

**October 1977**



The A.M.E. Church, built 1885



Bernice Bates (left) and Juanita Redd, natives of Nicodemus

## Nicodemus Centennial: 1877-1977

Nicodemus, the last all black community in Kansas, celebrated its 100th birthday the 24-31 of July. The celebration, conceived in 1887, commemorates the emancipation of black people from slavery and the creation of Nicodemus as a town.

Former residents, relatives and friends came by the hundreds from different parts of the country to participate in this annual affair. Cars and mobile homes with license plates from California, New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio crowded the streets and park areas.

Times were joyous for everyone. The children had plenty of room to run and play. A ferris wheel and pony ride in the middle of town helped to limit their mischief. Only on occasion did you find one chasing a stray chicken or exploring the darkness of an old abandoned building.

The older generation, while enjoying its fill of chicken, ribs and beer, lounged around—old friends reminiscing of days past and talking politics.

At the day's end, a dance, with live music in Township Hall, was the center of attraction. Erected in 1939, Township Hall is the largest

structure in Nicodemus. It has a seating capacity of 350 persons.

People young and old congregated in and outside the building. Some danced while others made rounds conversing with friends and relatives.

A parade was held Saturday at noon and everyone converged to the main street. It consisted of several covered wagons pulled by teams of fancy groomed mules; an array of horses with flag carrying riders; an antique fire truck and Daniel Boone who startled the crowd with bursts of gun powder from his musket and pistol.

The celebration ended Sunday with religious services from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with spiritual entertainment provided by a gospel choir from Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Topeka.

Also attracted to the weekend's festivities were news reporters from state and local newspapers and television stations. With a grant from the federal government, New York University hired free-lance reporters, cameramen and sound crews to document the entire event.



## Historical Background

It was in June of 1877 when the first wave of black homesteaders reached a treeless, non-inhabited dusty plain area of western Kansas.

These 30 black settlers, most of whom were originally from Kentucky, were seeking a dream of freedom—a better way of life—from the cruel and harsh realities of the segregated South.

They came with the visions of hope and prosperity implanted in their minds by Benjamin "Pop" Singleton, one of the principal leaders of the black migration to Kansas, and W.R. Hill, a white land agent from Graham County, Kansas.

It is said that the name Nicodemus comes from an African slave who bought his freedom after coming to America.

In September of 1877, a charter was issued and the township of Nicodemus became official.

Nicodemus peaked in population to over 600 in 1879. This was due primarily from the exodus of 300 more blacks from Lexington and Georgetown, Kentucky.

The years ahead were by no means easy. Hope, determination and help from the Potawatomie Indians were the main elements of survival for these people the first winter.

Terrible droughts, blizzards, hot winds and the breakdown in plans for a railroad line forced many to move on to better lands as far away as Colorado. The population soon dropped and by the turn of the century (1905), only 261 persons remained.

Land ownership posed as another major obstacle for these black pioneers. They were in no position to compete with the white land owners who controlled over 370,000 acres of the county's farmland. At the turn of the century ownership of land in Graham County by blacks was approximately 50,000 acres.

At its height, Nicodemus had a post office and school, three churches, three grocery stores, two drug stores, two newspapers, a bank and hotel.

Today, with a population of 54, Nicodemus is making plans toward reconstruction. A federally funded housing project is nearing completion. It will house low-income and elderly families. The community has built a new church and some of those who had left because of an unstable economy, speak of returning for retirement.

Nicodemus is the last remaining town in Kansas that was established by blacks. It is also noted as the home of some distinguished and widely acclaimed personalities. These include football great, Gale Sayers; E.P. McCabe, Kansas state auditor for two terms and founder of Langston, an all black town in Oklahoma; W.L. Sayers, lawyer, and Denver County attorney; district Judge Alexander in Denver; and Kansas State University Dean of Minority Affairs, Veryl

Switzer, who recently was voted into the Big 8 Football Hall of Fame. All these originated or lived in Nicodemus.

The United States Department of the Interior designated Nicodemus as a historical landmark on January 7, 1976.

**By Anthony J. Seals**



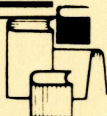
Hill City residents and visiting kids participate in Nicodemus Centennial parade



The Goins home, built in 1880s



## NEW ACQUISITIONS



### FILMS...

**Bilingualism: Promise for Tomorrow.** This film, purchased jointly by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Minorities Resource/Research Center, successfully dramatizes the importance of an educational system which is sensitive to the needs of non-English speaking children. Techniques of dramatization followed by authoritative statements clearly illustrate the basic need for bilingual education in this country. Perhaps the strength of the film lies in the well acted scenario in which Consuelo eagerly anticipates her first day of school. This eagerness is rapidly replaced by disappointment and confusion since Consuelo, who is Spanish and doesn't know any English, is placed in a completely English speaking environment. Confusion ends when the bilingual teacher becomes aware of the situation and places Consuelo in a bilingual class. The subsequent comments by educators and legislators concerned with bilingual education becomes increasingly vital and important in light of the preceding drama. Due to its introductory nature, the film can provide an excellent orientation for all students studying to become elementary educators and administrators. Also students of sociology, history, social work, psychology and other fields in education would benefit from exposure to **Bilingualism: Promise for Tomorrow**. 16 mm., 29 min., Color.

### CASSETTES...

**Let's Celebrate Ethnicity.** The Hon. Julian Bond discusses Black problems of the last hundred years with particular focus on the historical events of the 60s and the unique problems of the 70s.

### NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES...

**El Mundo.** A bilingual newspaper with coverage of U.S. and Mexican news.

**Mexican American Sun.** A bilingual newspaper from Houston, Texas.

### BOOKS...

**Code Name "Zorro": The Murder of Martin Luther King, Jr.** by Mark Lane and Dick Gregory. The authors examine the death of the civil rights leader and challenge the belief that James Earl Ray acted solely in the murder.

**Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature** by Cecil Robinson. A chronological study beginning with the *Criollo* in Mexico and ending with Chicano literature.

**One Hundred Million Acres** by Kirke Kickingbird and Karen Ducheneaux. Presents a detailed study of the continued struggle of American Indians in attempting to retain their land.



The Minorities Resource and Research Center Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication. This is the first issue of the 1977-78 school year.

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# CALENDAR



## Conferences

Oct. 22—Statewide ME/CHA Conference

## Exhibits

Sept.-Oct.—Nicodemus, Kansas. Minority Resource/Research Center, Farrell Library.

Sept. 26-Oct. 7—Native American Display. K-State Union.

## Speakers

Oct. 22—Luis Tony Baez, bilingual educator, Statewide ME/CHA Conference.

Nov. 10—Juan Rodriguez, editor of "Canta Abierta" and literary critic.\* Sponsored by MEChA.

Nov. 10—Gary Soto, poet, recipient of the United States Award of the International Poetry Forum. Sponsored by MEChA.

Nov. 17—Leslie Marmon Silko, author of **Ceremony**, Kansas State Native American Art Series, K-State Union 212, 7:30 p.m.

## Miscellaneous

Nov. 6-12—Homecoming Week festivities. Sponsored by Black Student Union.\*

\*Watch **Collegian** for further information

## Movies

Nov. 6-12—"I heard the owl call my name." During Homecoming Week. Sponsored by Native American Indian Student Body.\*



Leslie Silko, Native American author.