

THE ELLIS TRAIL TO NICODEMUS: REVEALING STORIES IN THE LANDSCAPE OF BLACK WESTWARD SETTLEMENT DISCOVERY PHASE DESIGN PLAN for INTERPRETIVE WEBSITE

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Primary Investigator

La Barbara James Wigfall, Associate Professor of Regional & Community Planning, College of Architecture, Planning & Design, Kansas State University

Partners / Community Consultants

Angela Bates, Independent Historian, Founder and Executive Director, Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum

Robert Alexander, Board Member, Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum

Co-Investigators

Katie Kingery-Page, Professor of Landscape Architecture and Associate Dean, College of Architecture, Planning & Design, Kansas State University

Erin Wiersma, Associate Professor of Art, College of Arts & Sciences, Kansas State University

Kristen Epps, Associate Professor of History, College of Arts & Sciences, Kansas State University and Editor, *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*

Project Advisors

Pamela Blackmore, Geographic Information Systems Specialist and LEED Green Associate (Web-based GIS mapping)

Deborah Dandridge, Associate Librarian & Field Archivist and Curator of African American Experience, University of Kansas Spencer Library (Humanities Scholar, Nicodemus archives)

Sheila Ellis-Glasper, Social Media Strategist & Trainer, SEG Media (Website promotion)

Kenneth M. Hamilton, Professor and Director of Ethnic Studies, Dedman College of Humanities & Sciences, Southern Methodist University (Humanities Scholar, History of Black settlements in the United States)

Evert Nelson, Photographer (Aerial drone videography and Still photography)

Mark Weaver, Retired, National Park Service (Interpretive and assessment adviser)

Student Research Assistant

Sepideh Sharifi, Kansas State University

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THE ELLIS TRAIL TO NICODEMUS: REVEALING STORIES IN THE LANDSCAPE OF BLACK WESTWARD SETTLEMENT

DISCOVERY PHASE DESIGN PLAN for INTERPRETIVE WEBSITE

Landscape view near the historic wagon trail route from Ellis to Nicodemus, Graham County, 2020, Kingery-Page.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nicodemus, Kansas, is the longest continuously inhabited, Black townsite west of the Mississippi River. The townsite of Nicodemus remains today as home to approximately twenty-four persons, who act as stewards of their historical legacy with support from thousands of former residents and descendants of the families of those freed people who settled in Nicodemus in the 1870s. Nicodemus represents the achievements of a group of formerly enslaved people who entered the West to experience freedom, autonomy, and homesteading through the establishment of their own town.

The Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum's (executive director, Angela Bates) original research has deepened understanding of the **Ellis Trail to Nicodemus**, a foot path and separate wagon trail used by newcomers to Nicodemus traversing the rolling grassland bluffs from the Ellis train station to their new home thirty-five miles away.

The Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum has pieced together the trail route through painstaking research of recorded oral histories, photographs, and new interviews with descendants of Nicodemus settlers and white settlers along the Trail route. During the two-year National Endow-

ment of the Humanities, Discovery Phase project, Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum worked with faculty members at Kansas State University and other humanities and digital media advisers to reveal this little-known aspect of Nicodemus's history.

This project interprets the cultural landscape of the Ellis Trail, a now invisible route winding through mid-grass prairie, down wooded riparian ravines, and along limestone bluffs; the wagon trail is sometimes visible as traces and sometimes now replaced by roadways.

The product of this project is a thorough design plan for the digital product, an interactive website for viewers (a broad online audience ranging from middle school youth to adults) to understand the journey the first Nicodemus settlers took by wagon and on foot to the townsite. The website's pages will also be connected to the physical landscape with an auto-tour along the Ellis Trail route, using smart codes to offer in-depth information about the settlers' experience and the landscape's hidden narrative.

This **Design Plan** focuses upon specific humanities themes to be included, the visual and audio-visual assets to include, and a thorough site map for the website.



Limestone bluffs near the historic wagon trail route, 2020, Kingery-Page.

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

The Ellis Trail to Nicodemus: Revealing Stories in the Landscape of Black Westward Settlement

Nicodemus, Kansas, is the oldest continuously inhabited Black townsite west of the Mississippi River. The townsite of Nicodemus remains today as home to approximately twenty-four persons, who act as stewards of their historical legacy with support from thousands of former residents and descendants of the families of those freed people who settled in Nicodemus in the 1870s.

Nicodemus represents the achievements of a group of formerly enslaved people who entered the West to experience freedom, autonomy and homesteading, just as other citizens did, through the establishment of their own town. A crucial difference between Nicodemus settlers and other groups settling Kansas is that Nicodemans did not choose to travel from their home countries to the Americas. And while the early settlers of Nicodemus pursued opportunity and land ownership just like other westward settlers, they were also fleeing the cultural and economic backlash against emancipation.

After being nationally recognized as a Historic District in 1976, Nicodemus became a unit of the National Park Service as a National Historic Site

in 1996, symbolizing the Black experience in the post-Civil War West. Nicodemus is one of seven National Park sites with low visitation and is unique among national parks as a living, inhabited, unincorporated town. Nicodemus is slated for new program and project development that will increase its visitation; this project is timely.

The Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum is the only and key community partner collaborating with the National Park Service to preserve Nicodemus's cultural history. The Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum's original research has deepened understanding of the **Ellis Trail**, a foot path and separate wagon trail used by newcomers to Nicodemus traversing the rolling grassland bluffs from the Ellis train station to their new home thirty-five miles away.

This project interprets the cultural landscape of the Ellis Trail, a now invisible route winding through mid-grass prairie, down wooded ravines, and along limestone bluffs. The Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum has pieced together the trail route through painstaking research of recorded oral histories, photographs, and new interviews with descendants of Nicodemus and white settlers along the Trail route.

The Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum is working with faculty members at Kansas State University and other humanities and digital media advisers to reveal this little-known aspect of Nicodemus's history.

This project team came together for two Summits, both held by video-conference. The first Summit resulted in a more nuanced understanding of humanities themes relevant to the story of Ellis Trail to Nicodemus. The second Summit resulted in organization of audio-visual and archival assets needed to create the website.

The outcome of this project is a thorough design plan for the digital product: an interactive website for online viewers to understand the journey the first Nicodemus settlers took from the train by wagon and on foot to the townsite. The website's pages will also be connected to the physical landscape with an auto-tour along the Ellis Trail route, using smart codes to offer in-depth information about the settlers' experience and the landscape's hidden narrative.



Still image from the filming of *Ellis Trail to Nicodemus* (director Angela Bates, videographer Nick Abt) 2022, Nelson.

SECTION 2. INTERPRETING BROADER HUMANITIES THEMES

The settlement of Nicodemus, Kansas by African Americans occurred in context of post-Civil War backlash against Black emancipation and increased Westward expansion by land speculators. This historical context will be interpreted through two, nested **timelines**: one a broad, national **time-line** of emancipation and westward expansion; the second a detailed **timeline** of Nicodemus settlement. The timelines and accompanying brief text descriptions will lead viewers to further resources: a rich bibliography including public domain videos which can be used for further learning. These timelines create the framework for unfolding both the broader humanities themes and themes specific to Nicodemus.

Broad Theme 1. Westward expansion by white and non-white settlers

Westward expansion by freed African American people who were formerly enslaved cannot be interpreted the same as contemporary white settlement, though some of the same contextual forces influenced the movement west of both peoples. Acts of settling the American West were a part of colonialism, even when westward expansion was an escape from white supremacy.

Sub-themes:

- 1.1. Indigenous history of region; Indigenous dwellings including dugouts.
- 1.2. Lifeways, removal, and survival of Indigenous people in the region, including the Comanche, Pawnee, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Osage and Pottawatomi (KSHS 2024, National Park Service 2015).
- 1.3. The development of the Homestead Act; promotion of homesteading to American and European settlers.
- 1.4. Freed African American peoples' reasons for entering Kansas and establishing the community of Nicodemus (rather than moving to Kansas City, for example); motivations as understood from archival documents and oral histories.

- 1.5. Motives of the land speculators of the town company; include archival promotional flyers.
- 1.6. The establishment of Nicodemus before mass migration of the 1879-80 Exodusters.
- 1.7. The contrast between the Exodusters' motivations for migration with leaders like Pap Singleton and the Nicodemans' town building led by town speculators like W.R. Hill.
- 1.8. Struggle and hardships surmounted to reach Nicodemus, beginning in Kentucky and throughout the journey.
- 1.9. Family background and political, cultural, economic, and other leadership achievements of early Nicodemans.
- 1.10. Enterprise and economic development of Nicodemus.

Broad Theme 2. Railroad interaction with land speculation shaping the West

Land speculation in Kansas (statehood granted in 1861) was fueled by the Homestead Act of 1862. Some of the homestead claims came from railroad land grants. Kansas railroads rapidly expanded in the 1860s and 1870s (Henderson 1947, Mack 2012). When prosperity occurred due to railroad access, or decline occurred due to outmigration of young people, black settlements also experienced the same phenomena (Wigfall Fly 1980).

Sub-themes:

- 2.1. W.R. Hill was a land and excursion agent. He met and partnered with W.H. Smith, along with other ministers in Topeka, Kansas, to create a town company which eventually selected the town site and named it Nicodemus.
- 2.2. In 1877 as the founders of Nicodemus travelled west by rail, the nearest railroad station to the Nicodemus town site was in Ellis, Kansas.
- 2.3. Early Nicodemans journeyed by railroad to Ellis, and then overland by foot or by wagon (nearby but separate routes), thirty-five miles north to Nicodemus.

- 2.4. As later waves of people migrated to Nicodemus, many of them came through the railroad station at Stockton, Kansas.
- 2.5. The role of the railroad in the establishment of Bogue, Kansas as a railroad town near Nicodemus; and the eventual economic downturn in Nicodemus.
- 2.6. An agrarian community of homesteads and satellite towns helped Nicodemus survive in spite of being overlooked by the railroad.

Broad Theme 3. Physiographic features and ecology shaping settlement

The Ellis Trail to Nicodemus passes over limestone bluff and loess topography from the cretaceous era limestone sea bed and the paleogene Ogallala Formation.

Sub-themes:

- 3.1. The landscape of the trail is shaped by the Saline River and Solomon River (South Fork).
- 3.2. Early Nicodemans walking or riding north encountered midgrass prairie and riparian woodlands.
- 3.3. Prairie plants provided food and other useful resources to the Nicodemans.
- 3.4. Because wood was scarce on the prairie, limestone (locally quarried) and earth sheltered structures (dugouts) were dominant building materials and approaches.
- 3.5. In 1877, as Nicodemus was established, the western Kansas landscape was in transition from open range to a homestead, agrarian, and fenced range landscape.
- 3.6. Early Nicodemans used geographical landmarks to follow the trail from Ellis: Gadie Hill, the Mound, and Happy Hollow; these along with the use of a compass were critical to wayfinding.

Broad Theme 4. Nicodemans in the history of Black agrarians post-Civil War

The migration of freed African Americans after the Civil War must be interpreted through factors of both choice *and* non-choice; opportunity and threat.

4.1. Economic incentives of westward expansion were countered by the push and pull back pressures of migration.

4.2. Freed Black people exercised choice to come to rural communities versus urban centers.

4.3. After Emancipation, African Americans weighed many options, including the push for Blacks to migrate to Liberia, Africa, or to migrate north or westward in the United States.



Remaining dugout near Stockton, Kansas, built and used by early Nicodemans to find safety from racist Sundown laws. Image source: <https://www.nps.gov/nico>.



Still image of the filming of *Ellis Trail to Nicodemus* (director Angela Bates and videographer Nick Abt) 2022, Nelson.

4.4. Churches played a role in promoting westward migration of African Americans; places to meet; church leaders' role in promoting migration west.

4.5. Nicodemans from Kentucky and further south and east (Tennessee and Mississippi) felt a push to Kansas to escape the Jim Crow laws and black codes strongly enforced in their former homes.

4.6. In Kansas, Nicodemans also encountered restrictive and racist laws, such as sundown ordinances; roadside dugouts used by Nicodemans to refuge after dark along the roadway are remnants of this history.

4.7. Homesteading was a struggle; three out of five families attempted and did not survive homesteading; the drought of 1880 intensified struggles; the Osage-Potawatomi Indians gave meat to Nicodemus and helped feed starving residents (National Park Service 2015).

4.8. Many early Nicodemans were highly educated people who became political leaders making great impact in western Kansas and elsewhere; example of E. P. McCabe and partner A.T. Hall on forcing the organization of Graham County.

4.9. The history of the Nicodemus Emancipation Celebration (Homecoming) and its present-day effect on the continuous re-connection of descendants to the town of Nicodemus.

Interpretive Themes Used at Nicodemus

In the early 2000s, the National Park Service undertook planning to formalize an interpretive plan with the people of Nicodemus. This Interpretive Plan, created with community input 2003-2009, identifies five themes for interpreting Nicodemus (National Park Service 2015). In developing the Nicodemus **timeline**, nested over the larger timeline of westward expansion, the website will reinforce these five themes, quoted here from the National Park Service webpage:

Theme One: *"The Five Pillars: Nicodemus arose from the efforts of an organized group of African Americans who wanted to create a supportive,*

viable, African American community, relying on the values of home life, education, religion, hard work and the social, religious, and political organizations that grew out of a tradition of mutual assistance.”

Theme Two: *“Move Toward Civil Rights: The settlement of Nicodemus represents a determination to escape rampant racism; the loss of federal support and protection for African American citizens in the South at the end of Reconstruction allowed and encouraged an increase in institutional racism, social injustice and violence.”*

Theme Three: *“Struggle for Community: The continuous occupancy of Nicodemus, Kansas, portrays African American perseverance and the struggle of African American emigrants as they journeyed west into an unknown and often difficult physical environment to participate in the American Dream.”*

Theme Four: *“The annual Emancipation Celebration began in 1878 and continues today as the Homecoming Celebration. It is an African American can traditional celebration that fosters the renewal of family and communities with the physical place of Nicodemus and with its residents, offsite descendants, and the African American community at large.”*

Theme Five: *“Still Connected: Nicodemus represents far more than a physical place with historical significance. It serves as a focal point for all people to renew spiritual and emotional connections to family, community, and ancestors through this African American experience.”*

SECTION 3. SITE MAP FOR THE WEBSITE

Conception of the website, page-by-page as well as the interaction or linking between pages, is an essential aspect of a website design plan. The webpage will feature design for screen and mobile, based upon user interface research on how visitors are most likely to navigate webpages.

Homepage

The homepage (landing page) for the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus website will feature brief, opening statements and will contrast historic, archival photos with present-day photos. Sample opening statements:

Nicodemus is not just a place on a map, it is the manifestation of the hopes and dreams by a people who had endured the ugly institution of slavery, and migrated west to participate in the country’s national narrative of Manifest Destiny. These formerly enslaved pioneer settlers dared dream, then created



Still image of the filming of *Ellis Trail to Nicodemus* (director Angela Bates and videographer Nick Abt) 2022, Nelson.

a reality that established a new place they could call home and experience real freedom in the settling of West (paraphrased from Wigfall Fly and Fly 1986).

“...Black people, concentrated in places, have been central to the advocacy for and survival of democracy in America. Black people’s creative place making is the light toward both true civilization and broad liberation” (Hunter and Robinson 2018, p.11).

The homepage will feature a brief, three sentence introduction to Nicodemus, Kansas and will invite visitors in to experience the **time-lines** and the **interactive maps** about the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus. Timeline and Interactive Map pages will feature further, brief introductory sentences, further deepening overall understanding of Nicodemus and the Ellis Trail story.

Homepage links to:

- ↳ Ellis Trail to Nicodemus Interactive Map
 - ↳ Linked archival and present-day assets
 - ↳ Linked video clips from documentary
- ↳ Timeline of Emancipation & Western Expansion
 - ↳ Timeline of Nicodemus History
 - ↳ Multi-State Map of Migration to Nicodemus
- ↳ Participatory Map (public/visitor family migration)
- ↳ Visiting Nicodemus
- ↳ Researching Nicodemus
 - ↳ Learn More (teaching and learning resources)



Still image of the filming of *Ellis Trail to Nicodemus* (director Angela Bates and videographer Nick Abt) 2022, Nelson.



Frank Riley Home, image made in 1964. From Nicodemus Historical Society Photographs, Historic Sites collection, Spencer Library Nicodemus Archives <https://digital.lib.ku.edu/ku-nicodemus/6113>.

Youth of Nicodemus. From Family Snapshots 1940s collection, Spencer Library Nicodemus Archives <https://digital.lib.ku.edu/ku-nicodemus/7297>.



Lonetta Alexander standing in wheat field. From Family Snapshots 1940s collection, Spencer Library Nicodemus Archives <https://digital.lib.ku.edu/ku-nicodemus/7297>.

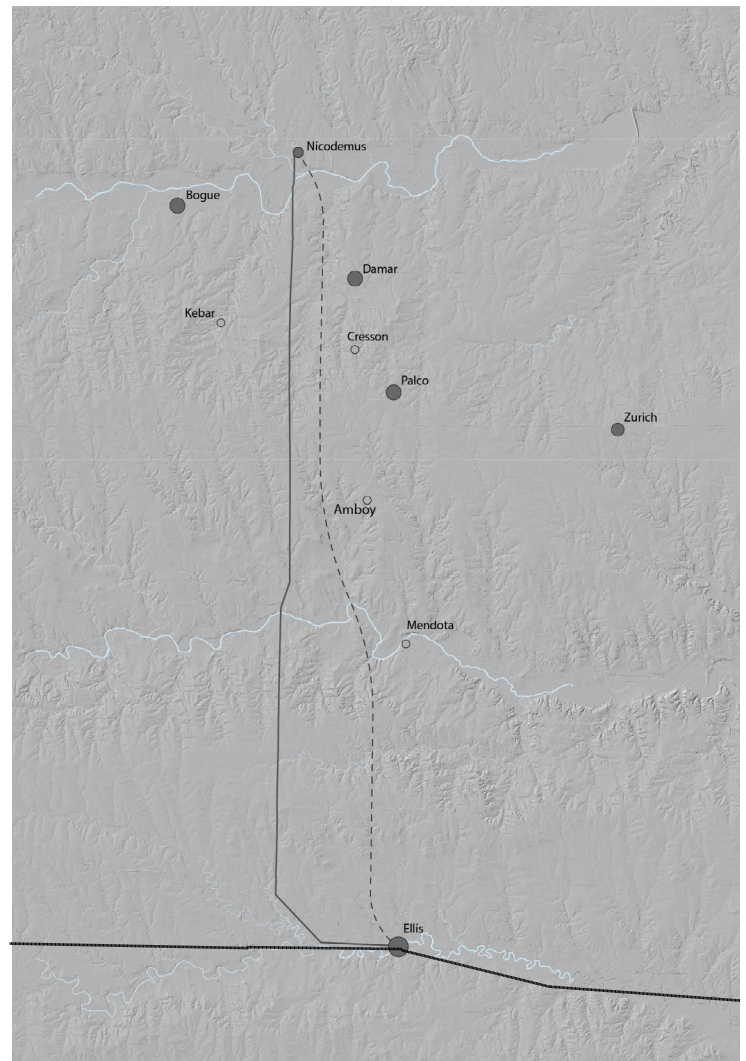
Ellis Trail Interactive Map

The interactive trail map page is the heart of the website. It uses a minimalist map of topography and trail routes to reveal the trail history through archival photos, present-day photos along the trail, still images from the making of the documentary, and clips of the documentary itself.

Visitors are presented three ways to view the map via toggle buttons at the top of the map graphic:

- Landscape & Place Names
- Stories, Images, & Archival Documents
- Reenactment Footage

Each layer builds upon the next to bring the trail map from an abstract symbolic map, to richly visual experience. The project team has begun to geolocate the walking trail and wagon trail route, as traced by director of the Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum, Angela Bates, from archival written accounts and oral histories. The map includes shaded topography (from satellite data); linear symbols to show trail routes for both the wagon and walking trail; with historic and present day place names

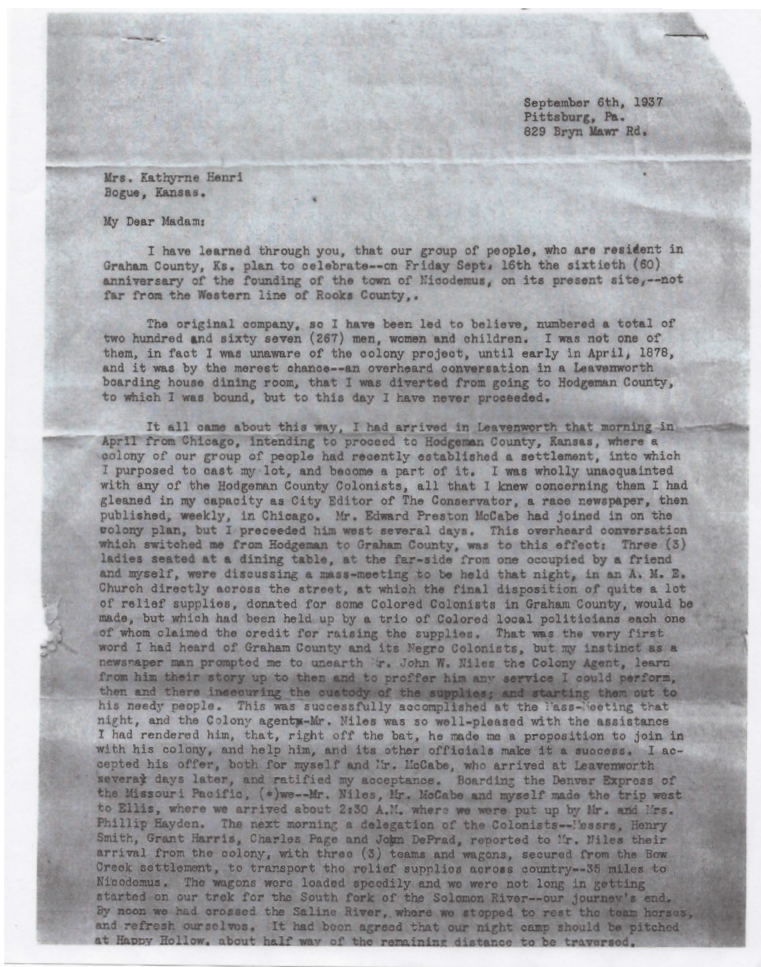


Still image of the GIS map in progress, 2023, Bates, Barrett, Blackmore. --- Walking Trail
— Wagon Trail
— Railroad



Present day woodland along the wagon route of the Ellis to Nicodemus Trail, 2020, Kingery-Page.





Letter written by Nicodemus Abram Hall recounting his journey to Nicodemus. Image of copy in Angela Bates's personal collection. Original held in the Spencer Research Library.

as reference points. Hovering over a node reveals historic photos and documents related to the trail, present day images of the landscape, and video clips to select and open.

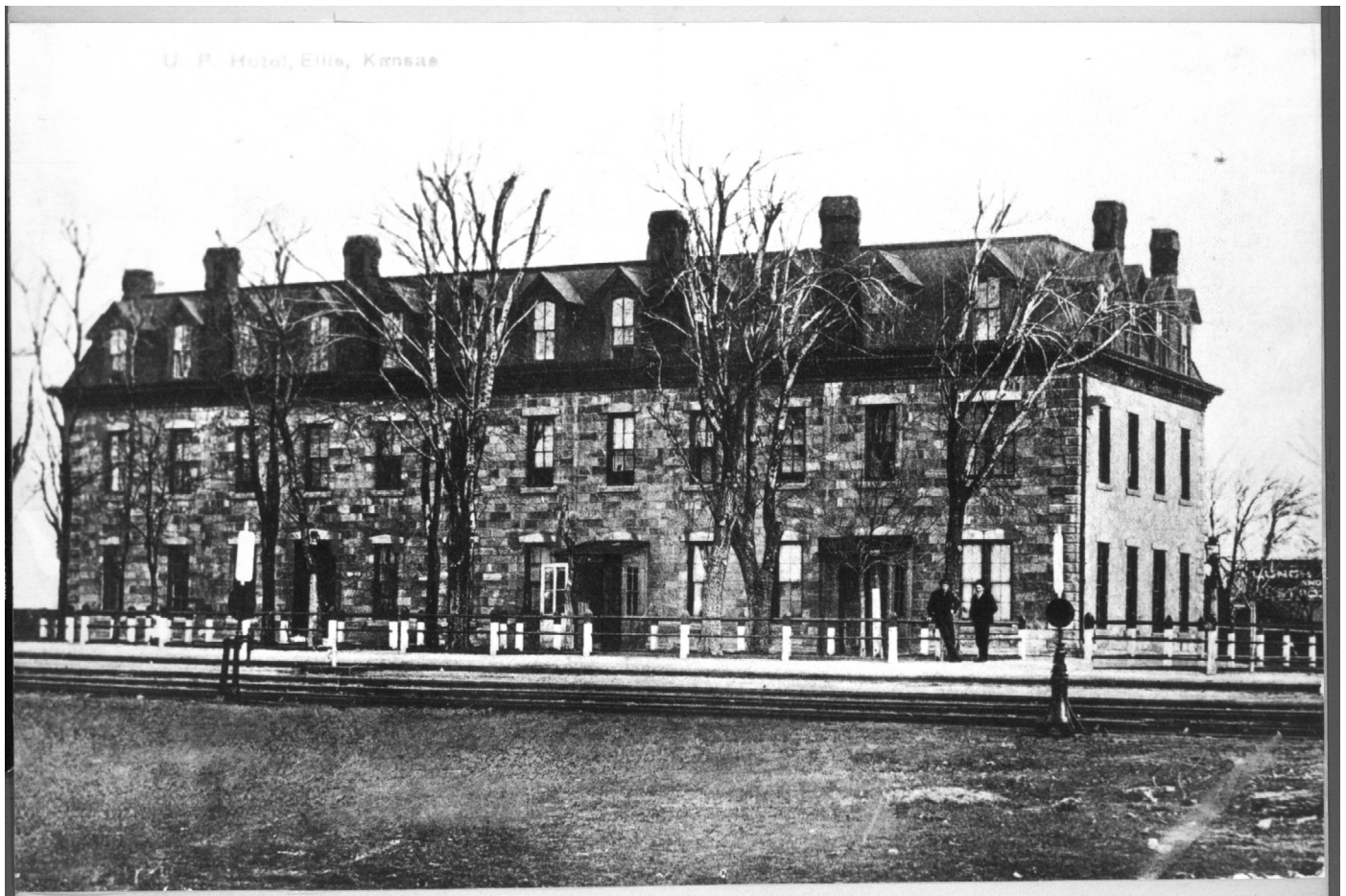
Landmarks to Map

The map will feature historic points along the trail journey of early Nicodemans as expandable nodes. **Historic landmarks** include:

- Walz Homestead
- Wagon Ruts on the Walz property
- Ellis Depot Hotel
- Union Pacific Railroad line, 1870s route
- Ellis City Park
- Gadie Hill
- Saline River
- Solomon River
- The Mound
- Happy Hollow
- Post Office locations: Kebar, Mendota, Cresson, Amboy
- Kebar - Desair Home

Present day woodland along the wagon route of the Ellis to Nicodemus Trail, 2020, Kingery-Page.





Union Pacific Hotel in Ellis, Kansas. Hotel established 1873, photo taken between 1880 and 1899. Held by the Kansas State Historical Society, <https://www.kansas-memory.org/item/221252>.



"View on the Plains, Kansas, 585 miles west of St. Louis, Missouri," Stereograph of the plains in Ellis County, Kansas. From Alexander Gardner's series, "Across the Continent on the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division." 1867. Held by the Kansas Historical Society, <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/151>.

Present-day landmarks will also be mapped in a contrasting color, serving as reference points for those seeking to understand the trail in relation to present day Nicodemus. **Present-day landmarks** to include:

- Ellis Railroad Museum
- Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum
- Nicodemus Visitor Center

Each node will open to feature one resource, depending upon the toggle button activated. Example resources could be: archival documents and photos, present day still photos of the landscape and of the filming of the Ellis Trail re-enactment, or clips from the re-enactment documentary (permission granted by director Nick Abt).

A separate auto tour map brochure will be linked to this page.

Participatory Map

The participatory map page invites visitors to trace their own family migration history within the United States. The map is a simple United States map with multi-colored lines tracing (without words) website visitors' own family migra-

tions within the United States. Places of entry to the United States can also be designated by selecting areas along the United States border or by selecting an entry city. The map uses data input by visitors:

- Origin before migration of family (place location and dates, including any places of entry to the United States)
- Destination(s) of family migration (places and dates)
- All visitor data will be anonymized, no internet metadata will be collected or stored (to be publicly stated on the webpage).

This data is used to trace a single, continuous line for each family story. These lines will accrete over time. The map design will allow lines to be categorized by end destination (for example, designations in the Southeast or Midwest), by direction of movement, or by present-day state boundaries. If the trace lines eventually become too dense to view, these sorting features will increase legibility.



"A man seated in a horse drawn carriage west of Hays, Ellis County, Kansas." From Alexander Gardner's series, "Across the Continent on the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division." 1867. Held by the Kansas Historical Society, <https://www.kansasmemory.org/item/154>.

Visiting Nicodemus

The Visiting Nicodemus webpage links website visitors to existing resources to help them plan and enjoy a visit to Nicodemus, Kansas. The page features an invitation to visit the National Historic Site, followed by resource links to learn more:

- National Historic Site (webpages hosted by National Park Service)
- Self-Guided Tours, including the Ellis Trail Auto-Tour and the Nicodemus Township History Trail
- Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum
- Union Pacific Railroad Museum in Ellis
- Nicodemus Kansas Homecoming Celebration (webpage maintained by the LLC of the same name)
- Kansas Historical Society
- Kansas African American Museum
- Kansas African American History Trail
- Kansas Black Farmers Association
- National Museum of African American History & Culture
- Spencer Research Library at University of Kansas
- Ellis, Trego, and Graham County Chambers of Commerce
- Ellis County Historical Society
- Fort Hays State Historic Site

Researching Nicodemus

During the Discovery phase project, the project team became convinced that not only is it important to elevate the history of the Ellis Trail, and of Nicodemus—there is also an important story to tell of the researchers who have dedicated their careers (indeed for some, their lifetimes) to preserving and recording Nicodemus’s history. Thus the homepage will link to a page about key researchers of Nicodemus:

Independent Historian, descendant of Nicodemus, and Director of the Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum **Angela Bates**: see sample [video](#), indicative of the short video that will be linked to each researcher’s biography and image.



Gathering in Nicodemus. From Family Snapshots 1940s collection, Spencer Library Nicodemus Archives <https://digital.lib.ku.edu/ku-nicodemus/7297>.



[Angela Bates, independent historian, descendant of the early Nicodemans, and Director of the Nicodemus Historic Society. Interview conducted by Katie Kingery-Page, filmed and edited by videographer K.O. Bailey, June 2023.](#)

A brief written biography and linked video of two-to-three minutes length will be provided for each additional researcher:

Archivist of the Nicodemus collections and Librarian at the Spencer Research Library
Deborah Dandridge

Historian and Professor at Southern Methodist University
Kenneth L. Hamilton

Cultural Landscape Researcher, Community Planner, and Professor at Kansas State University
La Barbara James Wigfall

Property Owners along the route of the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus, collaborator with Angela Bates in researching the route of the trail,
Leroy Walz and Roy Acheson

Scholar and Professor of Public Policy at Mills College/Northeastern, research collaborator on Nicodemus geneology,
Ashley Adams

SECTION 4. AESTHETIC GUIDELINES

Aesthetic guidelines are an important part of the design plan, as they affect legibility and emotive qualities of the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus website. Web materials for historic subject matter, like any graphic design, can run a risk of being either uninteresting (too gray or monochrome) or too chaotic, featuring too many diverse visual assets.

The overall aesthetic goals for the website are visual unity with diversity and dynamism. The following guidelines will be observed in designing each page as a cohesive set (the website):

1. A **hierarchy of typography** will be established, to include no more than two font families and two font colors. Type will be selected for legibility within the type hierarchy.
2. Each page of the website will feature only one dominant **visual texture** and up to two subordinate visual textures (for example, a dominant

texture in a high contrast image may be complemented by lower contrast images with softer visual textures).

3. Inspiration for the **color palette** of each page will be drawn from the visual assets of the page (for example photographs) and from input of the Nicodemus community members on the project team, since Nicodemans have developed color palettes for their existing web communications.

4. Each page of the website will feature no more than two, analogous colors and one complementary color, in addition to any neutral colors used throughout the website.

5. Analogous colors of each page will harmonize with overall **website navigation** buttons and map toggle buttons.

6. The **Ellis Trail to Nicodemus map** nodes will expand to focus on just one video, one image, or one archival document per node for visual and cognitive clarity.

7. A **unified set of symbols** will be coordinated across the website Ellis Trail Map and the auto-tour route map and township tours, to include existing symbols in use on the physical sites for walking and wagon trail.

8. The **participatory family migration map** will utilize all colors used across all pages to represent family trace lines.

9. All web pages will be developed to perform visually in both a computer screen and smart phone **format**.

10. **Archival assets** will be used as much as possible in their full and intact form, not cropped.

11. **Contemporary landscape photos** may be cropped or otherwise altered to provide visual textures.

12. Video clips from the documentary of the reenactment will be selected for consistent narration voice, for a **consistent auditory experience**.

SECTION 5. WEB HOSTING AND DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Ellis Trail to Nicodemus website will generate a variety of data needing management, archiving, hosting for open access, and maintenance. The project team will use the resources available at Kansas State University and through the Chapman Center for Rural Studies to host and manage the website data.

Types of data the project might generate and eventually share with others, and under what conditions:

Written text, digital photographs, scanned archival documents, video, geo-spatial information, and web code data will be generated by the project.

How data will be managed and maintained until shared with others:

During website design and construction, all data will have three locations: 1) team member local workstation hard drive, 2) team member external hard drive backup, and 3) backup to cloud storage through Microsoft OneDrive.

The mechanism for sharing data and making the project openly accessible to others:

K-State offers the project team three ways to make the project publicly accessible: 1) as a K-State hosted set of webpages, 2) as a Chapman Center for Rural Studies (digital projects) set of web pages; and 3) as a publicly available dataset on the K-State Research Exchange.

The project team plans to pursue stable web hosting through the Chapman Center for Rural



Bushel corn raised by Howard and Harley Solomon. From Nicodemus Historical Society, African Americans collection, Spencer Library Nicodemus Archives <https://digital.lib.ku.edu/ku-nicodemus/7629>.

Studies, with the web pages linked to associated entities, including the Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum, and the K-State College of Architecture, Planning, and Design.

Annual website maintenance will include review of all pages and archiving of data as a publicly available data set on the K-State Research Exchange.

Factors that might impinge on ability to manage data, for example, legal and ethical restrictions on access to non-aggregated data:

Participatory family migration data will be anonymous: no identifiers of any kind will be collected from participating members of the public. While some people could view this as a missed opportunity, the project team sees it as a vital part of the mapping design to protect families.

Other types of information that should be maintained and shared regarding data, for example, the way it was generated, analytical and procedural information, and the metadata:

“The Dublin Core”, also known as the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set, a set of fifteen “core” elements (properties) for describing resources, will be used to record metadata for all assets.

SECTION 6. MARKETING PLAN

Ellis Trail to Nicodemus: Revealing Stories in the Landscape of Black Westward Settlement website will be promoted through all project partners and visit partners. These include promotions through the existing web presence of the Nicodemus Historic Site (National Park Service partner), Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum, Nicodemus Homecoming, and area chamber of commerce and tourism websites.

Website awareness will be raised through multiple presentations by the project team to professional and educational networks. Early awareness will be increased through the publicly

available Design Plan, which will be archived on the K-State Research Exchange, an indexed repository.

Website launch branding and promotions will be developed by a professional consultant for a consistent visual and auditory aesthetic. Promotions will include web placement through African American social media influencers.

SECTION 7. ASSESSMENT PLAN

The website discovery period has included two project advisor summits. These virtual (video-conferenced) meetings have been guided by key questions related to the essential components of the website: humanities themes, timelines and maps of the Ellis Trail. Outcomes of the summits formed the initial Design Plan. The Design Plan has been reviewed by the project partners and advisors and edited according to their comments.

The project team plans to pursue a Development phase award through the National Endowment for the Humanities. During the Development phase, the draft website will be reviewed by two panels: a panel of Nicodemus descendants and present-day Nicodemus resident stakeholders; and a panel of project partners stakeholders. This formative assessment will be recorded in meeting notes and survey feedback and will be used to revise the website before it goes live.

Following the website going live, summative assessment will be requested from three stakeholder groups: 1) the descendant and residents group, 2) the project partners group, and 3) a focus group of five to eight middle school, high school, and undergraduate university educators. The educators’ students will use the website and will also provide feedback via a short survey. The educators’ focus group will reflect upon the student survey responses and their observations. Summative assessment will be used to propose future changes to the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus website.

SECTION 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

The **bibliography** of resources used to develop the website will become the foundation of the **Learning More** page of the website.

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Project Partners

All will be linked to the Learn More web page.

National Endowment for the Humanities

Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum

Nicodemus Homecoming

K-State College of Architecture Planning and Design

Kansas History Journal

University of Kansas Spencer Research Library

Nicodemus Archives

APPENDIX. SUMMARY OUTCOMES

Accomplishments—The questions under this tab are about what you did during the grant period.

Summit #1

Met with our advisory board twice and sub-groups independently to discuss our interpretation of historical significance and the importance of black settlements, specifically Nicodemus history to the general public. The Principal Investigators provided an introduction and briefing on the project and everyone's roles before dissecting our interpretations and significance of Nicodemus. This included the origin and evolution of black settlements in the United States, and placing the founding of Nicodemus, KS in the westward development of other rural towns. The lengthy debate between scholars brought about a diverse understanding of the westward motivation and significance of black settlements in the west within the context of other mainstream settlements founded during the late 1800s. The bottom-line realization from this discussion was that the difference of opinions among the scholars represented the diverse perceptions we could expect of our public audience that would need to be addressed in sharing of the Nicodemus founding story via the Ellis Trail.

The content would need to be both informative and convincing for the spectrum of users. For instance, a novice would need more historical background on the broader national context to explain the town's significance within westward migration; whereas a humanities scholar might prefer more specific, in-depth documentation of the founding through expanded literary sources, cartography, and historic photographs. This revelation shaped the selection of content (led us to add timelines to the website content), the website optional navigation, and intentional website design.

There were also discussions on technology and mapping options that would accomplish our goals: best strategies for telling the story of the Nicodemus founding, the journey along the Ellis Trail, and allowing users to navigate through the mapping to document their own ancestral migratory stories.

Another sub-group discussed the types of archival images that were available, how and when to review the collections at Spencer Museum of Art and Nicodemus Historical Society & Museum, and the selection of most effective images to utilize for the website story.

After Summit #1

The three principal investigators along with Angela Bates and Deborah Dandridge devised a plan to access and review the Spencer Museum archival collections. Following numerous selections of family photographs, farmland assets, and landscape features, the team joined Angela Bates on-site at her home to review, select, and photo-document additional assets for the website. The investigators were delighted to see that there was so much excellent material on site to support the prevailing design concepts.

Although the team had anticipated a film documentary of the reenactment of the Ellis Trail journey produced by the Historical Society and Museum as part of a subsequent grant, we did not expect significant funding which might provide abstracted film segments for the website during this grant. However, the Historical Society & Museum found the opportunity to pursue filming of the reenactment with videographer, Nick Abt. The principal investigators were

invited to observe and document filming of the Ellis Trail re-enactment. This film viewing and production offered a visual example of how the images and videos for the next phase or website might evolve. An accomplished photographer and adviser, Evert Nelson, augmented the video documentation with photographs which will also be incorporated into the website. Abt has given this project team and the Historical Society and Museum permission to use clips from the documentary within the proposed website. The premiere of this film will be shown in a Wichita theatre and nearby Hill City, Kansas in the last two weeks of February.

Summit #2

A second summit updated the project advisors on the project's progress and used breakout session to plan for maps, timelines, and archival assets. Some project advisors offered valuable input at critical times following the second summit. Sheila Ellis-Glasper, website promotion advisor, provided great insight on the most appropriate means of elevating awareness of the website once it is live. At the same time, the technology team recognized a need for more specialized knowledge in web data management. This led to a follow-up conversation with a digital humanities specialist at Kansas State University to explore hosting the eventual website.

After Summit #2

In the meantime, our community partner, project consultant Angela Bates, expanded her research on the founding of Nicodemus and the mapping of the now nearly invisible Ellis Trail. This obscure route was revealed on the prairie through a few wagon wheel ruts in the ground and stories from ancestral farm owners along the route. A few obscure markers from previous investigations were also helpful in mapping the entire route across the prairie.

The team returned to Nicodemus in June 2023 to record a brief interview with Angela Bates, documenting her in-depth research on Nicodemus. This digital video is a sample, with three more videos anticipated with other key researchers. This addition was not expected when the project team proposed the discovery phase. Working closely with independent historian Angela Bates, we realized it is important to present to the public some essence of the researchers who have been instrumental in interpreting the history of Nicodemus, its founding principles, and the evolutionary development of the townsite. The interviews will serve as one of five main navigational options within the website.

During the discovery phase, we created a preliminary geo-located map of the entire



Discussion image from Summit #1.

route (based upon the original research by Angela Bates, supported by archival assets) of both the walking and the wagon trail. Further development of the interactive map will be a core component of the team's next proposal for a development award.

State to what degree your activities matched the work plan you laid out in your application and whether there were any changes to your project.
Provide an update on your current plans.

All the activities were intrinsically related to the project plan and will ultimately lead to the accomplishment of the next phase of our proposal. We followed the activities of the work plan with minor changes to the timing of activities.

We reduced one activity: though we had planned to produce sample drone footage of the trail landscape, we changed course and asked our photography advisor (Evert) to focus upon still images documenting the filming of the trail journey reenactment instead. Reasons for this change are: the unexpected opportunity of the professional documentary film underway deserved documentation and the documentary team agreed to share clips (including drone footage of the landscape) with the website project team.

We also added one activity: we added documentation of the researchers who have been pivotal to interpreting Nicodemus. A sample video (representative of more to come) documents Angela Bates life-long pursuit of Nicodemus history.

Products—Add any publications that appeared during the grant period. You may enter information about conference papers, articles, digital resources, books, and other project-related products. You will be able to add updates on your products whenever they are completed, even long after the grant period.

The primary product is the Design Plan for the website which will be available on the K-State Research Exchange, an indexed web archive.

Associated products include the preliminary map of the Ellis Trail, brief video documenting historian Angela Bates, and photographic documentation of the filming of The Ellis Trail to Nicodemus documentary. This documentary was led by Angela Bates and filmmaker Nick Abt, who worked with the community to stage and enact thirteen different scripted scenes along the Ellis Trail.

The team shared the project at university research events and regional gatherings. For example, the University K-State Today and APDesign newsletters announced the award and SEEK Magazine (K-State research magazine) ran a short article insert with a photograph of the project, "Telling the story of Black westward settlement" (Spring 2022). Project team member Erin Wiersma was invited to talk about the project during K-State's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. week celebration. The project has been presented at the Alumni Association Board meeting, department Advisory Board meetings, and university-sponsored events as an example of exceptional engaged scholarship in the university.

The primary product of the discovery phase is the Design Plan, which guides implementation of the website. The team plans to pursue a development phase award to realize the project aim: that Nicodemus residents and their ancestral stories are heard in the interpretation of Nicodemus founding and that those who enter their migratory journeys understand the common and uncommon significance of their collective past.

The team will continue to share the outcomes over the coming year, as we plan to propose conference sessions at venues in engagement, planning, and humanities, disciplines.

Participants—For these individual programs, please discuss whether your employer or another grant-making entity or a publisher provided additional support for work on your NEH-sponsored project. Also describe any collaboration with other scholars, if applicable.

Participants in the Discovery phase project included all project team members (including all advisors). There were three additional contributors who provided valuable contributions to the team:

- University of California at Berkeley humanistic social scientist and Black Studies scholar, Dr. Justin Hosbey, invited to join Summit #1.
- Kansas videographer K.O. Bailey, who assisted the team in recording and editing interview with Angela Bates.
- K-State landscape architecture faculty member, Kirby Barrett, who assisted with mapping the Ellis Trail.
- K-State librarian Ryan Otto advised on open access and website archiving.
- K-State Chapman Center for Rural Studies director Mary Kohn advised on web hosting.

Impact—Describe, how, in your opinion, your project has made or will be able to make an impact on scholarly or general audiences, and what impact it has had on your teaching and career.

As a Land Grant Institution, K-State values engaged scholarly work. For the principal investigator, La Barbara James Wigfall, this project has been an important milestone in her application for promotion to full professor.

In her professional field, this project built upon Wigfall and Bates' work on the National Park Service, Parks for the People Competition. The Ellis Trail project contributed to Wigfall's

nominations for the Ad Astra KS American Planning Association Award, a lifetime achievement award in planning, and a nomination for National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) Midwest Member of the Year. Both awards were received.

This past year, Wigfall was also nominated for the K-State Coffman Distinguished Professor Award because of her engagement scholarship with Nicodemus, National Endowment for the Arts, National Park Service, and National Trust for Public Lands; and she was nominated by K-State for the Engaged Scholarship Consortium Faculty Excellence Award.

Recognizing the historic significance of Nicodemus in the context of black westward migration, Wigfall has lectured on campus in architectural history courses, agricultural courses focused upon Black farmers, and a world cities planning course. She has also shared this project with the Manhattan Rotary Club, who invited her to a breakfast talk about her 45-year research on Nicodemus. The club members were very interested in the NEH grant, the current townsite development, and how they might help to disseminate the compelling story.

The Design Plan for the Ellis Trail to Nicodemus will be a publicly available, open access product of the discovery phase award. The team plans to pursue a development phase award. If implemented, the completed website has the potential to reach youth and adult audiences and serve as a valuable teaching resource for educators.

Reporting—Describe how you have acknowledged NEH support for your work.

All reporting (press release, *SEEK* magazine coverage) and presentations on the project have made clear the NEH support. The Design Plan for the website, which will be a publicly available product through open access on K-State Research Exchange, acknowledges the NEH and includes the grant award number.