

# Promise Washed Away

Doniphan, Doniphan County, Kansas, 1855-1947



Figure 1. A photograph of a steamer on a river in Doniphan County, Kansas, c. 1880. SOURCE: kshs.org, <https://www.kshs.org/p/steamboats-in-kansas-a-bibliography/13711>

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This history is about the river town of Doniphan, located in Wayne Township of Doniphan County, Kansas. A combination of topographical and political factors propelled the early growth of Doniphan. The included material is based on a variety of sources including: maps, multiple written histories, photographs, and an interview.

The year is 1856; now imagine traveling the muddy Missouri River by way of steamboat, hugging towering tree-covered bluffs, in search of the ideal place to settle in the newly opened Kansas Territory. For many people in the antebellum United States, Doniphan, located in Wayne Township of Doniphan County, Kansas, was that ideal place to come ashore. A combination of topographical features and turbulent politics propelled the early growth of this town. The river began, sustained, and ended the town of Doniphan. The times attracted national figures such as Jim Lane and James Redpath. Abraham Lincoln believed Doniphan to be important enough to visit, and he spoke from the hotel there on December 3, 1859.<sup>1</sup> Today, the name Doniphan represents a rural area in contrast to the booming town it once was. The rich story of Doniphan has its beginnings around an important time in Kansas and United States history.

### **The Location**

In nearly all written accounts of Doniphan, much of the initial success of the town is attributed to the excellent rock-bound landing that the location offered to steamboats traveling the Missouri River. At the time of early settlement, railroad lines had not yet reached the Kansas Territory, making steamboat traffic the leading mechanism for economic growth. Far northeast Kansas is known as the Glaciated Region, consisting of rolling hills with deep and fertile soils, which today, support high yielding corn and soybean agriculture.<sup>2</sup> As seen in Figure 1, the plat map appears to show a square, cookie-cutter town layout but this is somewhat deceiving. The town of Doniphan was not built in the river bottoms where it was guaranteed to be flooded, but instead, built on the river bluffs.

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<sup>1</sup> “93<sup>rd</sup> Birthday,” *Kansas Chief*, Aug. 3, 1939. Private collection of Robert Nourie.

<sup>2</sup> Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972, 1988), Map 3.

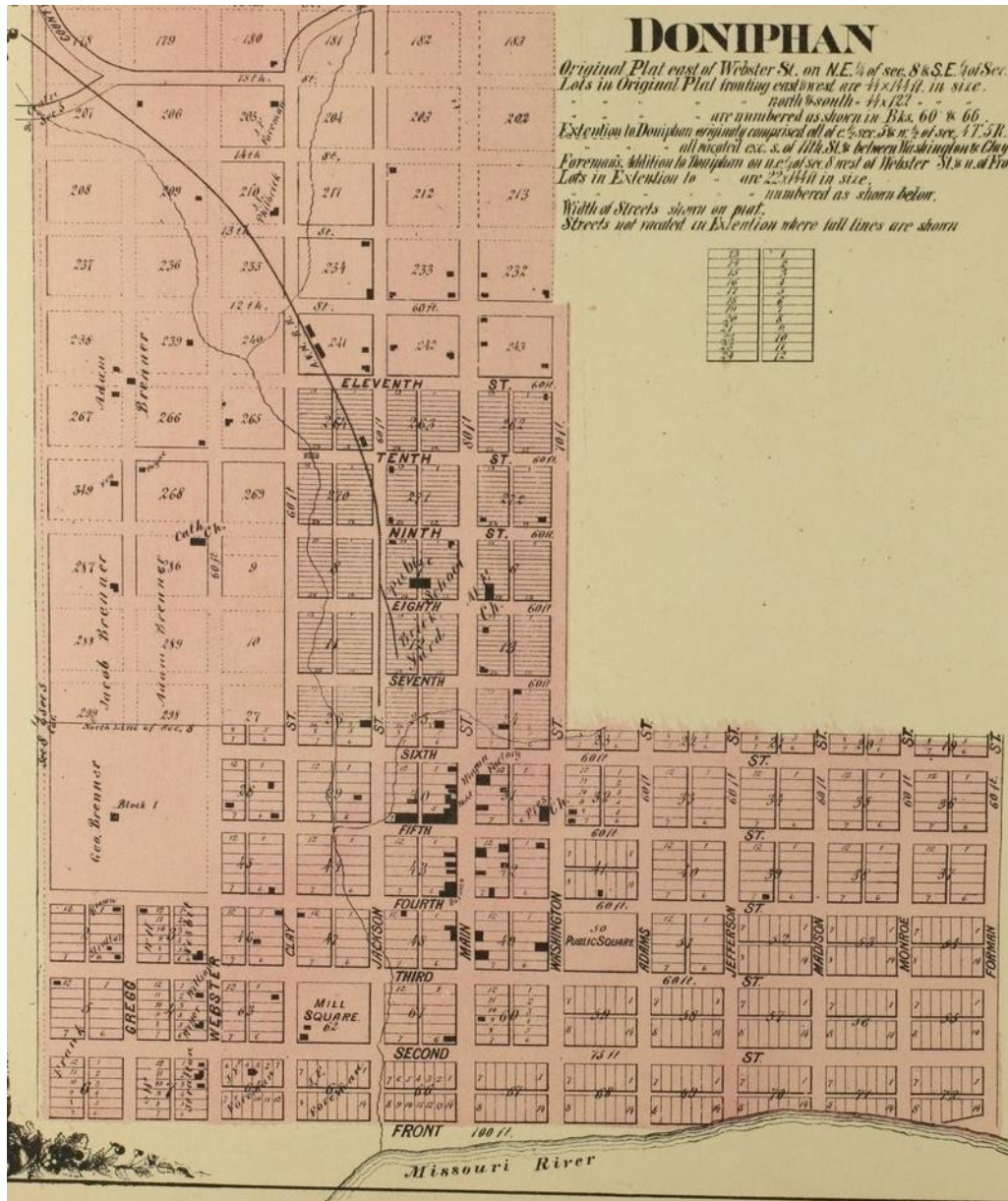


Figure 2. A plat map of Doniphan, 1882. SOURCE: *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas*, KansasMemory.org.

The north/south running Main Street (what is Mineral Point Road today) gradually rises above the bottom ground elevation heading away from the Missouri River. The elevation quickly rises east of Main Street, and several platted blocks of the town would have most certainly been on steep slopes or in gullies. West of Main Street remains relatively flat for a short time before also rising into rolling hills. This region would have also provided abundant wood for initial

building, with the native flora consisting heavily of oak-hickory forest.<sup>3</sup> In the 1882 *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas* it was stated, “The timber supply in Doniphan (County) is better, perhaps, than that of any county in the state. All the streams have borders or belts of timber, varying from forty rods to three miles in width.”<sup>4</sup> Lying just to the west of Doniphan is Independence Creek which drains into the Missouri River. Perhaps the 1856 writings of Father Peter Henry Lemke, the first Catholic priest to come to Doniphan, addressed to his Abbott, best summarize the beauty and practicality of the Doniphan location:

It has the only good landing place...outside Leavenworth, and is the farthest point up stream that heavily freighted steamers can reach at any season of the year. Moreover the surrounding country is both beautiful and fruitful. Water and wood in abundance and the climate is healthful. You will not easily find the like in any part of the world. Steamers arrive and depart daily.<sup>5</sup>

Further support for the advantageous location of Doniphan can be drawn from the occupation of the Kansa Indians in the general area of Doniphan from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> It is believed these Indians settled in the area because of the convenient location on the Missouri River. In 1724, French explorer Etienne Veniard De Bourgmont discovered the Kansa Indian settlement on his trek into Kansas.<sup>7</sup> In the late 1700s the Kansa Indians relocated for still uncertain reasons, leaving their settlement abandoned.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Map 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas*, *KansasMemory.org*, Original Pub: J.S. Bird, Chicago, 1882, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/223992/page/20> (accessed Dec 14, 2013), page 18.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Beckman, O.S.B., *Kansas Monks* (Atchison: Abbey Student Press, 1957), page 21.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Martello, “The Gift and Curse of the Missouri: Doniphan & the Grand Village des Canzes,” *Lost Kansas Communities*, Spring 2012, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/omeka-net%2F2236%2Farchive%2Ffiles%2F63f912b83192c0d5d1d19d73f878132c.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAI3ATG3OSQLO5HGKA&Expi>. (accessed Dec. 14, 2013)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## The Name and Beginning

The town of Doniphan and Doniphan County were named after Alexander William Doniphan. A.W. Doniphan was a Missouri attorney known for representing the Mormons, led by Joseph Smith, in multiple proceedings against hostile Missourians. He was also distinguished for his time as commander of the Mexican War First Missouri Mounted Volunteers. Being born in Kentucky, and residing in Missouri, A.W. was pro-slavery and held several slaves, but he remained neutral during the Civil War. He was pro-Southern, but at the same time, an advocate of the Federal Union.<sup>8</sup> The city of Atchison and Atchison County, which lie just south of Doniphan, were named after David Rice Atchison, one of A.W. Doniphan's peers and associates. D.R. Atchison was strongly pro-slavery and was known as leader of violence against Free-States during "Bleeding Kansas." The naming of towns after these two individuals hints at the make-up of early settlers of northeast Kansas.

The Doniphan Town Company was organized in November, 1854, in St. Joseph, Missouri, and the town site was surveyed the following spring by J.F. Forman.<sup>9</sup> Two years prior to the organization of the company, Joseph Utt had constructed a trading post at the location of Doniphan.<sup>10</sup> In the spring of 1855, J.W. and J.F. Forman raised the first building after the town had been surveyed and laid off. The second story of the building housed Doniphan's first newspaper, the *Constitutionalist*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Roger D. Launius, *Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997). Pages xi, xiii.

<sup>9</sup> William G. Culter, "Doniphan County, Part 3" from *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), *kancoll.org*, <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/doniphan/doniphan-co-p3.html#DONIPHAN>. (accessed: Dec 14, 2013)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas, Kansas Memory*, Original Pub: J.S. Bird, Chicago, 1882, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/223992/page/42> (Accessed Dec 14, 2013). Page 40.

## **An Interesting Story**

Bridget (Murry) Flannigan landed at Doniphan in 1856. At the time she was ten years old. Like many of the first settlers, she got a first-hand experience traveling the powerful Missouri River by steamboat. Those towering tree-covered bluffs likely appeared beautiful, yet intimidating to a girl of her age. She had just recently left her home country after being born into a society struggling for survival. Her journey was very long and likely tiresome. You see, Bridget Flannigan was born in County Mayo, Ireland, August 7, 1846.<sup>12</sup> The Irish Potato Famine lasted from 1845 to 1852 and was likely a factor behind her family's departure from Ireland. From my talks with Bernadine Masters, a former Doniphan resident, I discovered Bridget Flannigan is believed to have traveled nearly the entire way from Ireland to Doniphan by boat. After sailing the Atlantic and arriving in New York, it is believed she traveled by canals to the Ohio River, from the Ohio to the Mississippi River, from the Mississippi to the Missouri River, eventually landing at Doniphan in 1856.<sup>13</sup> After arriving in Doniphan, Bridget Flannigan had to be tired of traveling, and evidently was content with staying put for a while. Mrs. Flannigan spent the remaining 87 years of her life in or around the town of Doniphan.<sup>14</sup> Her basic life story as provided from one article in the *Kansas Chief* newspaper, written for her ninety-third birthday, serves as a unique outline for highlighting some of the key aspects of Doniphan's history.

## **The People**

As reported by the *Kansas Chief*, Bridget Flannigan clearly remembered and recalled one of Doniphan's notable early figures, Jim Lane. Lane, born in Indiana, was believed to have been sent to Kansas by Senator Stephen Douglas, architect of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, to begin an

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<sup>12</sup> "93<sup>rd</sup> Birthday," *Kansas Chief*, Aug. 3, 1939. Private collection of Robert Nourie.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Bernadine Masters, Nov. 30, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

anti-slavery Democratic Party.<sup>15</sup> A United States Congressman representing Indiana, Lane was strongly anti-slavery and would go on to later serve as a senator from Kansas and a general in the Union Army. Bridget Flannigan recalled seeing Lane stop his team of horses at a spring on her father's farm to get a drink and water the horses.<sup>16</sup>

The earliest federal census for Wayne Township was conducted in 1860. This census highlights the divided situation that occurred in Kansas prior to the Civil War. Of the 1,390 people identified in Wayne Township, one-quarter were from Missouri and one-quarter were from Kentucky, with Pennsylvania and Ohio being the next most common states of origin.<sup>17</sup> Of individuals listed as foreign born in the 1860 Federal Census data, 44 percent were German, 25 percent Irish (Murry/Flannigan's included), and 20 percent Norwegian.<sup>18</sup> With the opening of Kansas Territory (Kansas-Nebraska Act), it was decided that the issue of slavery would be determined by way of "popular sovereignty." Pro-slavery individuals in Missouri had been itching for the land across the river for years and rushed in upon its opening, hoping to establish Kansas as a slave state. Census data suggests slavery did indeed make its way into Wayne Township with 10 individuals labeled as "colored," all of which were listed as "servants" in the census data.<sup>19</sup> Thomas J. Key established the *Constitutionalist* newspaper to serve as a mouthpiece for the promotion of slavery in 1856. It went out of publication in 1858.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Collins, *Jim Lane: Scoundrel, Statesman, Kansan* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2007). Pages 23-36.

<sup>16</sup> "93<sup>rd</sup> Birthday," *Kansas Chief*, Aug. 3, 1939. Private collection of Robert Nourie.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Nourie, "Summary of 1860 Federal Census Data," Obtained from the following: Doniphan Post Office, *Federal Census of Wayne Township, Doniphan County, Kansas*, Aug 6, 1860. Private collection of Robert Nourie.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> William G. Culter, "Doniphan County, Part 3" from *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), *kancoll.org*, <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/doniphan/doniphan-co-p3.html#DONIPHAN>. (Accessed: Dec 14, 2013)



In opposition to pro-slavery stances, the Doniphan *Crusader of Freedom* came into publication under James Redpath.<sup>21</sup> The *Crusader of Freedom* was not long lived, lasting only from only December 1857 to May 1858.<sup>22</sup> Redpath, a journalist, devoted much of his life to promoting anti-slavery ideals. Two of his more notable works were *The Roving Editor, or Talks with Slaves in The Southern States* and *Hand-Book to Kansas Territory and the Rocky Mountains' Gold Region*. In the *Editor*, Redpath documents his interviews with slaves while traveling the South. The *Hand-Book* was produced with hopes that it would attract Free-Staters to immigrate to Kansas. A quote from the *Hand-Book*, which can be found in *Gray's Doniphan County History*, reads:

Doniphan, it is admitted by everyone, has the best rock-bound landing, and the best townsite on the Missouri River anywhere above St. Louis... We say to the emigrant, come to Doniphan; believing as we do, that it is destined to be the great emporium of the upper Missouri. The population is about one thousand.<sup>23</sup>

Jim Lane was a large owner in the *Crusader of Freedom*, and a dispute between Lane and Redpath is believed to be the cause of the newspaper's closure.<sup>24</sup> The early mixture of pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces in Doniphan would have made for interesting times for all residents, especially for a young girl who recently arrived from Ireland.

At the age of thirteen, Bridget Flannigan experienced what was said by the *Kansas Chief* to be "one of the greatest thrills of her lifetime." On December 3, 1859, Abraham Lincoln came

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James Redpath, *The Roving Editor or Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) Page 230, Note 13.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Leopoldo Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History* (Bendena, KS: The Roycroft Press, 1905), skyways.lib.ks.us, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/doniphan/history/1905/1-1a.html#Doniphan>. (accessed: Dec 15, 2013)

<sup>24</sup> William G. Culter, "Doniphan County, Part 3" from *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), [kancoll.org, http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/doniphan/doniphan-co-p3.html#DONIPHAN](http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/doniphan/doniphan-co-p3.html#DONIPHAN). (accessed: Dec 14, 2013)



to Doniphan and spoke at the hotel (likely the Doniphan House or St. Charles Hotel<sup>25</sup>) after traveling from Troy (the seat of Doniphan County), where he had spoken that morning. Bridget Flannigan recalled that a large crowd had gathered to hear the tall lawyer from Illinois speak.<sup>26</sup> To have the future president of the United States travel to speak at a small, young town in the Kansas Territory emphasized the fact that Doniphan was home to significant political happenings. Lincoln was most likely on a campaign to rally support for his presidential nomination. Imagine being in Bridget Flannigan's shoes: standing on what was likely Main Street, just outside of the hotel, in the cold December evening. Imagine listening to the powerful words of a man that would one day end slavery in the United States and come to be known as one of the greatest American leaders of all-time.

### **The Catholic Church**

On February 1, 1863, Bridget Murry married Thomas Flannigan in the Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup> Father Peter Henry Lemke was the first Catholic priest to come to Doniphan, being sent by Bishop Miege with the promise of \$500 to help build a church.<sup>28</sup> Father Henry was a Benedictine who was described as displaying, in a somewhat exaggerated form, "all of the characteristics of the typical free-lance missionary."<sup>29</sup> Despite his age, an unfavorable winter, materialistic limitations, and financial misfortunes, Father Henry had a combination chapel and residence (see Figure 3) in 1857, perched atop the river bluffs.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> William G. Culter, "Doniphan County, Part 3" from *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), *kancoll.org*, <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/doniphan/doniphan-co-p3.html#DONIPHAN>. (accessed: Dec 14, 2013)

<sup>26</sup> "93<sup>rd</sup> Birthday," *Kansas Chief*, Aug. 3, 1939. Private collection of Robert Nourie.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Peter Beckman, O.S.B., *Kansas Monks* (Atchison: Abbey Student Press, 1957), page 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Page 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Page 26.

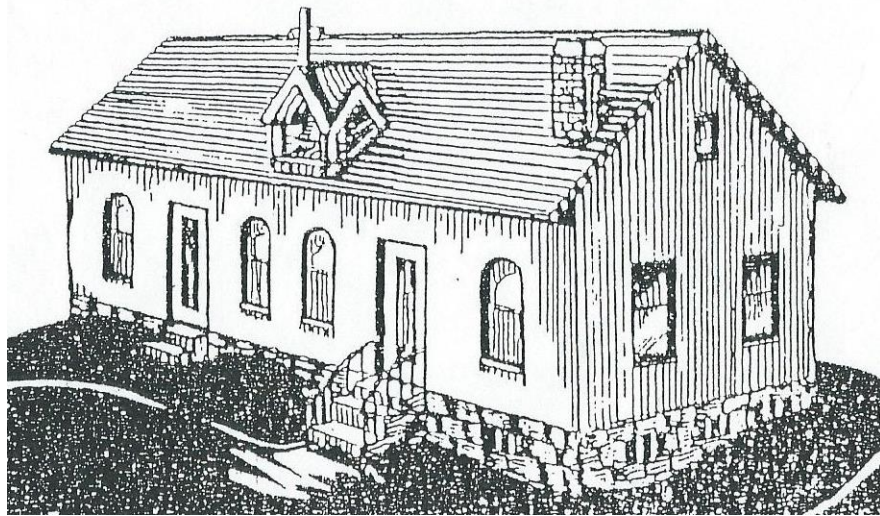


Figure 3. A sketch, done by a fellow priest, of Father Henry's chapel/residence, c. 1860.

SOURCE: Private collection of Robert Nourie.

A year after the Flannigans were married, the chapel/residence burned down. The new Catholic Church, St. John the Baptist, was constructed from brick in 1867, on land donated by Adam Brenner, who was known for his expansive vineyards and wine operation on the west side of Doniphan.<sup>31</sup> Today, the brick church is one of few significant structures that remain standing in Doniphan (see Figure 4). The “public square” that can be seen in the plat map of Figure 1 is where the original church stood and was just one block south of where Bridget Flannigan lived in her later life.<sup>32</sup> The Benedictine Abbey, now in Atchison, traces its beginnings to Father Henry in Doniphan.

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<sup>31</sup> William G. Culter, “Doniphan County, Part 3” from *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), *kancoll.org*, <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/doniphan/doniphan-co-p3.html#DONIPHAN>. (accessed: Dec 14, 2013)

<sup>32</sup> “93<sup>rd</sup> Birthday,” *Kansas Chief*, Aug. 3, 1939. Private collection of Robert Nourie.



Figure 4. A photograph of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, Nov. 26, 2013. Photograph by Peter Masters.

### **The Later Years**

With arrival of the railroad in Kansas, the importance of the steamboat diminished and the advantages of Doniphan's excellent landing faded. In the early 1870s, the Atchison & Nebraska Railroad arrived at Doniphan and the first mail train arrived on January 3, 1871.<sup>33</sup> Around 1871, an additional line was constructed from Wathena to Doniphan, eventually connecting to the A. & N. line near Doniphan. This line operated only two years.<sup>34</sup> The railroad sustained Doniphan for some time. In the early summer of 1891, the Missouri River flooded. The

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<sup>33</sup> Patrick Leopoldo Gray, *Gray's Doniphan County History* (Bendena, KS: The Roycroft Press, 1905), skyways.lib.ks.us, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/doniphan/history/1905/1-1a.html#Doniphan>. (Accessed: Dec 15, 2013)

<sup>34</sup> *Historical Plat Book of Doniphan County, Kansas, Kansas Memory*, Original Pub: J.S. Bird, Chicago, 1882, <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/223992/page/26> (accessed Dec 14, 2013). Page 24.

flood resulted in the formation of a new southern river channel and a lake about “four miles in length and, in places, a half to three-fourths of a mile wide.”<sup>35</sup> With the flooding, Doniphan was no longer on the Missouri River, but instead on what would become known as Doniphan Lake. The main line of the A. & N. railroad ran west of Doniphan, stopping at Doniphan Station, which was a few miles northwest of town. In the 1882 plat map of Doniphan, a branch of the A. & N. line entered the town from the north, terminating between seventh and sixth streets. Maps of *The Official Atlas of Kansas 1887* do not show the same branch entering Doniphan, while still showing the A. & N. line to the west.<sup>36</sup> The lack of a railroad to the heart of the town would have harmed businesses. The emergence of neighboring river towns, Atchison and St. Joseph, also likely played a role in the decline of Doniphan. Both were on the river and both were key railroad hubs; two factors that Doniphan lacked.

Bernadine (Ford) Masters, born on July 4, 1933, was the great niece of Bridget Flannigan and grew up in the dwindling town of Doniphan. Bernadine’s mother came to Doniphan to teach school and her father grew fruit in the area, selling it at his general store in the 1920s and 1930s. She fondly recalls her great “Aunt Biddy,” living with the Ford Family after she had become blind in her later years. One of the unique memories she shared with me centered around dinnertime. Each evening, once dinner was ready, Bernadine’s younger blonde haired brother, Dennis, would lead Aunt Biddy to the dinner table; as a result, Aunt Biddy proclaimed him to be her “Golden Haired Angel.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “The Formation of Doniphan Lake,” *Transaction of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Meetings of the Kansas Academy of Science*, Vol. XIII, 1893. Page 47. Private collection of Robert Nourie.

<sup>36</sup> *The Official Atlas of Kansas 1887* (Philadelphia: L.H. Leverts & Co., 1887). Rock Creek Valley Historical Society, Westmoreland, KS. Pages including/near 26.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Bernadine Masters, Nov. 30, 2013.





Figure 5. A photograph of Thomas and Bridget Flannigan at their home, April 8, 1912.  
SOURCE: Private collection of Robert Nourie.

### **Closure**

Bernadine attended school in Doniphan until the closure of Rural High School Number 10 in 1947. She finished high school in Troy. Today, the walls of the brick school stand strong while the roof of the structure fades away. The closure of the school marks a closure of the town of Doniphan. Families remain in the ‘area’ but the hustle and bustle of the early political times is gone. The railroad is also gone. Yet the Missouri River that began, sustained, and ended the town of Doniphan can still be seen from the scenic bluffs of the town site. Although continuously shifting its course, the Missouri River persists. The stories of Bridget Flannigan also persist, along with her rocking chair. Yes, to this day, Aunt Biddy’s rocking chair, which she brought along on the trip from County Mayo, Ireland, remains within Bernadine’s family. Imagine stepping off a steamboat at Doniphan, in territorial Kansas, where you are about to begin your new life.

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