

Albany-Nemaha County, Kansas

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588

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“It was in the stirring political time of 1856 when the struggle was on as to whether the new Territory of Kansas should come into the nation as a slave state or free. This was the era when Rev. Henry Ward Beecher took up collections in his Plymouth Church at Brooklyn with which to buy “Sharp Rifles,” for young men to carry with a Bible to the scene of the conflict. The impending conflict was heralded through the “New York Independent” to which Mr. Beecher was a valued contributor. Horace Greeley of the “Tribune” also aided young men to “go west” to aid the noble cause, and stop the encroachment of slavery on the free soil of Kansas.” ~ W.B. Slossonⁱ

In 1857, a group of New Yorkers, including W. B. Slosson, John L. Graham, William G. Graham and Edwin Miller, set out for Kansas territory. They traveled by boat along the Missouri River before disembarking in Doniphan, Kansas. From this point, the men headed west to stake their property. “We four men with each a “Beecher rifle”, axe, spade and grip of cloths, started walking the trackless prairie, moving by compass to the northeast part of the territory to a creek marked on the map, Pony Creek,” later recalled one of the gentlemen.ⁱⁱ In 1859, these four men, along with Elihu Whittenhall, George Graham, Rev. R.D. Parker and Archibald Webb, established the town of Albany, named after the capital of New York.ⁱⁱⁱ

Albany grew during the 1860s, as more families migrated to stake claims on Kansas’s unsettled territory. During its heyday, the town of Albany consisted of a post office, hotel, boarding house, livery stable, blacksmith shop, grocery store, creamery, sawmill, and millinery store.^{iv} According to National Archives records, a post office was established in Albany in 1858. In addition to serving the communication needs of the surrounding area with a post office, Albany was a stop along the Pony Express Trail.^v Albany also featured one of the most successful stores in the area. It employed five clerks and offered a variety of goods ranging from plows to lace.^{vi}

Education was highly important to the founders of Albany. Between 1858 and 1860, classes were held in the home of Elihu Whittenhall. Later, a small wood-framed building was built at the cost of \$400 and for seven years served as both the school and church. After the Civil War, the district decided to build a two-story limestone schoolhouse, which still stands today.^{vii} The upstairs served as the church, a community meeting space, and as a classroom for the Albany Academy. The Academy was a school offering advanced high school and college subjects. Students from all over Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas attended Albany Academy during its fifteen-year duration.^{viii}

Another important aspect in the organization of Albany was the establishment of a church. Historian Mary Hinds recorded, “The first Congregational Church of Albany, Kansas Territory, was organized September 25 and 26, 1858, by a group of pioneers who had come to the western frontier, beyond the limits of the States, to make new, Christian, homes and to build a new state that would be free, not slave.”^{ix} The church established the stance against slavery, however, it was the individual members who fought to make Kansas a free state and participated in the Underground Railroad. The slaves were hidden during daylight hours and moved by moonlight to the next station along the northern trail to freedom.^x The famous Jim Lane trail, which led many slaves to freedom, had stops in Albany and the surrounding area because of the fresh water springs.^{xi} John Brown, a famous abolitionist, spent his last night in Kansas at Edwin Miller’s residence on February 1, 1859.^{xii}

As occurred in many Kansas communities, the coming of the railroad was a fatal blow for Albany. In 1870, the Grand Island railroad decided to expand westward from St. Joseph, Missouri. The residents of Albany tried in vain to convince the railroad to come through their

town. However, surveyors determined it would be too expensive to route through Albany. The very intense and, at times, bitter town rivalry between Albany and nearby Sabetha was further provoked when it was decided that Sabetha would receive the depot.^{xiii} This, like in so many other towns, set the demise of Albany in motion. Slowly, one-by-one, the shops and townspeople moved to Sabetha as business began to dwindle in Albany.^{xiv}

Albany was formed by a set of individuals who desiring to fight for their values by bringing Kansas into the United States as a free state. They overcame the harsh environment of the Kansas prairie to build a prosperous community based upon the New England values they carried with them. Although Albany was not able to survive the coming of the railroad, the memory of its early settlers lives on in the values they passed on to future generations of Kansans.

End Notes

ⁱ W.B. Slosson. "To The Stars Through Difficulties," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 2.

ⁱⁱ W.B. Slosson. "To The Stars Through Difficulties," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Emily Slosson, "Albany" in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 18.

^{iv} Albany Historical Muesum. *Albany Historical Muesum*. Sabetha, Kansas, 2011. Muesum Brochure

^v "Albany Postoffice And Pony Express," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 25.

^{vi} "The Store," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 25.

^{vii} "History of Albany School Dist." 1N & B, in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 4.

^{viii} "Records Of The Albany Academy," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 8.

^{ix} "History Of The First Church," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 10.

^x "History Of The First Church," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 10.

^{xi} "Jim Lane Trails", in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 43.

^{xii} Dr. Emily Slosson, "Albany" in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 18.

^{xiii} J.T. Brady. "Reminiscences of The Late J. T. Brady" in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 16.

^{xiv} A. L. Slosson. "That Old House," in *Albany Historical Muesum; blue book*, compiled by May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virginia Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 15.

¹⁵ "Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, 1878," Blue Skyways, KSGenWeb, accessed September 18, 2011, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1878/images/nemaha.jpg>.

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May Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber(Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund),

4-5.

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Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber(Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 10.

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Outline Map of Nemaha County, Kansas. Scale ½ inch to 1 mile. Stinson, A.R

Plat Book of Nemaha County. Seneca, Kansas: A.R. Sinson. 1908. 2.

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Wines, Elmer Synder, Virgina Gerber (Albany Historical Society: Memoral Fund), 13-15.

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Figure #1:



Picture of Albany as of September, 4 2011. This would have been Main Street looking to the north. The Original two-story stone school house is located on the left side of this picture.
SOURCE: Photo taken by author

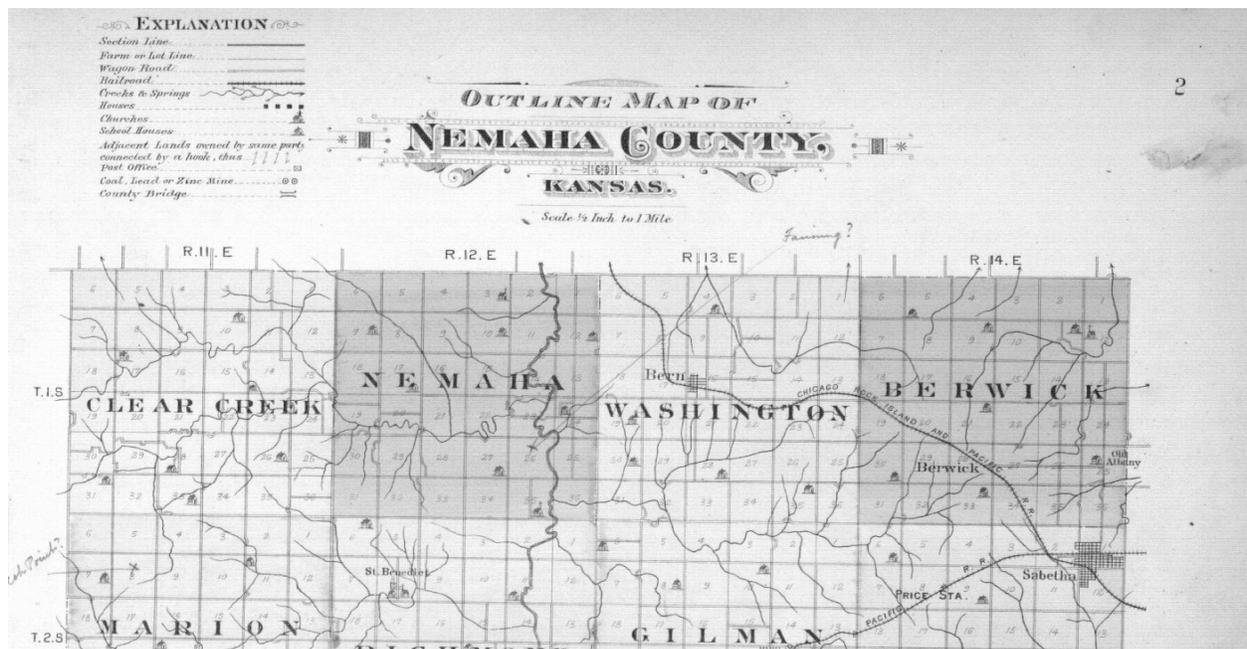


Figure #2:

Plat Map of Nemaha County Kansas, 1908. Albany is located in top right of the map. Source: www.kansasmemory.org

