64.

¹² William Allen White, "Early Autobiography by William Allen White, [1927]," MS (photocopy), chapter five, p. 15. William Allen White Collection, University Libraries and Archives, Emporia State University, Emporia, KS.

mayoral candidate, Luther Severy. White had endorsed Severy's opponent, H.B. Morse, in the Emporia mayoral campaign. When Morse won, White celebrated in the *Gazette* and stated that "[t]he defeat of L. Severy is a public rebuke to a man who will let his ambition override his ideas of personal honor. The defeat is stinging. It is humiliating and it is proper that it should be."¹³ The next day, the two met on the street outside a restaurant and exchanged words. Apparently White offered to shake his hand and was refused. As White turned to walk away, Severy hit him with his cane and knocked him to the ground. White went into the restaurant to clean himself up and was met by another man. This man made a joke, saying that White was a coward for turning his back to Severy. White slapped him in the face and a small fight started.¹⁴ Severy and White were arrested and were forced to pay fines for their actions. The next day, the *Gazette* chronicled the incident and stated that "it had nothing to retract about Mr. Severy. It still believes that his age has withered his sense of honor. The fact that even an old man would strike in the back and seem proud of it, indicates how far senility has deadened manhood."¹⁵ Eskridge attempted to use the incident to make White look like a disrespectful young man, going so far as to help set up a collection to buy Severy a new cane and pay his fine. Years later, with the animosity long cleared, White recalled the incident as unfortunate and stated that it was "a case of temper with him and idle meanness with me, put into rather cutting and unjustified rhetoric."¹⁶

Politically, White and Eskridge were not far apart. White's own politics changed over time, but "[i]n the nineties, he had been, in his own words, 'a child of the governing

¹³ *Emporia Daily Gazette*, 5 April 1899.

¹⁴ *Emporia Daily Republican*, 6 April 1899.

¹⁵ *Emporia Daily Gazette*, 6 April 1899.

¹⁶ White, *Autobiography*, 313. White incorrectly recalls in his autobiography that the incident happened in 1898, when it really occurred on April 6, 1899.

classes,’ and a ‘stouthearted young reactionary,’ who rallied with other young Kansas Republicans against the Populists.’¹⁷ Indeed, White’s famous editorial “What’s The Matter With Kansas?” was a diatribe against the Populists. After the turn of the century, however, White began to support many reform policies and would later come to regret the hot words of his famous editorial. Though Eskridge was a Republican, he began rebelling against the party line in the late 1890s. In Eskridge’s heyday, the Republican Party was the only viable political party in the area, and the Republicans so dominated Lyon County politics that the only thing to quarrel over was minute details and personal grudges.

Understanding Emporia’s social and political structure is integral to understanding Eskridge’s values and attitudes and how they changed in the 1890s. Emporia’s differing political views were represented by the two factions that existed in the city and centered on its two most powerful banks. These factions competed for power at the local and state political levels. Emporia’s finances were largely entrusted in these competing banks: Charles S. Cross’s First National Bank and Calvin Hood’s Emporia National Bank. The Emporia National Bank had deep local roots. It had been founded by the late U.S. Senator Preston B. Plumb. Upon Plumb’s death, Hood, known as the “Major,” took over as the bank’s president. William Allen White summed up their function eloquently:

The banks fought for business. Their customers lined up behind the banks, and all over this part of the world in the nineties as the economic scenery of the world was changing. Factions, feuds, internal bitternesses, wicked and sometimes bloody rivalries were fostered at the front doors of the banks in towns and cities across the land—at least across our western land.¹⁸

¹⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, (New York: Random House, 1956), 132.

¹⁸ White, *Autobiography*, 263.

Most of the town's leaders aligned themselves with one or the other of these banks. The result was a rather tense conglomeration of egos, especially noticeable around election time. Quarrels between town leaders represented quarrels between bank factions in this small-town alliance system.

William Allen White was beholden to the Hood faction. Several of Hood's associates had lent White the money to buy the *Gazette*. Based on old family friendships, Plumb's estate lent him \$1,000 to get started. Several other people loaned him money for the same reasons. Hood, who had supported Morgan when he owned the *Gazette*, loaned White money as well.¹⁹ White fully understood the way that the factional system worked in Emporia and used it effectively. But the nature of politics and factions were changing in Emporia as many of its original settlers and leading businessmen died or retired. In fact, the system was slowly breaking up on its own as the people who were entrenched on both sides retired from civic interests and business. White was to witness its dissolution in the years after Eskridge died.

Eskridge was firmly entrenched in the old guard and factional system. Allied with Cross and the First National Bank, Eskridge fought many of the factional battles through his newspaper, especially at election time. When White purchased the *Gazette* and started to gain circulation and prominence, Eskridge used him as a whipping boy in the *Republican's* columns. With White acting as surrogate for the Emporia National faction and Eskridge representing the First National faction, the old battles were re-fought. Eskridge faithfully chronicled the factional infighting in the *Republican*.²⁰

¹⁹ White, *Autobiography*, 256-57.

²⁰ For the Eskridge-White battle, see *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 25 January 1896, 16 April 1896, 4 August 1898, 12 January 1899, 16 February 1899, 13 April 1899, 1 June 1899, 8 June 1899, 24 August

Eskridge kept up the fight until his death, but he lost ground to White, who gained national celebrity for “What’s the Matter With Kansas?” White’s success overshadowed Eskridge and the *Republican*. Furthermore, editors in other cities began to question Eskridge’s convictions. Eskridge reprinted their comments and offered his rebuttal frequently, but it was clear from their comments and the *Republican’s* declining subscription base that Eskridge was losing the battle to White and his contemporaries.²¹

By the late 1890s, Eskridge’s alliance with the First National Bank and Charles S. Cross was no longer fortunate. Cross’s bank was overextended, and in order to maintain the credit he needed and the appearance that business was fine at the First National, he had illegally floated a series of worthless bonds. By 1898, creditors were beckoning and Cross was in a precarious position. Only a select few of Emporia’s elite knew that Cross was in trouble. Eskridge, who was heavily involved in the finances of the bank, knew about the difficulty and simultaneously realized that his fortunes were in a precarious position as well. Unfortunately for Cross, Calvin Hood also knew of the bond scheme and its imminent failure. Aware that federal bank examiners were closing in on Cross’s crimes, Hood solicited William Allen White’s assistance. Hood confided to White that he had known of Cross’s troubles for a while and had arrived at a solution. Hood’s proposition was simple: White would go to Cross on behalf of Major Hood and offer to buy the junk bonds, effectively taking control of the bank’s assets and debts. Cross’s banking career would be finished, but the bank would be saved, and the depositors and creditors would be protected. Given Emporia’s political climate and the large debt

1899. For an article outlining some of the factional battles between the *Republican* and other newspapers in Emporia, see *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 6 July 1899.

²¹ Eskridge quoted the following papers in the *Emporia Weekly Republican*: *Kansas City Star*, 31 August 1899; *Lawrence Journal*, 2 January 1896, 29 January 1897; *Syracuse Journal*, 1 June 1899; *Topeka Capital*, 3 August 1899; *Wichita Beacon*, 1 June 1899.

burden, Hood's plan was quite generous. Hood undoubtedly understood the effect of a rival bank's failure; the town as a whole would be distrustful of banking. Hood had the capital to assume the debt, and not incidentally, realized that he could eliminate his major competitor.²²

White's response to the proposition was timid: he told Hood that he did not think he could do it. Hood was disappointed, and White's own disappointment at his timidity years after the incident is painfully evident.²³ White clearly regretted his lack of resolve. In his autobiography, he said, "I was a coward and knew it, and went to the 'Major' in humiliation and told him I just could not do it, that I had tried and it would not come."²⁴ White recalled passing the First National Bank on his way home one afternoon, knowing that the examiner was in the office about ready to close down Cross's bank and cause great loss to many in Emporia. He recalled Cross waving and smiling at him as he passed by, either oblivious to his own demise or keeping up appearances. In White's 1927 autobiographical manuscript, he recalls that he "siddled up twice, even three times to the subject. Suddenly my friend looked down at me and said: 'Bill what in the hell are you trying to say.'" He dropped the subject.²⁵ White's sorrow is clear as he witnessed the demise of the amiable man. Later that afternoon, Cross killed himself at his Sunnyslope

²² White, *Autobiography*, 315-318. Such a story begs for corroborating evidence. Yet the evidence is elusive; to the author's knowledge, White's autobiography contains the only known account of this meeting. White also recalls the conversation in his 1927 autobiographical manuscript. See White, "Early Autobiography" MS, chapter five, p. 23-24. Neither the *Gazette* nor the *Republican* carried accounts of this proposed "back room" deal.

²³ The editor of White's autobiography advised him to remove the paragraph where he describes his disappointment with himself. The paragraph stayed in the final work. See William Allen White, "The Autobiography of William Allen White [ca. 1944]," MS, chapter forty-four, p. 15. William Allen White Collection, University Libraries and Archives, Emporia State University, Emporia, KS.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 316.

²⁵ White, "Early Autobiography" MS, chapter five, p. 24.

farm west of Emporia, setting into motion a painful series of stories and investigations that revealed the extent of Cross's deception and its consequences.²⁶

The failure of the First National Bank shook the town's foundation, including its political structure. The Cross faction dissolved under the stress, and Eskridge, for one, was never the same financially or politically after the failure.²⁷ A level of trust had been lost in the town. Eskridge himself was devastated. He had defended his ally to the end and beyond. Writing in the *Republican*, Eskridge defended Cross repeatedly and attempted to assure Emporians that the bank would survive.²⁸ This was a dream of course; the only man who could have possibly saved the bank was Hood, not Eskridge.

Eskridge's already unsound finances were severely wounded by the bank failure. The *Republican* was in dire financial straits at a time when it was facing increasing competition from White's *Gazette*. Eskridge would have normally responded to competition by increasing the size of his paper and making improvements to its physical plant or redesigning the paper itself. Without sufficient financial resources to mount an offensive, Eskridge was forced to make do with his existing resources and hope that he could keep his advertisers and his contracts. White, however, was doing his best to cut into Eskridge's share of Emporia's newspaper business. In the *Republican*, Eskridge accused White of trying to steal his advertisers by using the bank scandal to make Eskridge and the *Republican* look insolvent.²⁹ In fact, Eskridge was \$65,000 in debt and

²⁶ In the *Emporia Weekly Republican*, see 17 November 1899 to 29 December 1898. Eskridge's coverage is predictably favorable to Cross. In the *Emporia Gazette*, see 16 November 1899 to 22 November 1898. The *Gazette's* coverage is superior, showing "hard luck stories" of Emporians who lost money in the bank.

²⁷ Cross's suicide is recorded in the *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 17 November 1898.

²⁸ *Emporia Daily Republican*, 17 November 1898, 21 November 1898.

²⁹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 16 February 1899.

was going through court proceedings for bankruptcy.³⁰ In February 1899, Eskridge, through a receivership agreement, was forced to turn over some of his property to pay for his debts. He surrendered his farm and his office building, keeping his print shop and the newspaper as a “tool of his trade.” The *Gazette* covered the proceedings far more candidly than did Eskridge in his *Republican*.³¹ Eskridge responded to the embarrassing coverage by saying that “we can inform the Gazette that we have made a fortune and lost it. We lost it by banking on Emporia.”³² His statement was honest; Eskridge had believed that Cross would correct his errors and regain solvency. Eskridge had borrowed large sums of money from several banks in St. Louis and New York to cover his own obligations as well as those of Cross and his cashier. Whether this was based on friendship alone or more questionable motives is unknown, but Eskridge was using his own credit to shore up Cross’s finances. Cross’s suicide shattered Eskridge’s hope of repayment and forced him into bankruptcy, saving only his home and business.³³

Though Eskridge was facing financial ruin and the slow decline of his newspaper, he was endorsing a new progressive Republican reform agenda. By backing this new reform movement, Eskridge’s reflected the changes that were coming about, though few of his contemporaries recognized it. Eskridge supported a bimetal monetary policy for the American economy, a proposition that had roots in the Republican platform. Western

³⁰ Approximately \$1.35 million in 2004 dollars. Eskridge’s business records are no longer extant, but the following sources outline his situation: Bankruptcy proceedings papers, C.V. Eskridge, National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, MO; *Emporia Daily Gazette*, 19 November 1898, 11 February 1899, and 20 February 1899.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Emporia Weekly Republican.*, 8 June 1899.

³³ Bankruptcy proceedings papers, C.V. Eskridge, National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, MO.

Republicans had advocated bimetallism in the past.³⁴ In 1892, the national party “demand[ed] the use of both gold and silver as standard money” in its platform.³⁵ But in 1896, the party declared itself “opposed to the free coinage of silver.”³⁶ Eskridge supported the earlier stance of the Republican Party and supported free silver after the issue had largely disappeared in Kansas politics, especially preceding the 1900 elections. Eskridge protested in the *Republican*:

For forty years the Republican party has been teaching us that bi-metallism—the use of gold and silver on an equal footing—was right. Now, it turns right around and says to us that what it taught was false, illogical, and morally wrong. What do you think of such a teacher? Can you follow it blindly into new heresies? Speak! Or follow, what would be more becoming, observe the silence which nearly always follows the remorse of an accusing conscience.³⁷

Eskridge’s advocacy of a bimetallic standard was one piece of his political philosophy in the 1890s. In 1899, he used the *Republican* to articulate his political philosophy.

Eskridge proposed the bimetallic standard as a means of promoting political and corporate reform. He believed that a bimetal standard would discourage the formation and operation of trusts. He stated that “[e]ither metal alone as a basis for money could be more easily cornered than both as constituting one standard” because the gold supply was so limited. But with a bimetal standard, “supplemented by stringent legislation against combinations to rob the masses, trusts in a few years, would undoubtedly be broken up...” so that the nation’s different sections could develop their own industries.³⁸ Eskridge also proposed additional reforms; he advocated imposing a “heavy income tax” on incomes

³⁴ Scott G. McNall, *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 283, 286.

³⁵ Republican Party Platform of 1892, “The American Presidency Project,” http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/site/docs/doc_platforms.php?platindex=R1892.

³⁶ Republican Party Platform of 1896, “1896: The Republican Party Platform,” <http://projects.vassar.edu/1896/gopplatform.html>.

³⁷ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 16 November 1899.

³⁸ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 1 June 1899. This issue carries a comprehensive outline of Eskridge’s political propositions at this time.

over \$5,000; he advocated legislation to prevent railroads “from discriminating against interior points”; and he advocated legislation that amounted to price controls on products considered “the necessities of life.”³⁹

When the “Boss-Busters” came to power in Kansas after 1900, the year Eskridge died, they shared the progressive reform outlook that Eskridge was articulating at the end of his life. Men like Eskridge’s competitor William Allen White, Edward Hoch, Chester I. Long, and others, many of whom were newspaper men, advocated the break-up of the old Republican political machine in favor of a more reform minded and responsive political system. As historian Robert S. La Forte stated:

The Kansas movement was created by a number of forces, including rising economic expectations and a desire, by developing smaller economic interests, to have a larger share of the marketplace. But just as important in creating unrest were party factionalism, ambition for office, and a sincere interest in furthering democratic idealism.⁴⁰

Eskridge’s opinions anticipated the progressive Republican reform movement that existed in Kansas politics in the first decade of the twentieth century. Yet in his time, Eskridge was seen as a renegade by fellow newspaper editors.⁴¹ The *Kansas City Journal* remarked of Eskridge: “He needs lassoing.” Some of these editors believed he would bolt to the Democratic Party. Others wondered if he was becoming a late-blooming Populist. While none of these editors could quite settle on what Eskridge had become, they all perceived a shift in his political ideology that was hardly veiled. Not all of his colleagues were surprised. One Republican paper stated that Eskridge’s thoughts were “nothing more than what a great many fair minded and thoughtful Republicans are

³⁹ *Wichita Beacon*, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Robert S. La Forte, *Leaders of Reform: Progressive Republicans in Kansas, 1900-1916*, (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 1974), 11.

⁴¹ All are quoted in the *Emporia Weekly Republican* on the following dates: *Syracuse Journal*, 1 June 1899; *Topeka Capital*, 3 August 1899; *Kansas City Star*, 31 August 1899; *Kansas City Journal*, 1 June 1899.

thinking about” and that he was a “pioneer in the revolt against the encouragement the Republican Party is giving to trusts and corporations.”⁴²

Eskridge’s timing in proposing reform confirms that he was anticipating the progressive Republican reform movement rather than the more extreme Populist reforms. The *Eureka Messenger* chastised Eskridge for his tardiness, saying that “[t]here was elegant opportunity and demand in 1896 for such brave utterances as the *Republican* has given forth [denouncing the gold standard] during the past ten days.” Eskridge responded rather sheepishly: “It is never too late to do good.”⁴³ Eskridge was not too late; instead, he was embracing a movement that was distinct from Populism.

The energy of Kansas Populism largely predated Eskridge’s call for reform. However, understanding the Populist reform agenda and the support it enjoyed in Kansas lends valuable information to understanding Eskridge’s politics. The boom era of the first half of the 1880s that Eskridge had participated in came to an abrupt end in the middle part of that decade.⁴⁴ Historian Gene Clanton has summed up the spirit of the boom era well: “The land, they assumed, was there to be conquered. . . Whatever assisted in accomplishing that end was adjudged wise and good and right; whatever stood in the way was considered an obstacle to progress.”⁴⁵ By the winter of 1887-88, the “unfounded optimism” of years past had been crushed by excessive public and private debt, rapid inflation followed by rapid deflation, and adverse climate conditions.⁴⁶ Between sixty and seventy-five percent of Kansas farm acreage was mortgaged when

⁴² *Wichita Beacon* quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 1 June 1899.

⁴³ *Eureka Messenger* quoted in *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 8 June 1899.

⁴⁴ Raymond C. Miller, “The Background of Populism in Kansas,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11 (March 1925): 469-489.

⁴⁵ O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 475.

farm prices began to fall in the late 1880s.⁴⁷ The economic downturn continued into the 1890s and was exacerbated by the Panic of 1893. The adverse economic conditions, especially falling prices “reinforced and exaggerated a condition which would have been serious had prices never fallen, but which, emphasized by that decline, became almost intolerable.”⁴⁸

But economics does not entirely explain the rise of Kansas Populism. Kansas Republicans failed to enact reforms they had promised to make in the late 1880s, inviting a reform-minded third party into Kansas politics.⁴⁹ According to historian Jeffery Ostler, the absence of dynamic two-party competition in Kansas gave the dominant Republicans little to gain by following through with reform initiatives. “A sufficient number of politicians perceived little political risk in ignoring demands for reform and ultimately accepted the arguments of powerful bankers and railroad magnates.”⁵⁰ With the reformers alienated by the Kansas Republicans, they turned to the nascent Populist movement to achieve their political goals.

In the 1890s, Populism had substantial support in Lyon and its surrounding counties, particularly Osage. Ostler estimates Populist support among voters in Lyon, Chase, Morris, Osage, and Coffey counties at 40 percent or greater.⁵¹ Though Populism faded by the late 1890s as a reform movement, the strong support it garnered in its heyday proved that Kansans supported reform. The Progressive Republicans capitalized

⁴⁷ Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 46.

⁴⁸ Miller, “The Background of Populism in Kansas,” 489. See also Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 56; Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 180-186, 196-197.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Ostler, “Why the Populist Party Was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (November 1992): 470.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 471.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 25.

on that mandate. Some of the reforms that Eskridge proposed, especially bimetallism, were issues that Populists supported as well. But Eskridge, like White, saw Populists as hayseed reformers. Although Eskridge's reform beliefs borrowed from Populist rhetoric, they were not only more moderate, but also in line with the Kansas Republican Party.

What explains Eskridge's motives? Eskridge always supported a loose monetary supply. He gave some support to the Greenbackers in the 1870s, long before his advocacy of bimetallism.⁵² Even in this time period, his colleagues accused him of straying from the Republican Party. Explaining Eskridge's call for railroad reform is somewhat more complicated. Eskridge spent many years attempting to lure the railroads to build lines to smaller communities, especially Emporia, so his call for the railroads to end discrimination against interior points is understandable. Yet he did not support the Populist call for government ownership of railroads. He instead proposed reform to ensure competition. However, Eskridge's record on railroad dealings was hardly clean. He was accused of improper dealings with the railroads, particularly the Santa Fe, throughout his later career.⁵³ Perhaps Eskridge had a change of heart late in life when it came to railroad corruption, but it appears that the railroads distanced themselves from him after his bankruptcy. With his unsound finances and declining readership in the *Republican*, Eskridge became steadily less valuable to the railroads.

One factor remains, however. Why did Eskridge embrace reform? His own failures may have served as a notice to him that reform was necessary and right. Though it is difficult to judge whether Eskridge's changing political philosophy was sincere or not, it certainly made good copy in the *Republican*. Fellow editors noticed his attitudes

⁵² *Emporia News*, 31 October 1879.

⁵³ In addition to White's account, cited above, see *Emporia Democrat*, 21 August 1889.

and reprinted his comments in their papers. Eskridge's feud with White, who grew more notable as Eskridge lost recognition, kept a loyal audience from Eskridge's old faction. Eskridge may have recognized that his opinions and diatribes were his best effort to attract people to the *Republican*—and to him.

In the aftermath of his bankruptcy, Eskridge made one last effort to save his newspaper and compete with White's *Gazette*. In November 1899, Eskridge completed a new and more modest office building to replace the building he lost to receivership.⁵⁴ How he financed the construction is unclear, although it appears that he had settled his First National Bank affairs through the bankruptcy agreement as best as he could.⁵⁵ The move is classic Eskridge; when he felt pressure from competitors or detractors, he normally enhanced his newspaper somehow. But Eskridge soon found himself in declining health. In March 1900, he fell ill. By April, he began to seek medical attention for his condition, which was later diagnosed as cirrhosis of the liver.⁵⁶ No mention of the illness was made in the *Republican* until June, when the nature of the illness was disclosed in a cryptic article. Though the writer asserted that he was "slowly improving," it appears that Eskridge was not running the paper from his office any longer and was bedridden.⁵⁷ The next week, some reminiscences of Eskridge's old days were printed, in preparation for the inevitable. The end came on Sunday, July 15, 1900. On Thursday, Eskridge had requested a box containing some important papers to get his affairs in order. The box actually contained a .38-caliber revolver. Early Sunday morning, Eskridge

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1899.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 February 1899.

⁵⁶ The first mention of Eskridge's declining health (*Emporia Weekly Republican*, 7 June 1900) states that he was suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, but his obituaries state that he suffered from liver cancer. A sufficient explanation is lacking, which is common with many nineteenth century medical diagnoses.

⁵⁷ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 7 June 1900.

awoke and asked his family to leave the room and go to bed. Shortly after leaving the room, they heard two gunshots. His son rushed in the room and found Eskridge mortally wounded from two self-inflicted gunshots.⁵⁸

Monday's newspapers reported the death to a stunned community. Eskridge's *Republican* carried stories and eulogies to its dead editor. White's *Gazette* wrote the following:

On that cold autumn day when Emporia bade goodbye to Charley Cross, there stood apart from the throng that blackened the green lawn near the dead man's home, a stocky old man, with a rusty thin overcoat buttoned tightly over his chest, his soft hat was pulled down over his face—rigid with a grief too powerful to display. The man was Governor Eskridge and no one in all the congregation grieved more deeply than he. For the funeral of Cross was the end of Eskridge.⁵⁹

White's sad, poetic words were painfully true in many ways. Eskridge never fully recovered after Cross's death and the ensuing bank scandal. White gained much from the event, although he stated years later that he felt guilt over the matter. The *Gazette* became Emporia's flagship newspaper shortly after Eskridge's death, but White's obituary reflects the tense relationship between the two rival editors.

The *Gazette* published a tribute to Eskridge a week later, titled "The Sound of a Voice That is Still," that contained various eulogies from newspapers across the state.⁶⁰ Several interesting conclusions can be drawn from the editors' remarks. The fact that Eskridge committed suicide seemed not to bother the majority of people; in fact, he was lauded for ending his life with dignity and honor. One newspaper "congratulate[d] humanity on the fact that Mr. Eskridge had courage enough to shoot himself; when a man is hopelessly ill, and suffering great pain, suicide is not an offense against morals or

⁵⁸ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 19 July 1900.

⁵⁹ *Emporia Gazette*, 16 July 1900.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 July 1900. White used the same line, borrowed from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Break, Break, Break" in his obituary of Charles S. Cross. See *Emporia Gazette*, 16 November 1899.

common sense.”⁶¹ The consensus was that Eskridge had died nobly and saved himself and others from grief and pain. Only White’s *Gazette* obituary attributed Eskridge’s suicide in part to mental depression over the bank failure. His colleagues also noted his years of work in politics in laudatory terms that only the dead are afforded. Their comments reflected little of the acrimony that had existed years ago. Instead the writers recognized Eskridge’s achievements and his will to win. One paper’s eulogy praised his political acumen, while showing a humorously limited understanding of the man: “He was a man of few words and while he seemed to take small notice of things he was always alert with mind and eye and had an intimate knowledge of local and state affairs.”⁶² That a newspaper would refer to Eskridge as a man of few words showed the extent of deference in the obituary.

Eskridge’s final years illustrate the limits of his political career. His career was significant at the local level, but he never attained the success that some of his colleagues and contemporaries achieved. Eskridge was never a U.S. Senator; that position fell to Preston B. Plumb, a man Eskridge first met when he worked at the *Herald of Freedom* in the 1850s. He never became governor; he was the lieutenant governor for only a short time and was passed over for a gubernatorial nomination. His most successful political enterprise was his editorship of the *Emporia Republican*, but even in this position, Eskridge was edged out by another man. William Allen White, in the infancy of his career, overshadowed Eskridge at the twilight of his. Eskridge died a financial failure, with only a portion of the influence he had once possessed. Facing changing times and changing fortunes, Eskridge survived as long as he could, then ended his life violently,

⁶¹ *Atchison Globe*, quoted in *Emporia Gazette*, 23 July 1900.

⁶² *Topeka Journal*, quoted in *Emporia Gazette*, 23 July 1900.

but on his own terms. But in spite of his limited success and his failures, Eskridge anticipated the reform of Kansas Republican politics that came in the decade after his death, which was the significant achievement of the last years of his career. Eskridge's use of his party organ newspaper allowed him to articulate his ideas to a wide audience as long as they would listen. But Eskridge's final years also show the darker side of politics and business. His financial failure was the result of questionable practices and a strict adherence to a bitterly factional political system. Eskridge played the political game hard, but in the end, he faced scandal, ruin, and the loss of power as a result of his actions. Indeed, mixing business with politics had its pitfalls for Charles Vernon Eskridge.

CHAPTER FOUR

EPILOGUE

Eskridge's death marked the end of an era in Emporia's political and business history. William Allen White quickly became the town's beloved editor. It was White's vision of Emporia as the Athens of the plains that was projected to the nation, not Eskridge's simpler pioneer boosterism. White's progressive reform agenda, which Eskridge had anticipated but not fully participated in, replaced the old factional political system that Eskridge had operated within. As for the *Republican*, it limped along for several years after Eskridge's death. His daughter Mattie edited the newspaper for a short time after his death, but in December 1900, the family sold the *Republican* to Albert Strong.¹ The *Gazette's* competition was too much for the struggling newspaper. After twenty-four years of business, the paper ceased publication on June 3, 1905.

While Eskridge's rival editor William Allen White lived for over forty years after Eskridge's demise, Jacob Stotler died less than a year after Eskridge.² He had returned to Emporia in 1897 after a series of financial failures in Wellington and Fort Scott, Kansas. He published the *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County* around 1898, which like Eskridge's Search Light columns, was a sort of valedictory to the Emporia community. In many ways, the two old adversaries were much alike; they were both newspaper editors, both had insatiable political ambition, and in the end, both died in financial ruin. In history, both have been relegated to obscurity.

¹ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 13 December 1900.

² *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 31 January 1901.

Local politicians like Eskridge are often forgotten. Their work was merely one piece of a larger whole. There are few reminders of Eskridge and his significance aside from the *Emporia Republican* and the small Wabaunsee County, Kansas, town that bears his name because he purchased the first town lot. Eskridge gained recognition in his time, but never achieved the level of political fame that would gain him lasting attention.

Eskridge's family did not remain in Emporia following his death. Because his son Edward suffered from tuberculosis, the family made their way west, settling for a time in New Mexico and finally locating near Los Angeles, California.³ In 1927, Mary Eliza Eskridge, who married C.V. Eskridge on December 5, 1861, died at the age of ninety-two. The Eskridges are buried at Emporia's Maplewood Cemetery under a large granite monument with the misspelled inscription "Charles Vernom Eskridge, 1833-1900." The family never made an effort to correct the erroneous inscription. The marker is a testament to how quickly the people of Emporia and Kansas forgot the man they once knew as "Governor."

³ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 10 December 1903, 10 March 1904.

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APPENDIX A

Search Light and “The Genesis of our Squatter Sovereignty”: Charles Vernon Eskridge’s Reminiscences of Early Emporia and Lyon County History

The twelve columns in this appendix are some reminiscences of early Emporia and Lyon County history as written by Charles Vernon Eskridge in the *Emporia Daily Republican*. While the columns are not signed by Eskridge, but instead with the name “Search Light,” Eskridge is almost certainly the author for the following reasons. The accounts contain knowledge that only Eskridge could have known. Furthermore, the writing style is clearly that of Eskridge. Though much of the material in the Search Light columns is reminiscences, Eskridge recalls many of the early notable events in Emporia and Breckinridge County.

A word about style is necessary. The columns are presented exactly as they were printed in the *Republican*. Spelling errors, punctuation, and grammatical errors have been preserved.

The author acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Sam Dicks, Professor Emeritus of History at Emporia State University, in obtaining these articles.

Forty Years Since.

In this selection, Eskridge discusses the early Breckinridge County town sites, early gathering places in Emporia, and his own business, the Fick & Eskridge dry goods store. Through a humorous story, Eskridge reveals the competition in Emporia’s dry goods business.

A struggling assortment of a dozen or more cabins, a trader or two, a treeless prairie about three miles wide margined by two water courses, a town well, a public hall by the name of its enterprising proprietor McElfresh, a Masonic temple, though little suggestive of the name, a lonely little church doing work both sacred and secular, the omnipresent real estate office, of course a hotel also combining functions of both the spirit and the flesh, preaching in the office Sundays, a printing office, devil included, up stairs. Such was Emporia, forty years ago.

McElfresh hall was a pretentious, (called two story) edifice. The upper room was the hall. Stand in the center you could swing a cat, if not a large one, horizontally without striking either of the side walls. Over head it was quite another thing; a tall man had to unroll himself carefully or he might break a rafter, also develop some uncharted phrenological features in his cranium. This hall held the gatherings of the F. F. E’s, also for several years those of the Methodists. The common herd, the sans culottes, had their revels in a shed near the site of the Corner book store. One or two other religious

societies made attempts with more or less success “to go in and possess the land” and the golden calf had a few votaries.

Your readers, however, must not for a moment assume that Emporia was the only metropolitan prophecy that had an ignis fatuus existence in the buffalo and bluestem of the country. Townsites were staked out so close together that at times they overlapped and caused no end of inconvenience to conflicting jurisdictions, Agnes City, Americus, Breckenridge Center, Forest Hill, Hartford, Attica, Kansas Center (Kansas was spelled with a “z” then) Columbia, Fremont, Russell and a few others divided the honors with Emporia as trade centers, prospective county seats and embryo state capitals. An enthusiastic lot of cheerful young optimists gathered about the evening campfires of their staked out pre-emptions, extolling the excellencies of their favored locations and investing their incoming fortunes. The plow now glides serenely over the surface of many of these booming town sites, and their names are becoming legendary traditions. But, in those days it was holy ground, needing no unconsumed burning bush to inspire suitable respect and practical reverence at least, on the part of the incorporators.

Fick & Eskridge were members of one of the trading firms here then, doing business on the site of the Saving’s Bank, trustworthy themselves, doubtless, but perhaps a little too sceptical regarding outside human nature. The Pike’s Peak excitement was at its high water mark, Ben Parker, whom the older readers of the REPUBLICAN all know, was a patron of the rival concern of Proctor. Ben wanted some molasses. To make life worth living in those days depended less on the liver than on molasses. Proctor was out of molasses. Kansas City, then Westport, was anything from a week to three weeks distance depending on the roads and rivers, and Kansas City was the nearest wholesale source of supply. Ben had no money but he must have molasses. In a moment of desperation Parker started for the rival emporium of Fick & Eskridge. He saw the future Lt. Governor, but the governor, like Pharoah, hardened his heart and would not let the molasses go. He knew that Pike’s Peak was stretching its arms longingly toward Emporia and he feared the molasses might heat the blood in Ben’s veins to the fever point and in a moment of mental aberration he might do as the balance of the community were fast doing, start for the new El Dorado. Parker went home with an empty jug, that is empty of molasses, but with a heart full of rancor and bitterness. Ben is opposed to trusts on principle, but is not opposed to being trusted. However, it is a long road that has no turn. On the way home, Parker had, in some way, become possessed of a land warrant. This was before the passage of the Homestead act. He met an immigrant hunting land, and, perhaps, to show his contempt of the scepticism of calf worshippers, and also because in that primitive country man’s word was in general much better than his bond, Ben promptly turned over his warrant to the homeseeker on some sort of a verbal understanding, which in effect was that the man, if he found land to suit him, was to pay the value of the warrant into Fick & Eskridge’s store. Neither party seemed to regard the transaction of sufficient importance to say anything to Fick or Eskridge about it. Some days or weeks later, happening in the village, Fick called Ben into the store and counted out to him \$160 and then blandly inquired if they could do anything for him. Parker, however, thought not. Proctor in the meantime had got in the molasses, and he said that

so many of the business men were going to Pike's Peak that he was afraid to risk his money in commercial transactions and had about concluded to buy it.

SEARCH LIGHT.

TO BE CONTINUED.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, August 31, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

II.

Eskridge recalls the demise of Madison County in this installment. Madison County shared land in what is now Lyon, Chase, and Greenwood counties. In the region's early days, Breckinridge County was attached to Madison County for judicial purposes, a sore point with many of Emporia's first settlers. The northern boundary of this county was the present-day Logan Avenue in Emporia. He also recollects early mail service to Emporia and the city's first Fourth of July celebration.

Struggling (the term is almost forgotten) what the late Stephen A. Douglas called squatter sovereigns had settled along the Cottonwood river for eight or ten miles, some of whom had been there for a year or two. Tradition even has the hardihood to hint at a school being taught a little west of what is now known as Thompson's ford. Be that as it may, a number of settlers had located land warrants, or in some other way, become possessed of holdings along this stream. I think Mr. Soden was interested in a mill site and a future - state capital in the brush out there somewhere, like other historic, or prehistoric cities, such as Babylon, Ninevah, Thebes and a few others, the site of this claimant for metropolitan honors in a matter of speculation, its remains having long since crumbled into dust. What buried hopes, wrecked ambitions and ruined lives went out with the decadence of Russell we have no means of knowing. The buffalo was too much of a nomad to be depended on. The coyotes did not make the most desirable class of citizens. The prairie dog did better, but even he was a failure. Mr. Soden, after sitting, like Marius amid the ruins of Carthage, for a while, finally came to Emporia and Russell was no more. At the time of which we write the Cottonwood, with its scattering settlers and overlapping townsites was in another and more important county, a county, however, that is not now on the map, at least that of Kansas. This county, Madison by name, had a much better status than Breckenridge. It had an unquestioned county seat, which has, also gone to that bourne whence no traveler returns, and the site thereof has this year, probably some one hundred bushels, more or less, of corn to the acre.

At this time, though Madison was a full fledged county and to the unutterable loathing and disgust of the Breckinridge contingent, this county was made by legislative enactment an annex thereto for judicial purposes. Southern Breckenridge however, did more than "hang its harp upon the willows." The enterprising cow boys and town companies of that region were not in the habit of playing second fiddle to anybody. The Emporia town company and its clansmen, in fact, originated the Republican imperialistic policy, and having hoodwinked, until too late, the Filipinos living along the Cottonwood bottoms, they went in and possessed that land, extending with legislative concurrence, Breckenridge's boundary, three miles to the south. This act annexed Mose Coppock, the

Patty's mill site and the Kirkendall family with a few others, to Breckenridge county. Moses wasn't here then and didn't arrive until a year or two later, being engaged in wrestling with Shibboleths of Missouri speech preparatory to an examination by a board of philological experts from that state as he came up the river. Harvey Fowler's Carolina drawl had got him through all right, but Coppeck was not from either of the Carolinas, and was also naturally averse to a condition of things that impelled even one of the governors of those states to utter his celebrated protest. Then Coppeck had too much of a Dreyfus appearance to pass, as Harvey Fowler did, on his good looks and Carolina accent. However, the land of promise had to have its lawyer, and Mose came in plenty time enough to more than once lay down the law to a court house theatrical starring combination.

The accession of this three mile strip was of great advantage to Emporia and gave the town considerable prestige in the county seat strife then raging on almost every quarter section in the county. But, we are anticipating. At the time we now have in mind Emporia was still in her swaddling clothes. Columbia, a mile or two south east, had a post office, while Emporia only had a box in the Lawrence post office some eighty miles away. It was some distance to go for your mail but the Emporia people preferred it to recognizing Columbia as a better town. The mail come from Lawrence as best it could, depending on individual enterprise and was generally left at Fick & Eskridge's store. It was a very informal arrangement. You went into the store and helped yourself. First come, first served.

Patriotism was abnormally developed in those days in Kansas and Emporia was not a whit behind her rival towns. Publishing the only newspaper in this part of the state the Emporia environment had an advantage as a boom center, not possessed by many of her ambitious but poorer rivals. Her first fourth of July celebration was a gorgeous affair. Having no natural shade, an immense rustic bower was constructed near where the Santa Fe freight house now stands. Patriotism effervesced every where, from the tongues of orators, from the joints of beef, from the strings of fiddles, from the feet of terpsichoreans, and, we believe, from the necks of bottles. It seemed strange to see. In the midst of the great arid barrens, surrounded by but half friendly Indians persecuted and outraged by an unfriendly natural and territorial administration, their dearest hopes and beliefs trampled upon, their political privileges abused, by such an enthusiastic demonstration. Like Mark Tapley they had a cheerful philosophy, The sun the next morning found the festivities still in progress. But such was and is life in the west.

SEARCH LIGHT.

TO BE CONTINUED.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 2, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

III.

Eskridge discusses early attitudes to slavery in Breckinridge County. He describes the handling of a runaway slave that was brought up on horse stealing charges. Unfortunately, because the runaway was caught by the law, the Underground Railroad was unable to help him. But could a chattel slave be prosecuted by law for a crime?

When the first of these articles was penciled no thought but that of whiling away an hour was in the author's mind. The subject, however, grows upon him as the scroll of time unrolls. It is not the purpose, however, of these pencilings to aim at itemized exactness, neither chronologically nor mathematically; recollection is too treacherous for that. We do hope, however, to give a sort of panoramic view of old times – the Genesis of our squatter sovereignty “in the beginning” – with such living pictures as we bring before the footlights of our Lyon county stage.

In view of our present purpose, the title of these papers, though correct enough now, may become inappropriate and need amendment. But the mood may not last, and we will make no changes yet. When we recall the black, brown, golden and even fiery crowns of thirty years ago and see the snowy turbans on most of them today, and look over the hill to the northwest, upon that silent city of marble and granite, whose beginning we saw, we feel like sympathizing with the genial poet, Whittier, when he wrote:

“O, time and change! – with hair so gray
As was my sire's that winter day,
How strange it seems with so much gone
Of life and love, to still live on.”

Moralizing, however, is far from the scope of our purpose. With the grammar of in its autumn the past is always beautiful and the future generally hopeful, be, the present what it may. Even Libby prison, as reflected by Chaplain McCabe in one of his entertaining lectures, has only a bright side. We, then, in our backward look over the blue stem and buffalo grass of our county's prairie, expect to see but very little of the alkali and gumbo that here and there mars its surface.

It is true, though that the contest between the civilizations of Plymouth Rock and Jamestown was on, Massachusetts and South Carolina had clashed in far away Kansas. The Pine and the Palm had interlocked their branches. The Bible and the rifle were coming up the Missouri and across the plains of Iowa, only to be met by the negro, enslaved, and the borderers from Missouri and Arkansas; John Brown on the Marais des Cygnes; the later-on followers of Quantrel at or near Westport; the United States military forces acting as a sort of military buffer between, but its directing force on the southern side. These darker tints somewhat shadow the picture. Henry Ward Beecher preached the church militant from Plymouth pulpit and illustrated the workings of the southern auction block from the same sacred platform. Horace Greeley hurled his anathemas from the editorial tripod of the Tribune. Lincoln and Douglas fought over again the verbal battle from the forums of Illinois. The southern slogan was equally defiant. Many compromises were talked of, but the days of compromise and arbitration were fast passing. The skirmish lines of the opposing systems had already met on the Missouri, the Kansas and the Marais des Cygnes.

Luckily, Breckenridge county was somewhat aside the point of import, and on but two or three occasions did our early pioneers feel any of the direct evils resulting from the existing status. The late Joel Haworth, Mark Patty, W. T. Soden, J. V. Randolph and a few others saw that their branch of the underground railway was kept ready for active service, but in general the Breckenridge county political trials and scrimmages were over

the county seat location, postoffice and such. A “Dreyfus” case came once before a local justice over a runaway negro accused of stealing, which, as told by Mark Patty, is as follows:

“Mr. Haworth was living on the hillside, some miles south of Emporia, and looking toward the southeast one morning saw what appeared to indicate work in his line – a runaway negro heading for the Haworth station. He had hardly arrived when his pursuers appeared upon the scene. The darkey’s horse giving out some miles back, and the case being pressing, a one-sided exchange was effected by the negro leaving his exhausted animal and picking up another without its owner’s knowledge. The slave hunters, become aware of this fact in their chase, got out a warrant against our runaway, knowing that whatever might be the popular opinion against slave catching, horse stealing was the worst crime in the border calendar. Armed with this warrant, the darkey was apprehended, taken before the nearest justice, and the trial promptly commenced. The facts regarding the stolen horse were clearly proven, the darkey’s legal status also incidently established. There was clearly no chance for the underground railway company to do any business for this passenger. The justice, in summing up the case, stated that the proof was conclusive. There was, however, a doubt in his mind as to the responsibility of the prisoner. Under the laws of the United States the prisoner was a chattel. Clearly, a chattel could not steal, or at least be legally responsible to the law for seeming theft. Holding this view of the case, and the complaint being for horse stealing and not for the return of slave property, he (the justice) would be compelled to discharge the prisoner. It is, perhaps, enough to say that that colored man did not go back to slavery.”

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 5, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

IV.

In this installment, Eskridge recalls the dubious methods that settlers used to acquire land in Kansas Territory. In one instance, a man who was not of age to preempt land adopted a “son” to satisfy the legal requirements. Or, in another case, a husband and wife divorced so that they could both preempt land—and then remarried.

When the five Lawrence gentlemen, Allen, Brown, Deitzler, Hornsby and Plumb, located the old Indian title, which was called, I believe, a float, and which I understand to be the Emporia townsite north of Sixth avenue, between East and West streets, and filed upon the half section south and adjoining, Mr. C. V. Eskridge, then a young man of 22 or 23 years, was appointed the resident agent of the town company. The town was then seen purely as a mirage, existing in the teeming fancy of the company and their accredited agent – dead buffalo grass under foot, an arching sky overhead. A river valley, or, rather, two, trended to the east for a few miles, then joined and bore to the south. From Lawrence to this point extended a seemingly desert plain. Water was a desideratum and yet a year or more elapsed before water was found on the Emporia townsite. In fact for more than a dozen years the Neosho and Cottonwood rivers were the sources of supply, barrels and wagons being the means of transportation and from twenty five to fifty cents

a barrel the market price. The first well was dug by John Hammond, lately deceased, near where the city building now stands. It was a God-send to Emporia, as many failures had almost discouraged our ambitious and hopeful young town company. Sometime later water was struck on what was known as Bingham or Brigham avenue. This well was not far from Miller and Call's bakery on seventh avenue and Commercial street. Capt. Heritage of the Emporia National bank, was a well digger in an early day here. Mr. Heritage came in 1857 a young man. It is a question with the older residents whether he was twenty one, or of age. The law then prescribed that a person must be of age or the head of a family to preempt land. Capt. Heritage – we give him his present title – and another young fellow by the name of Proctor, Proctor a sure enough minor and Heritage's age a matter of speculation, located land, at least the Captain did, west of town near Moon creek. Dan Hammond, a half grown boy, was about the only youngster on the townsite. Dan, with his parents's consent, doubtless, went to live with Proctor and Heritage, and was adopted by one of them, (Proctor I believe) in order to make him, Proctor, not Dan, the head of a family and so comply with the law governing land entries. Those were halcyon days for Dan and tradition says he enjoyed them hugely, living on the fat of the land, slept between Heritage and Proctor and was made much of while the need lasted.

Well, the boys had to have water. So Heritage dug, Proctor managed the windlass, rope and tub, and Dan, when he felt like it, gathered stones. It is not positively known by the writer whether the captain was first-class with the pick and the spade, but both tradition and Captain Heritage affirm that Proctor was anything but a success at his end of the rope. The way the dirt rattled back on L. T.'s head as Proctor raised the bucket was probably the result of accidental causes, but we have our doubts.

On one occasion tub and all went rattling back in the hole, and then the way Heritage flattened himself against the side of that shaft was a marvel. A lath, or, more correctly, a piece of siding standing vertically against the side of the pit would represent the captain's effort to economize space. Proctor, notwithstanding the possibilities of the situation, was so convulsed with laughter that had not the captain been some fifteen feet under ground, Dan Hammond would probably have been left an orphan then and there. It took Proctor some half an hour to get himself together again and Heritage about as long to cool off.

Writing of this peculiar way of becoming the head of a family, as an aid to getting a free hold, recalls another tradition which says that the late Hon. S. N. Wood – an ex-speaker in the house of representatives, – and his wife divorced themselves, each took up claims, and then re-married.

The Heritage-Proctor plan, also, seems to have been a success though whether Capt. Heritage found the truth, said to be at the bottom of wells, is a matter of some speculation. The captain evidently does not think so, for on a more recent occasion after listening to a story – a bit of history – related by the undersigned, he blandly reversed a badge pinned to the lapel of his coat, which read "I am somewhat of a liar myself," but this is a digression and only shows to what banking will bring a Kansan. More anon.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 8, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

V.

County seat battles in Kansas often resulted in bloodshed. Fortunately, Breckinridge County's battle was considerably tamer. Eskridge recalls the early county seats and the efforts to relocate the seat to Emporia from Americus. He recalls his role in the matter, stating that he kept the county records in his residence at Emporia. The reader will notice a reference to General Frederick Funston and the Twentieth Kansas in this and later selections. At the time Eskridge wrote the Search Light columns, the United States was fighting in the Spanish-American War.

Agnes City was the first capital of Breckenridge county. Agnes City was almost as near the north line of the county as Emporia was to the south line. This was before Madison county was disintegrated, and the county was twenty-two by thirty-nine, as now. Then, by methods that were never consented to, Americus, near the west line, was chosen, and for a time recognized. To maintain their advantage ground the people of that section established a paper called the Sentinel, of which the late Judge Ruggles was the editor. Americus also – not that there was any need, but to be abreast of the procession – erected a log jail and began to put on metropolitan airs.

At this time Mr. Eskridge had assumed about all the offices of record in the county. By either election or appointment he was county clerk, register of deeds, clerk of the United States court, clerk of the district court, deputy postmaster, notary public, and had a few other official strings tied to him. The county and court records he kept with him at his residence. (boarding place) in Emporia, declining to risk them at the county seat. To attend the sessions of the county commissioners at Americus, he, other means failing, walked back and forth carrying the records that he needed on his back.

In these days, we read much of the adaptability of the Kansas boys to an aquatic life, how General Funston and the Twentieth Kansas swam rivers. In fact this morning, (Saturday) the writer saw a cartoon in the Kansas City Journal, of General Funston breasting the Pacific ocean on his way home from the Philippines – a convenient mile post or buoy informing the reader that it was 4,000 miles to the United States. Now, while giving due credit to the Kansas boys at Manila it would be unjust to the truth of history not to state that the Twentieth came by ducklike habits and instincts naturally. The earlier Kansas settlers also took to water upon occasions, and the Kansas News records that “Governor Eskridge even swam the Neosho when high.” The statement is a little ambiguous, but giving it either meaning, it was a perilous feat, and the governor should rank with Funston, Jonah, Leander and the boys of the Twentieth as a mighty Neptune.

However, the county seat did not remain long at Americus. Three hundred dollars, partly in trade at Fick & Eskridge's store, and a share (ten lots) by the Emporia Town company, weaned from his allegiance Judge Baker, one of Americus' strongest backers, and an election shortly after vested in Emporia the county seat title. The Americus Sentinel soon suspended, and Judge Ruggles, its editor, removed to Emporia, residing on the site of, but in the frame dwelling now just north of the Whitley hotel.

Judge Ruggles – he died some dozen years since – was one of the strongest of the lawyers of the Kansas bar. Gruff and abrupt, seemingly harsh, but a true diamond and a good citizen. He has often been misquoted, or rather misinterpreted, concerning a well

remembered and seemingly irreverent expression said to have emanated from him, as being his idea of his professional obligations. It is this, "I would sue Christ if I could get service on him." In the days of long ago, there lived on one of the rivers, a German who went by the name of Christ, but pronounced crist, giving the i the short sound, whether this was the German's christened name or surname the writer does not know. At all events Christ was arrested on some trumped up charge by covetous parties, after the manner of Naboth, in the vineyard story. He was convicted and sentenced to ten days in jail. In those days in jail meant in the custody of the sheriff, as the county had no jail at Emporia. The sheriff at that time was, I think, a gentleman by the name of Samuel J. Mantor, and punishment consisted in the convicted following the sheriff around dog-fashion. In this case I believe that Christ gave bond. He was an ignorant credulous fellow, whose fears were so worked upon that on the ninth day, having but one day more to serve, he was persuaded by the Ahabs and Jezebels aforesaid to forfeit his bond and flee. Of course, his bondsmen followed him, stripped him – at least so the story goes – of all he had and gobbled up his land. Christ was seen no more in the county and further service could not be had on him. Judge Ruggles probably was not as irreverent as he has been construed from the before mentioned statement.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 12, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

VI.

Eskridge engages in a bit of personal aggrandizement in this selection by recalling his efforts to gain the state university for Emporia. While he failed at this effort, he did succeed in securing the Kansas State Normal School for the city. Eskridge skillfully exploited charges of bribery against the Lawrence delegation in their efforts to gain the university. By threatening an inquiry, Eskridge paved the way to securing the normal school for Emporia.

Though anticipating a little chronologically, in this number we will give a version of Lyon County's great legislative school fight. Hon. C. V. Eskridge, Hon J. W. Loy and Hon. F. R. Page ((Mr. Page died some years since) represented the county in the lower house and Hon. P. B. Maxson in the Senate. Kansas had just doffed her territorial short clothes and become a star in the sisterhood of states and the legislature was engaged in arranging for and locating the educational, charitable and penal institutions that go with statehood – "noblesse oblige" you know. The valley of the Kansas had several candidates for some of these institutions. The west bank of the Missouri had several more. The historic city of Lawrence, with her nymphs of mountain, Oread, claimed the location of the state university. Manhattan to the west in the same valley, the agricultural college. Emporia, way out on the frontier, eighty miles to the southwest, with perhaps two dozen cabins, surrounded by an alkali, gumbo barren. Upon what pretense of equity or justice did she found any claim to anything beyond the mere privileges of existence. So when Mr. Eskridge put in a claim for Emporia as a suitable location for the state university and had the cheek to quote the state constitution as affirming that the University when established should be centrally located, he was laughed at and his

pretensions sneered at, and he, himself, most soundly ignored by the Lawrence contingent. It was conceded, as a matter of course, that the state was two hundred miles wide and four hundred long, that Lawrence was geographically in the northeast corner but no one besides Mr. Eskridge could have thought for a moment – so argued the Mt. Oreads – that the convention which adopted the constitution meant that it should be construed literally and that the University could be located in a barren waste which would not, nor could ever be, inhabited by anybody but cow boys and wild cattle. The idea was preposterous.

Eskridge was even antagonized by his colleague, Mr. Page, who was from Neosho Rapids, which enterprising community had built itself upon the ruins of two townsites, Italia and Florence, and thought itself bound phoenix like, to immortality and a consequent renown to which Emporia had no pretensions.

Mr. Eskridge, however, was a politician and laid his plans, formed alliances and combinations, and in the committee of the whole was finally counted out by the casting vote of the chairman. It was a wonderful fight for Emporia, handicapped by division in her own councils, an unknown and almost unheard of frontier hamlet coming within one vote of wresting this great prize from the, even then, historic city of Lawrence. But this was not all. Three of the votes, if not more, that were cast for Lawrence were claimed to have been bought, and the sum named. The result of this contest gave Mr. Eskridge great prestige. Emporia was offered about all the charitable institutions then to be located which, however, were declined. Mr. Eskridge then introduced a bill for the establishment of a state normal school at Emporia. Its prospect for passage seemed infinitesimal. The session was almost over, and some four hundred bills were on the calendar. Fortunately for Lyon county the third bill from the top of the calendar was the one introduced by a Lawrence or Douglas county member, changing the boundaries of three or four counties. This gentleman, not wishing to have the university vote investigated, was glad to give his bill away. On motion of Mr. Eskridge, and after the exacting [*sic*, enacting] clause of this bill was stricken out and a copy of his normal school bill substituted, the title was then changed and Lyon county secured the normal school. It was snatching victory from the jaws of defeat and reflected great credit on Gov. Eskridge both as a strategist and a worker. In this connection I may as well mention that Mr. Eskridge was then and there given the military grade of colonel and attached to the staff of Governor Carney and is today by reason of seniority the ranking colonel in the state. To the Governor also belongs the credit of originating the method of building school houses the law for which is now upon the statutes of Kansas. He introduced and passed the first law of the kind ever passed in the United States, in the Kansas legislature providing for the building of the old Constitution street school house by issuing bonds. It was a local law and passed as such, but afterwards became and is today the settled policy and the only way provided for the erection of public school buildings by the various school districts.

In conclusion, let me mention a little incident which, while not pertinent to the subject matter of this particular paper, can be included as occurring about this time, and as indicating that the women of Lyon county, as well as the men, were both as courageous and as good swimmers as Gen. Funston and the Twentieth Kansas. The women of Lyon county in the auld lang syne, were every bit as courageous, progressive and practical as their brothers of the pioneer age.

At the time of which I now write S. J. Mantor was sheriff of the county. Having some papers to serve along the northern border he deputized his son, Tom, to make the trip. Young Mantor started with a horse and one of the old fashioned high wheel sulkies, forded the streams and creeks in his way, arrived at his destination without trouble, served his papers and started on his return trip. Of course, at this time roads were little more than trails, fences and guide posts were non-existent, the sun and the compass being about the only guides. A heavy rain had fallen and on reaching the Spencer ford, a little north of Bruner's I think, Tom Mantor found the stream high but as he thought favorable for his high wheel cart. If he could have kept the straight and narrow path of the crossing he might have succeeded but in the turmoil of the water either he or his horse lost his head and he was soon out of his depth. Tom, for a wonder could not swim and was likely to perish. Not so, however. Two young women, who opportunely arrived on their ponies, without hesitating a moment grasped the situation and plunged in, seized Mantor's horse by the head, turned him forcibly back upon the roadbed of the ford and got him ashore. Having rescued Tom, they doubtless regarded him as their captive, and tradition asserts that they then and there made him promise to marry one or both of them. His marriage, although a most natural result of such an incident, did not take place. One of the young ladies afterwards married a youth who afterwards, like Whittington, became lord mayor of Emporia., and is now in the lumber and coal trade. The other is a sister of Mrs. Judge Ruggles and Miss Mattie Spencer, a former teacher in the Normal and our city schools. Who will say hereafter that the Kansas women are not "ducks?"

But the end is not yet, and we expect, as we progress in these articles, to introduce other Captain Boyntons to the public.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 14, 1899]

Forty Years Ago.

VII.

Esckridge chronicles the social life of some of Emporia's prominent citizens in the early days of Breckinridge County. He also discusses some of the settlers that arrived and where they came from.

In the rescue of Tom Mantor, mentioned in my last, the inference was conveyed that both the young ladies plunged into the swirling flood. The girls, however, were wiser than that. Dispatching Miss Harris back to the nearest house for aid, Miss Armour swam the stream on her pony. Young Mantor was near the southern shore, his horse and cart headed for the Gulf of Mexico and he yelling like a Comanche. On reaching the other shore she pressed a sapling until Mantor could reach it, while she tried to save his horse. At this juncture a mail carrier by the name of Elliott appeared on the scene, and Miss Armour, relinquished the horse to him and pulled Tom out, thus saving the whole outfit. Miss Armour had to ride several miles to Emporia in her wet clothes, and was even then unable to get an exchange – women or extra clothes must have been scarce on the townsite. Miss Armour, therefore, had to ride back as far as Rinker's ford, again swimming the Neosho in order to get dry garments. Don't talk to me about Funston and the Twentieth, after this.

The old timers, also, had other amusements besides swimming bank-full streams. They could use their feet and arms in other ways upon occasion. A settler on the west side, having built a one-room cabin of aristocratic proportions, say sixteen feet square, concluded to give a dance. I believe he also had two daughters, an unusual inducement in those days, and all the town and surrounding country wanted to go, among others, the late United States senator from this city. He was not at that time anticipating his future honors. Mr. Plumb and a young disciple of Blackstone and Kent longed to shake the dust off their feet on the floor of this cabin. They did not, however, have suitable apparel to face these Fifth Avenue young ladies. They were full of expedients, however, and soon evolved a plan. Young Plumb – he was a little taller, but then of about the same proportions of his brother George; Kenyon, the younger lawyer, was short, perhaps like Tom Lewis. Plumb had a friend in Dr. White, father of the Gazette's editor. Dr. White was about the height of his son but of greater breath of beam. Plumb borrowed what he needed of Dr. White. Kenyon secured an outfit of the late Judge Ruggles who was six feet in his stockings. Thus equipped they attended the dance, and I believe I am safe in saying that Mr. Plumb enjoyed that dance better than Senator Plumb ever enjoyed a swell affair of the kind or of any other kind in Washington. The feelings of Dr. White and Judge Ruggles, when their suits were returned to them, can be better imagined than described. Kenyon had cut off the legs of Ruggles trowsers about six inches and turned under the raw edge and Plumb had taken innumerable reefs in the Dr's wearing apparel which looked like an old fashioned flounced skirt when he saw it next. The dance, though, was a howling success though there were hardly girls enough for the French Four which was the staple article on the program.

Among the arrivals in Emporia, the long ago, was a gentleman from northern Europe. He was a baker by trade and opened business on one of the principal thoroughfares of the embryo metropolis. He made and sold bread, pies and cakes in a modest unpretending way. Ostensibly prohibition has nearly always been enforced in Emporia. Occasionally, however, when, as at present, the river water was unendurable, and was condemned by the board of health, Emporia people were forced to drink something else. Our friend, the baker aforesaid had, provided for contingencies of this nature, though of the distilled, rather than the brewed thirst quencher. His bookkeeping was also said to be peculiar. For instance, I use names here impersonally, when Capt. Heritage, Gov. Eskridge, Major Hood, Col. Steele, G. W. Newman, Col. Whitley, W. T. Soden, T. G. Wibley, Marsh and Bent Murdock and other of the first citizens of the time and town, lived up in the rear of our friend's bakery and asked for the cup that cheers, whatever may be said of its intoxicating qualities, and then walked out, grandly telling the baker to charge it. Our friend, being of an accommodating disposition, did as he was desired, and it is legendary that he charged the whole sum to each individual account. At one time he received a barrel of an unusually fine quality, and the price, when charged in this form, was also unusually high. A Mr. Cox was sheriff, who, judging blacksmithing more profitable, left his deputies to run the office. These officials, with other friends, who found their occasional indulgences, especially when taken in a social way, were fast bankrupting them, visited the bakery on one occasion when the proprietor was out and carried off the entire stock – that is, of liquids. Bread, pies and cakes were a drug with them. The theft was very promptly laid upon the Kaw Indians, and the two deputies visited the reservation, saying they would find the whole tribe drunk

as lords. This not proving to be the case, the baker was induced to offer a reward of \$25, when his liquor less five or ten gallons, which had been drawn off and replaced with water, was found in an old shed and restored to him by the deputies aforesaid. The facts leaked out after awhile, and I believe the reward was refunded. I am not informed as to what became of the five gallons.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 20, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

VIII.

W.T. Soden was a prominent Emporia mill operator, but before he built his mill on the Cottonwood River at the south end of present-day Emporia, he established a mill and corn cracker at a short-lived settlement called Russell, located eight miles west of Emporia on the Cottonwood River.

W. T. Soden, as has been previously stated in these articles, first settled some seven or eight miles up the Cottonwood and west of Emporia. He there established a small saw mill, and what the people then termed a corn cracker. In southern parlance the cracker is a poor white, and the term at that time might have been applicable to young Soden, but in the free soil part of Kansas the cracker was machinery for cracking grain into a sort of coarse meal which, with the early pioneers, was the staple grain regimen. Mr. Soden's saw mill and corn cracker was on the south bank of the stream, but his trade was expected to embrace both sides. Accordingly, in order to accommodate his north shore customers, when the river was high, Mr. Soden established a ferry. This ferry boat was not intended to carry teams, being merely a log dug out and shaped into a canoe appearance. Its motive power was a single paddle and the strong arms of the young man, Soden. There, with circular saw, corn cracking machinery and ferry, Mr. Soden hoped to build his seat of empire, future metropolis and prospective state capital. When the river was high and unfordable the pre-emptor arriving at the north side of the Cottonwood with his sack or two of corn would wake the echoes with a coyote or Comanche howl, and presently Soden's dugout would poke its nose along the side of the stream, making its way, if the river was very high, across the bottom, through the wooded shore, to where our farmer waited, then there would be a transfer of cargo, Soden would paddle back to the mill, the farmer would go home to return at the agreed upon time to receive his grist of corn meal. It was primitive, but satisfactory.

Mr. Soden's sawmill was considered a great convenience, and was as much of a popular rendezvous as the country store or the tavern usually is. It is related that upon one occasion when a number of young men were gathered at Russel (the name of Soden's emporium) Mr. Soden had an unusually large log, cottonwood probably, on the runway. This log had a considerable swell a little distance from the end, in which nature had stored away a large quantity of water. When the saw struck this place on the log its motion created a regular water spout, deluging everything within reach. The young men, lounging around and unsuspecting, received the full benefit of this impromptu baptism

which was greatly increased by Mr. Soden stopping the log railway and allowing the saw full play in its new role of cloud burst. The visitors stood the infliction awhile but finally fled from the scene when Soden, who had secured shelter, emerged from behind his screen, set the log to moving and began calling the water-soaked and discomforted loungers as if he greatly wondered what had become of them. Soden, in those old times was somewhat noted for a saying, it might almost be called a proverb, "An honest man always has hair growing in the palms of his hands." On one occasion after he came to Emporia, he returned a customer two hundred pounds of flour as ground from four bushels of wheat. Of course the man was astounded, as another old saw of the time proclaimed that a customer who took grain to Soden's mill was exceedingly lucky if he got back his sacks, and so he naturally wanted to see the inside of Soden's hands, and requested the privilege. However, Mr. Soden cheerfully and promptly corrected the mistake when the matter was explained to him.

Another little incident, which, if generally known, would entitle Mr. Soden to membership in the Methodist church without the usual probation, is reported as follows: Soden and another young fellow were calling on some young women at one of the primitive shacks which harbored our first families. The accommodations being limited, as usual, to one room, late hours were a serious inconvenience to the household. Soden and his friend seemed oblivious to that fact, and sat around as though they intended to make a night of it. The old folks, after various hems and haws, inquired as to the hour, and other polite reminders that the young men's room was becoming preferable to their company, could stand it no longer, and the mistress plainly stated that it was about time to retire, or to use her own words, to "Sing the Doxology." Young Soden (he is Irish, you know) was equal to the occasion, as he blandly intimated that in his church love feast usually preceded the Doxology.

J. B. Moon was another old stand by and "fly up the creek." Jake was a strong backer of Soden and thought his corn cracker, open air saw mill and log canoe ferry, the main essentials needed for a commercial center. And it did look, even to a man up a tree, that Russel was more than abreast of the procession in the march of prosperity. Emporia had neither and was no better location. There was, seemingly, no good reason why the unorganized prairie to the west, now Chase county, could not have been attached to Lyon more easily than to break up the older political organized county of Madison, to which Lyon was made an annex for judicial purposes, with the court sessions held at Columbia. Therefore it did not seem very foolish to several of the young pioneers to join in with Soden and boom Russel. Moon, also, besides his friendship for Soden and faith in the corn cracker and dugout, had another lode stone pulling him Russelward. A young woman, Thomas by name, was teaching school in that neighborhood, where the boys and girls came from the writer knows not. Thirty years later and out in the short grass country, school teaching as a revenue measure was reduced to a fine art and scholars were not necessary. Kansas had not progressed so far at the time I write of and Miss Thomas must have found some children somewhere. Perhaps my timetables are not strictly accurate, and the incident I now propose to chronicle may have been a few years later. Be that as it may, Jake had an attraction in the Russel neighborhood in the person of the school ma'm. This young woman boarded with a family named Penrod, and upon one occasion, Moore, after the precedent set by Soden, call at Mr. Penrod's to spend the evening. It was, as commonly the case, a one-room cabin. The family, however, more

considerate to the feelings of the young folks than were Mr. Soden's acquaintances, retired early. The hours, as is usual at such times, passed pleasantly, the deep breathing of the sleeping couple in no way disturbed the young folks. When Jake finally tore himself away and opened the door the rosy flush of morn illuminated the eastern sky. To say that young Moon was horror stricken but faintly expresses his feelings. What should he do? To be seen going home at that hour in the morning was not to be thought of. And to cap the climax, a neighbor was seen approaching the domicile. Mrs. Penrod, who now came out from behind her curtained recess, was appealed to, and was equal to the occasion. "Jump into bed with Penrod!" was her prompt suggestion. There was nothing better to be done, and Jake, dressed as was, plunged into Penrod's bed, boots and all, covering himself with the bed clothes, and in fear and trembling awaited the outcome of the visit.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, September 23, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

IX.

William Allen White organized the 1899 street fair that Eskridge refers to in this installment. Eskridge, in a subtle dig against White, reminds the reader that the 1899 fair was not Emporia's first; the city had celebrated with street fairs in the past. In 1857 and 1858, Emporia held less "pretentious" celebrations.

Emporia has just had what is claimed to be her first Street Fair. Cattle, horses and a lone sheep were penned in her principal street, chickens, turkeys and geese were also corralled there, and a monster hog was in a procession upon the same thoroughfare. Booths for the exhibition and sale of merchandise, in many forms lined the sidewalk. Electricity, gas, and candle power, in forms oriental and occidental, paper and pumpkin combined to make a polar summer day. Glass, canvass, muslin and paper, in rainbow dyes, everywhere caught the eye and arrested the attention. The products of the soil and the machine shop added their magnetism to that of the bazar. Harmony, pitch and melody also lent their aid in swelling the attractions of the fair. And lastly men and women in thousands walked the streets, gazed at the moving caravans, rode on the merry-go-rounds, speculated with the street fakirs, fed at the lunch counters and became, themselves, a part of the revolving kaleidoscope, which with banners, bunting and streamers, made the street a mass of color and uproar.

Still, in the by-gones, we had our street fairs in Emporia. The booths may have lacked the tinsel but they were almost equally frail and about as open to air and moisture. The stock exhibit, it is true, was not confined in pens or stalls, the walls of the stables being, generally, the radius of a hempen rawhide rope. Turf rather than macadam or asphalt paved the street. Canvass, slabs and sod made the business rooms, which were not circumscribed by the brick and stone of the permanent warehouse. In this respect, auld-lang-syne surpassed the street fair of today, for then, the back ground was the horizon. The blanket of the aborigine and wild flowers of the prairie gave a touch of color. Tallow dips and candles in horn, tin and glass, with burning fluid and camphene, supplied the place of the arc and incandescent electric carbons, and gas mantels, while the

flaming prairie gave it now and then a glory, peculiar and altogether its own. The blare of trumpet and other wind instruments had their representatives in the bulge of the stage coach and the strings of the omnipresent fiddle, while the Sharp's rifle and Colt's revolver added a suggestiveness and variety to the panorama which effectually dispelled ennui. Indian dances, on the buffalo grass carpet were of common occurrence, and occasionally a white man danced on nothing, at the end of a rope. An invalid corps of a score or two of old veterans with six pointed stars were not needed, then, to keep order, for method and regularity were unknown attributes, and a vigilance committee, if necessary, looked after property rights. The Filipino exhibits of forty years ago were much better managed than was that of Ed Jay last Friday, there being no irate and high strung Stringtown mammas to contend with, and society did not ordain even a corn husk wardrobe – that is in summer – Little Filipinoes, in fact, were much more common than the Dan Hammond, Charlie and Jonnie Johnson and Nevada carney variety. It is affirmed by Gov. Eskridge, then the agent of the town company, that he had to offer a premium of a town lot for the first baby born upon the town site, Charles Yerrum Eskridge Cox winning the prize. Such was the street fair of forty years since, and the managers are hereby notified that any application for a patent or copyright upon this latter day innovation will be enjoined in the courts. The automobile and the bicycle may not have been known to the Kansas pioneer, but the horse litter and the travois answered a very good purpose and carried more burdens. Take it all in all, remembering the spice and zest given by uncertainty and danger and the Emporia street fair of 1857 and 1858 will compare favorably with the more pretentious one which is the fad of the day.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, October 2, 1899]

Forty Years Since.

X.

The drought of 1860 was severe and stinging to the settlers of Breckinridge County. Aside from the debate over the location of the county seat, many pages of the Emporia News were devoted to chronicling the pains of the 1860 drought. Communities were forced to assess the damage and endeavor to assist the needy.

One day our Breckenridge county pioneers awakened to the consciousness that the ground was becoming thirsty, that many fissures or mouths were opening to the sky, and that earthly lips were parched and dry. They then called to mind that for many days there had been continued sunshine. In fact since the previous autumn the rainfall had been very light much less than in two or three years before of which they had knowledge. The spring had opened dry and the seed sown was suffering from the want of rain. It also came to light that the unusually good market of the past year had tempted them to sell themselves very short and that there was barely enough grain on hand to last until harvest. Nevertheless, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, our optimistic "advance agents" were not disposed to give up the ship. Their faith was still boundless and all was merry as a marriage bell. The cloud not larger than a man's hand with its promise of an abundance of rain was seen daily. The Kansas News continually magnified appearances, a few scattering rain drops being reported as a good rain, while

showers that barely laid the dust were hailed as God-sends and as verifying the promise of “seed time and harvest,” “the early and the latter rain.” Even the worldly among the people, took comfort in the thought that the rain falls alike on the just and the unjust, and were disposed to endorse that particular portion of scripture, to say the least. Still as day succeeded night and Breckenridge county, each morning, turned its face upward toward a cloudless sky and a blazing sun, anxiety shared with hope the public favor. Mr. Cox, it is true, whose wife won the Eskridge prize for her baby, and who was a devout Methodist, still, in his trade, cooled his heated horse shoes with a plunge bath and the other fellows had Hallberg to fall back on. The situation was becoming strained. The gay, de’il may care look soon became forced, the cheerful weather prophet with his prognostications of a change of weather when the moon turned her next quarter, backed up though he might be with the rain crow or a mackerel sky, found now and then, a croaker who had his doubts. The sky was constantly and closely scanned for Elijah’s cloud – the rain-maker as we know him, unless among the Indians, being then unknown. The “News” still reported its weekly shower bath in favored localities and boldly asserted, that the county would raise a moderate crop, – modified, later on, to half a crop as conviction became forced – would be self sustaining, needed no aid and could care for itself. The high watermark of the rivers, creeks and draws, however, gradually receded, bare spots and riffles assumed unusual prominence, the channels of the water courses became narrower, night failed to distill its dew drops from the air, earth’s seams opened wider and wider and only the mirage seemed to promise any relief to the watching, weary, troubled eyes of the hoping, fearing, despairing men and women. And yet in spite of the dark surroundings and its hope-deferred heart sickness, a dash of rain from a passing feathery cloud would illumine every countenance and be taken as a happy omen, foretelling a good time coming and an ended drought. Thus the days went by, doubt at last became certainty. The Neosho went out of its banks, but by the underground road, greatly to the disgust of the anti-slavery votaries of that much abused thoroughfare. To Soden, Haworth, Randolph & Co. this seemed like adding insult to injury, “stealing,” as it appeared to them, “the livery of heaven.” Be that as it may, the water gradually retired from sight, wells went dry, and it began to look as if Hallberg would soon have a monopoly of liquid refreshments and become the sole reliance of the settlers. No rock-smiting Moses had as yet put in an appearance. He whose surname is Coppock was still engaged in wrestling with the Shibboleths of the Missouri vernacular preparatory to running the gauntlet of slavery’s forces the next year. Optimism, however, though somewhat disfigured was still in the game. The News cheerfully announced “a huge crop of walnuts and acorns, the trees bending under their weight,” and then added, “the hogs will be fattened, mainly, on acorns this fall.” Well, that seemed to settle the pork question and the people gave a gasp of relief, the only conjecture being as to the number of hogs on hand. Another enthusiastic settler discovered, about this time, that sorghum seed meal was far superior to buckwheat flour for griddle cakes and was prepared in the same way. Buckwheat cakes – out of sorghum seed – and acorn fed pork sausage were now assured. Hallberg, sorghum molasses, sorghum seed pancakes and acorn fed pork sausage were rations not to be sneezed at. Ben Parker actually began to look happy. Soden’s corn cracker still had work before it “and things were not as they seemed.” Jake Moon, Jim Newlin, Dave Morris and Joe Ecret, who had shown marked pessimistic symptoms, now publicly

renounced the wife's folks party and came out strong for the Hallberg, hog and hominy ration, and one old fellow, who had been, and, as it turned out, much too publicly bewailing his lot, being reduced to lye hominy as a food supply, found himself besieged with applications for board by almost his entire neighborhood, who seemed to think a generous quantity of lye hominy the acme of prosperity. These hopeful hallucinations, though, were but spasmodic and temporary outbursts, the signs and portents being of too unfavorable a nature to encourage many manifestations of this kind. Another phase of the situation now unfolded. Supplies on hand were carefully inventoried as a precautionary measure. Committees were appointed to canvass the settled communities, ascertain the stock on hand and probable need. Some few localities reported sufficient for their own absolute requirement. The country at the junction of the beds of the two rivers returned a hopeful estimate and the people there seemed to think that with the acorn crop, sorghum seed meal and cane molasses they could get along for some weeks. They had, also, some old corn on hand. The Russel neighborhood was also disposed to take a rosy view of the situation; of course they had lost the prestige of the log ferry but the need of the Soden dug out was not now apparent.

As time rolled on the drought situation became more and more acute, prayers for rain were offered in the meeting houses, many gave up the struggle and the wagon trail east was kept warm by the ships of the desert as they made their way back toward their home ports in a far off Goshen. And now, to cap the climax of the pyramid of their woes, clouds came across the sky, clouds darkening the face of the sun. Clouds, but not of moisture; clouds, sifting down their snowy pinions, but not of the frost king; clouds, yielding myriads of the red-legged scourge of ancient Egypt. This was the last straw and it broke the last pride barrier of Breckenridge county independence. From this time on the people succumbed to the inevitable. Breckenridge county now vied with her neighbors in appeals for aid. Her wagon trains were dispatched to the river points for relief, and she clamored as loudly as any for her share in the general distribution now going on. One newspaper item, however, stands out prominently amid the general prostration. The late Horace Bundrum was sick when the locusts came but in a few days he announced, through the columns of the News, his convalescence and the additional fact that he had resumed his occupation and "driven the grasshoppers out of his shop" where it is presumed they were faring sumptuously every day on harness leather and brass buckles. To tell the truth, the locusts found rather scanty picking in this county and had to forage lively for what they got, literally earning their bread in the sweat of their faces. Hot blasts from the late General Sheridan's Hades and the arid southwest had long before dried up the sap of the grasses, truly making hay while the sun shone, and the poor hoppers had a hard time of it. They were even worse off than the settlers, as they, the hoppers, had no friends east to send into the state over eight million pounds of food and thousands of bushels of seed, grain and roots, with large sums of money, stores of clothing etc. The struggle of the Pine with the Palm had turned many eyes on Kansas and when her other trials of nature, drought and plague came upon her the North and East extended an open hand.

Breckenridge county with the balance of the scourge smitten state was helped to her feet, furnished with a new start, and then came the civil war.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, October 6, 1899]

Forty Years Ago.

XI.

In addition to recalling the prices of staple goods in Emporia in 1860, Eskridge mentions some of the challenges in conducting business during the 1860 drought. He also mentions some of the early Emporia churches.

GLEANINGS.

On May 26, 1860, the date of issue, the *Emporia News* quotes the local market as follows: Wheat, \$1.25 per bushel; oats, 40c; corn, 20c; potatoes, 80c; beans, \$2; butter, 12 ½ c; eggs, 7c; salt, \$2.25; flour, \$5.25 per hundred; burning fluid, \$1 per gallon; nails, 7 and 8c; log chains, 12 ½ c per pound, etc.

The time by the pony express between Salt Lake, Utah, and St. Joseph, Mo., is given in that issue at five days and seven hours and the distance as 1,200 miles. The pony express evidently did not allow much grass to grow under the horse's feet as it crossed the plains and climbed the mountains.

Vegetables, corn and wood were taken on subscription by the *News* at that time. Even these inducements offered the farmers failed to increase the avoirdupois of the editor.

Among the real estate transfers reported June 30, 1860, are lots 125, 127 and 129 Merchants street to the trustees of the Methodist church, the consideration named in the deeds (they were bought of different parties) being \$25 in each case. It must have grown quite warm by July of that year, so warm in fact as to transform family cupboards into natural incubators, for the *News* reports that the wife of one of the citizen went to the cupboard for some eggs and found that two of them had taken unto themselves wings and legs and were having a time among the dishes.

Another new town named Pittsburg was laid out at this time four miles east of Emporia. It had one blacksmith shop and bright prospects, or was it prospectus? Corn is now quoted, July 14th, at 30 to 35c. By July 21st corn had taken another jump and was quoted at from 40 to 50c. Haworth & Soden sold Uncle Sam 2000 bushels at the first figure and Dr. Armor 1000 bushels. John Hammond struck water, near what is now the residence of Major Hood, at a depth of sixty feet on July 14th. As a well digger Uncle John was much more of a success than either Gov. Eskridge or Capt. Heritage, and the report does not state that Mr. Hammond used either a peach tree or witch hazel divining rod, in his search for water.

However Uncle John was at this time a Methodist in good and regular standing, while at best, Gov. Eskridge was but a probationer and Capt. Heritage – well, the captain probably was hunting for the answer to Pilot's question. He has since acknowledged his failure in that line.

On July 26th T. P. Hall almost caused a riot on Commercial street by bringing a watermelon into the village. Even Hallberg's bakery was temporarily denuded in the scramble for that melon. However, Hallberg soon regained his popularity after Hall's

melon was deposed of. Barley and hops seemed to have, then as now, a big advantage over watermelons, as a steady beverage, in Emporia. At this time there were four wells on the townsite, water having been found at 109 Merchants street about the first of August. The editorials of Mr. Plumb still took a very rose colored view of the situation, in spite of the advance of 150 per cent in the price of corn since the last of May.

Many showers were reported, and a lady in the country was killed by lightning. A limited supply of green corn, tomatoes, cucumbers etc. were brought to town, none of which are reported as going to the editorial sanctum in payment of subscriptions either in arrears or advance. The new Congregational church – now I believe doing service as a hog or cattle pen on Sunny Slope – had been recently dedicated and half the seatings sold. This was the second church edifice erected. It stood on the site of the present building. As yet I have not been informed as to the rental value of church privileges in Emporia in 1860.

Mr. Plumb, soon after this time got down from the news editorial tripod and went back to Ohio to study law, Mr. Stotler resuming the editorial pencil. Jake's eye-glasses were not as color blind as Mr. Plumb's had been and he soon began to perceive the signs and portents, and the paper became what in these latter days would be called somewhat of a calamity howler. Still Stotler was not very much discouraged and held out pluckily. As a specimen of unique advertising for country produce I transcribe in substance one of Hallberg's.

HALLBERG'S BAKERY AND SALOON.

Bread, Pies, Cakes, Notions, Candies,
Raisins, Nuts, etc. Oysters and Sardines.

LAGER BIER.

Butter and Eggs wanted for which I will
pay the highest market price, in goods out of my Saloon.

Goods from the saloon branch of Mr. Hallberg's business in exchange for butter and eggs would be somewhat of a novelty in these days.

The late Horace Bundrem appears to have repented of his hasty and harsh treatment of the grass hoppers earlier in the season for in February 1861 he makes the following pathetic appeal:

"All persons owing me wood are requested to bring it along immediately as the grasshoppers legs are frozen and must be thawed out."

Another story on W. T. Soden who seems to be the Hamlet of that early day drama, is now given. W. J. Means, who probably will help to set up this article, was a youngster and a recent arrival in Emporia. Mr. Soden, who was not at all partial to having the kids nose around his premises, was feeding his hogs one day when William was stealing along on some predatory expedition across Mr. Soden's grounds, probably on his way to the old swimming hole above the dam. Frightened out of his wits as Mr. Soden pounced upon him, he blurted out the following mal apropos question: "Mr. Soden! Mr. Soden! Whose feed are you giving those hogs?" Mr. Soden was thunderstruck for a moment, then the humor of the situation struck him, and releasing the young culprit, he

smiled as he candidly (and no doubt truthfully) answered, "The Lord only knows, Willie, I don't."

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, October 13, 1899]

Forty Years Ago.

XII.

In this final installment of the Search Light letters, Eskridge memorializes the efforts of the early Breckinridge County pioneers in developing the county and its communities. He chronicles some of the early Emporia churches, including the Methodist, Congregational, Christian, Friends, and Baptist congregations. He also mentions more about some of the early county settlements and their residents.

It must not be inferred from the somewhat rollicking tone of these letters that there were no good people in Breckinridge county in its earlier days. It must not be inferred, even, that Governor Eskridge, Captain Heritage, Messrs. Moon, Soden, Hallberg, Parker and others were sowing an extraordinary seeding of wild oats for a future harvest. The voracious chronicler of these reminiscent sketches is far from wishing to bias the REPUBLICAN'S readers against the old landmarks of our pioneer age. It is true that Mr. Soden is reported to have refused to allow baptism by emersion in his mill pond on the Cottonwood river. That fact, though, need not presume a sacrilegious, scoffing spirit on his part. Captain Heritage, though not a member of the Congregational church, was from the beginning a member of its congregation, and Governor Eskridge, in the auld lang syne, on more than one occasion, was not above asking for the prayers of the Methodist fraternity. However, it cannot be denied that Mr. Hallberg sold lager "bier," but Hallberg was no hypocrite. He did not attempt to conceal his business. His advertisement was "Bakery and Saloon" and specified Lager "bier" as an article of his merchandise. Even in the spelling no disguise was attempted. We all know that in the spelling, "bier," its noxious qualities are plainly hinted at. On one occasion, however, Mr. Hallberg did try the snake game in an editorial Eden. He sent a pitcher of this "bier" with his compliments to the News sanctum and while no one heard the "get-thee-behind-me-Satan," proper at such times, and the pitcher went back empty; still the editorial response to the gift was mainly a laudation of the bakery branch of Mr. Hallberg's business, coupled with Mr. Stotler's affirmation "we don't drink." Of course it is possible that Mr. Stotler did not regard a pitcher of beer as a drink. "Rushing the growler" may have been his form of tippie, but suppositions of this nature are uncharitable, the probabilities being that Jacob kicked over the pitcher before returning it to Hallberg. But, however appearances may have seemed, there were good people in Breckinridge county forty years ago. A Methodist class of that Hebrew jubilee number (seven) had been formed early in '56 or '57 which by June of the latter year had increased twelve and had secured the services of a circuit rider by the name of Moyes. Rev. Mr. Moyes preached his first sermon on Sunday morning, June 7th 1857. A Baptist minister by the name of Meader preached in the afternoon. These services were held in the office of the then unfinished hotel building, located on the corner where the Citizen's

bank now is. The printing office of the "Kansas News" was in a room on the second floor of the same building. The Baptist organization as it now exists here, came with the railway some thirteen years later. The Methodists, however met with some regularity from this time on, holding their services in the hotel and in a carpenter shop in McElfresh's building, now a blacksmith shop on Second avenue between Commercial and Merchants street, but the Hall, par excellence, of the village of Emporia. At times they met in the open air with no roof but the sky and no floor but the ground but within the unfinished walls of a stone building they were trying to erect. The Christians, Friends and the Congregationalists, though later arrivals far outstripped the Methodists in church architecture. The Christians dedicated their church in October 1859 and its tocsin called the faithful to prayers nearly a year before any other denomination in Emporia had a church home. This building still continues faithful in well doing, being occupied now by a congregation of the same sect, on Eighth avenue near Congress street. In the early days of this chronicle, it acted in a secular as well as a sacred capacity. Civil as well as ecclesiastical courts sat within its walls, juries were impaneled and cases tried. It was also the main forum for the discussion of affairs of interest to the citizens of Breckinridge county.

The Kirkendall settlement – the Kirkendall family were to the county west of Emporia what the Fowlers were to the east – some four or five miles up the Cottonwood, is credited with building the first school house in the county, though it was then Madison, and holding the first school, a Mr. Gardner, I think, being the teacher. Mr. Gardner afterwards married one of the late George W. Kirkendall's daughters and went back east. Americus had the next school and by the close of 1858 Emporia, Forest Hill and Fremont maintained schools, that in Emporia being supported by popular subscription. Miss Mary J. Watson was the teacher.

In Breckinridge county, however, the press was in advance of both circuit rider and pedagogue, as the pioneer of civilization. Though the grape vine may have been its telegraph, the jack rabbit its news gatherer, the coyote its devil and the prairie dog its home reader, still the Kansas News, published in that unfinished upper room of the Emporia hotel, June 6th 1857, was as large as our dailies are today and just as presentable. However, it had one or two white subscribers. Mr. S. E. G. Holt, now living near Hartford, took four or five copies, paying the subscription in advance. This act on the part of Uncle Gib Holt greatly encouraged the editor, Mr. Plumb, and the foreman, Jacob Stotler. Others, however, were not so reckless. Col. Plumb's rule was, no subscription for less than six months to be paid in advance. Of the few residents who were thought to have use for a newspaper, some hesitated to put their dollar against the unsupported work of a comparative stranger starting a new enterprise, and appearances seemed to justify their fears. Advertised as a weekly, the first two or three numbers appeared at intervals of fourteen days. Fourteen days was not considered a week east of the Mississippi, and would-be subscribers hesitated. The editor, however, promised twenty-six numbers for a dollar and fifty – two for a year, irrespective of the date of subscription. Corn, wood, vegetables, skunk skins and even county warrants, the last at some discount, were currency at the News office. The paper wasn't hampered by any gold standard or sixteen to one dogmas in the good old days. Even cotton-tails, pawpaws and gooseberries had a market value in exchange for the Kansas News. The paper had followed Horace Greeley's oft quoted advice and proposed to stand by it. "A cloud by

day and a pillar of fire by night," it was the nucleus about which desert sojourners gathered and the oriflamme under which they fought the wilderness. High water and bad roads might suspend for weeks its issue, but like a variable star, it was bound to reappear. Its advertisements came mainly from Lawrence, while the paper on which it was printed came from Westport or Leavenworth, by wagon, buckboard or more primitive conveyance, in sixty pound lots. Journalism in the Neosho valley in 1857 was attended with difficulties. Obstacles, fightings without and fears within encompassed it. The Kaw, Comanche and Cheyenne were less fearful than the Philistine and Amalekite of Missouri and Arkansas.

Among the side lights of this narrative is the following. Two gentlemen, who then operated a saw mill and corn cracker at the head waters of the Cottonwood river, had hired an engineer who did not satisfy and yet for some reason could not be discharged. Accordingly a little harmless piece of Ku Kluxism was resorted to in order to accomplish the purposes by indirect means. The engineer, a tenderfoot from the east, was invited to a torchlight snipe round up. The objectionable workman was stationed in a gulch with a net or similar appliance to ensnare the birds when driven in. The night was cold and frosty and the man alone, time passed heavily, and the tendency was to cramps and fears. Our engineer was getting cold and discouraged, nowhere could he discern the flickering of moving torches. It was a pokerish situation and trying to the nerves. Suddenly a hideous apparition developed apparently rising from the ground. In the darkness it was a ghoulish looking spectre, and the boys who were lying in the brush near by, their teeth chattering and their lips blue with the cold were of the *qui vive* for the denouement. It came. Mr. Engineer gave a quick glance at the ghostly visitant and quietly remarked, as he shoved a huge six shooter toward the goblin, "If there's a man inside them fixings he'd better speak pretty quick for I'm going to shoot." I understand that the vice president of the Emporia National bank can, if he will, tell who the ghost was that night. The engineer was at his place in the mill next morning, but the night before watchers in the bush, were rather slow in showing up.

SEARCH LIGHT.

[*Emporia Daily Republican*, October 18, 1899]

APPENDIX B

EMPORIA NEWSPAPERS

The following list gives the publication dates for the newspapers cited within this thesis.

Emporia Daily News (1 November 1878-5 February 1887)

Emporia Daily Republican (21 January 1882-3 June 1905)

Emporia Democrat (16 August 1882-26 January 1900)

Emporia Gazette (18 August 1890-current)

Emporia Globe (28 August 1886-15 November 1889)

Emporia Ledger (8 January 1874-12 January 1882)

Emporia News (13 August 1859-21 December 1889)

Emporia Standard (23 August 1890-28 May 1892)

Emporia Times (8 February 1895-5 March 1925)

Emporia Weekly News (16 June 1881-19 December 1889)

Emporia Weekly News-Democrat (26 December 1889-1 May 1890)

Emporia Weekly Republican (26 January 1882-1 June 1905)

Kansas Sentinel (3 March 1880-9 August 1882)

Kansas News (6 June 1857-24 July 1858)

Kansas News (31 July 1858-6 August 1859)

I, Robert C. Childers, hereby submit this thesis to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree that the Library of the university may make it available to use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

Robert C. Childers
Signature of the Author

November 22, 2004
Date

Charles Vernon Eskridge and Kansas Politics, 1855-1900
Title of Thesis

Ray Cooper
Signature of Graduate Office Staff

11-22-04
Date Received

11-22-04