

## Winchester, Jefferson County, Kansas



Figure 1: Looking north on Winchester St. between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> streets, circa 1890s. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)

Allison Bertels

Chapman Center for Rural Studies

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Today, the town of Winchester in Jefferson County, Kansas is small and quiet. But beneath this exterior lies a history rooted deeply in family stories, connections with the railroad and a famous native son.

Winchester developed along the Fort Leavenworth-Fort Riley Military trail, taking an economic advantage of the military wagons that often passed through the area. Many of the first settlers were from Winchester, Virginia, so they chose this name for their new home too.<sup>1</sup> After the first post office was established in 1858, the town grew slowly until 1872, the year the Kansas Central Railroad—now part of the Union Pacific Railroad—expanded from Leavenworth and began passing through Winchester. The railroad provided the spark needed for the little community to boom.

**Figure 2: Political rally at the Union Pacific depot in Winchester, KS. Midland grain elevator visible in background. October 19, 1910. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)**



By 1912, the town had stores, a hotel, bank, a weekly newspaper, and a post office serving the surrounding rural community.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 3: 1893 photo of the Bank in Winchester, KS. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)

The Winchester of today differs greatly from the prospering town it was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interviews with lifelong residents of the town demonstrate how it has changed over time. Charles and Barbara Pence, who married just out of high

school, have lived in and around Winchester their entire lives. According to the Pences, because of the convenience of the highway most residents of Winchester now commute to jobs in Topeka, Leavenworth or Atchison. Those who do not commute are employed by either Jefferson County North High School, F.W. Huston Hospital, or a family owned farm.<sup>3</sup>

While many people chose to keep their residences in Winchester, others left the area altogether. Although John Stuart Curry, an accomplished Kansas painter, is well known for his artwork depicting scenes from his home state, few people are aware of his connections to Winchester. Curry was born in Jefferson County and attended school at Winchester High until his junior year.<sup>4</sup> As a student he was easily distracted and often doodled in his notebook during class. Curry eventually left Winchester and went on to become one of the most renowned painters of American Regionalism, an art movement popular in the 1930's that focused on scenes of rural life. Members of his extended family still live in the area, and he chose to be buried in the town's Reformed Presbyterian Cemetery.<sup>5</sup> It is amazing that a world famous man, emblematic of the Kansas and the American heartland, was from such humble beginnings and returned to them after his death.

Figure 4: Funeral of John Stuert Curry at the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Winchester, KS. Date: September 1, 1946. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)



Figure 5: Tombstone of John Stuert Curry. Source: Photo taken by author.



Although it never reached the status of a grand city, the quaint community of Winchester has made a large impact on the nation. The artwork of John Steurt Curry, which has inspired many, would likely have been very different had

Winchester grown into a large urban metropolis. The story of its native son sets Winchester apart from other lost or dying towns, but in many other respects it is the same, an artifact of times gone by and a different way of life.

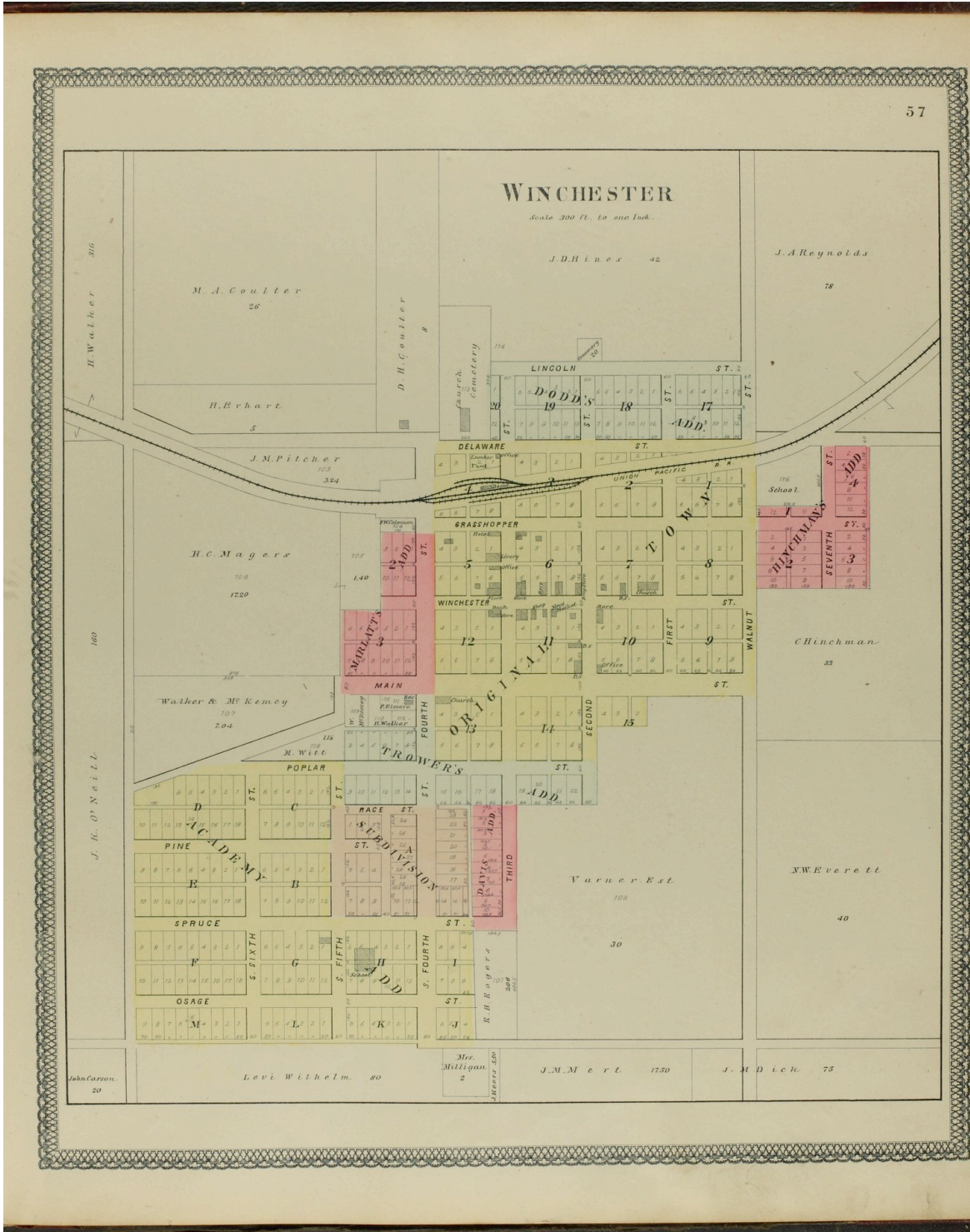


Figure 6: 1899 plat map of the town of Winchester, KS. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Winchester PRIDE Committee, First. "History of Winchester, Kansas." *Winchester Directory*. (2010): 2-6.

<sup>2</sup>Blackmar, Frank W., ed. *Kansas: a cyclopedia of state history, embracing events, institutions, industries, counties, cities, towns, prominent persons, etc.* Vol 2. Chicago, Illinois: Standard Publishing Co., (1912).

<sup>3</sup> Pence, Charles and Barbara. Interview by author. Winchester, KS. 1 September 2011

<sup>4</sup> Bertels, Alice. *John Steuart Curry: The Road Home*. Overland Park, Kansas: Leather's Publishing Company, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Bertels, Alice. Interview by Allison Bertels. Topeka, KS. 18 September 2011.