

How a Crossing Became a Lane: Lane, Franklin County Kansas, 1875-1915

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As the stage for Bleeding Kansas, Lane, Kansas in Franklin County's Pottawatomie Township has seen times of violent bloodshed, times of booming prosperity, and times of quiet solitude. Lane has a rich history of business, community, and above all, steady persistence. This study uses maps, historic images, and on-site photography as references for reading.

Imagine a calm creek, plenty of shade, and hills as far as the eye can see. This is what Lane, Kansas would have looked like at its beginning. Lane is set in quiet, Northeastern Kansas, right alongside the small Pottawatomie Creek as it travels to the southwest alongside the Missouri Pacific Railroad. It is located in Franklin County, in Pottawatomie Township, just twenty miles southeast of the county seat, Ottawa. The town sits on the Osage Plains region of Kansas, in a thin vein of the Oak-Hickory Forest. Trees canopy over the creek bed and the homes are tucked into other shaded areas, but just outside of town the land is smooth with the fertile farmland and grasses of Northeastern Kansas, as the hills surrounding the town cradle it in a shallow basin. Unfortunately, Lane's history is not as pastoral and peaceful as the landscape. As the first stage of Bleeding Kansas, Lane has a history that starts with death and ends with life.

The area of Lane was first settled in 1848 by the three brothers - Peter, Henry, and William Sherman.¹ They settled on the north end of what is now Lane, where the town's boundary touches the Pottawatomie Creek. Their settlement soon became known as "Dutch Henry's Crossing" – even though they were of German descent – and they likely charged travelers to cross the creek at the shallow waters near their home, shown in the image below. This is the second business recorded in the area, as there is record of a trading post as early as 1838.²

¹ Cutler, William G. "History of the State of Kansas", *Kansas Collection*

² kansasheritage.com "Interactive Map of Kansas" , *kansasheritage.com*



Figure 1. A historic photograph of the presumed location of “Dutch Henry’s Crossing”, Henry Sherman’s settlement.

C. 1930. Notice the low water – this would be ideal for wagons wanting to cross – and a good moneymaker for the Sherman brothers. SOURCE: Repository: kansasmemory.org

There are multiple accounts of Dutch Henry hosting pro-slavery men and border ruffians at his settlement, as well as those men causing trouble in the area. John Brown, the passionate abolitionist famed for his involvement in Bleeding Kansas also resided near Lane, just four miles to the southwest. He lived in a cabin owned by Charles Severns, a farmer in the area.³ Here, he is said to have harbored eleven slaves for a month before moving them into free territory, which is quite the feat with such violently pro-slavery advocates less than five miles away. The tensions between the two sides eventually resulted in the infamous Pottawatomie Massacre, as described by Joseph Baker: “Now the first killing that was done in this part of the county was the five men that were killed at the Dutch-Henry crossing in the spring of 1856. Wilkinson the

³ Cutler, William G. “History of the State of Kansas”, *Kansas Collection*

postmaster, William Sherman, the old man Doyle and his two sons.”⁴ This account, as well as others, says it was William Sherman that was killed because his brother Henry, the real target, was not home. These accounts also say that Dutch Henry was killed a year later on the plains for the pro-slavery cause. Other articles will say that it was Dutch Henry killed in the Pottawatomie massacre. Either way, John Brown’s men are held responsible for the murders, but there is some debate on whether or not John Brown himself did any of the killing. Lane was the site of early bloodshed in what would eventually erupt into Kansas’ biggest conflict today: Bleeding Kansas.

The town began when the post office was established in 1855 under the name of Shermansville, for the Sherman brothers. Removed in 1856 and re-established in 1857, the post office still exists in what is likely the same structure. The first post master was Allen Wilkinson, the same pro-slavery sympathizer that was killed in the Pottawatomie Massacre. The rail station at the time was named Avondale, and was serviced by the Missouri Pacific Railroad with both freight and passenger cars coming through daily. Being the only stop for the Missouri Pacific in Franklin County, Lane profited immensely. Around this time the Missouri Pacific plotted a new town called Emerson, which “included all the railroad right of way and the depot”, or all of the land North of town down to the north side of 4th street. Lane townsite was founded at the same time, on the south side of 4th street, and the two towns were rivals until 1881. This is shown in the map below.

⁴ Baker, Joseph Nathaniel. “Early Settlements of Lane Franklin County, Kansas.” *Kansas Collection*

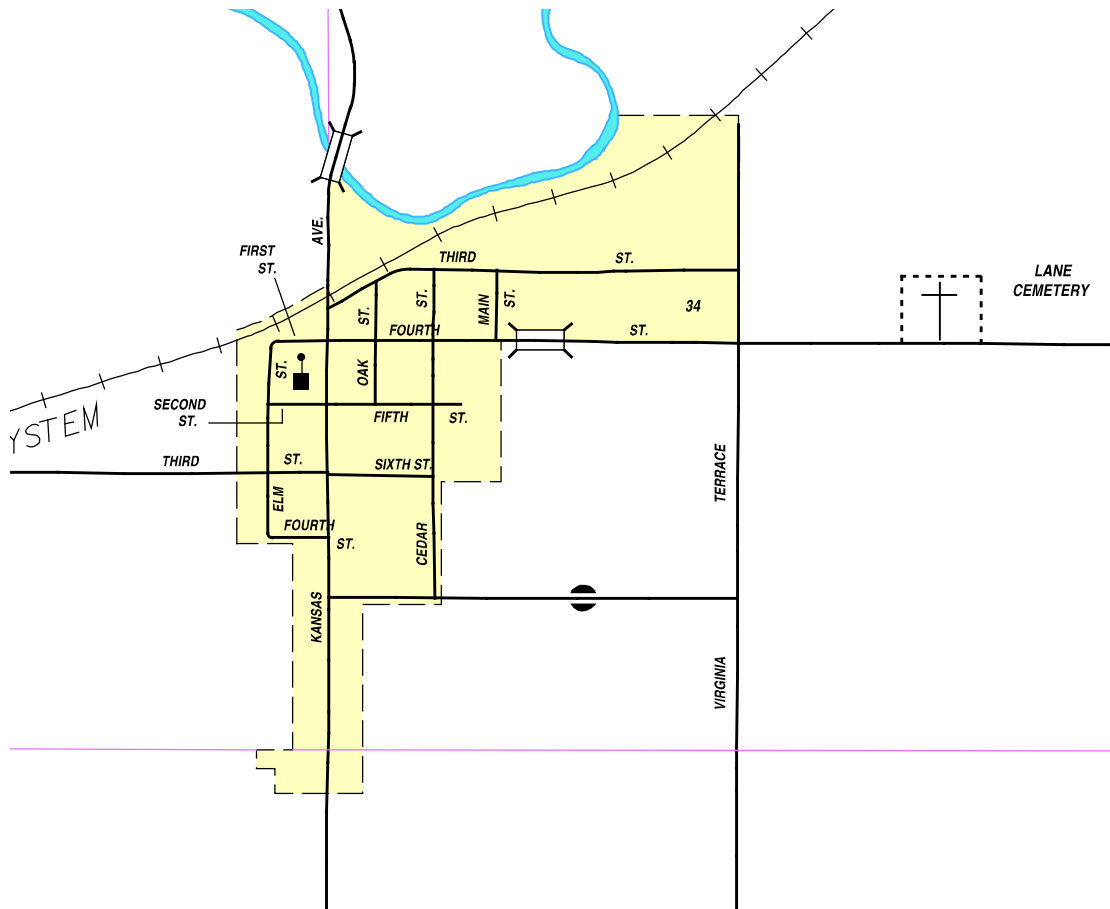


Figure 2. A current map of Lane, Kansas. 2016. Notice 4th street – this is the dividing line between Emerson and Lane. SOURCE: *Kansas Department of Transportation*

Lane became the victor of the rivalry, likely because businesses built on the south side of 4th street instead of crossing the rail line to the north. In late 1863, the town was renamed for Union General James “Jim” Lane, likely because the town wanted to distance itself from its pro-slavery namesakes toward the end of the civil war.⁵ Gen. Lane was one of the first United States senators for the state of Kansas, and a very outspoken, radical one at that. He is known for causing many issues between the two parties in Washington, but also for having a strong sense of patriotism for both his state and country. He founded the First Kansas Colored Infantry in 1862, right at the beginning of the war. By founding something so progressive, he created

⁵ Cutler, William G. “History of the State of Kansas”, *Kansas Collection*

waves in the senate, but also set the scene for Kansas in the Civil War. The train station was eventually renamed to match the town, as seen in this photo.



Figure 3. A historic photograph of the Lane, Kansas train depot on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. C. 1918. This is possibly the original Avondale station, with the addition of a sign that says "Lane". SOURCE: Repository: kansasmemory.org

The Native American reservations of the Pottawatomie, Ottawa, Perioa, and Kaskaskia Indians were located in and/or near Lane, and there were tribes in the area as late as 1867, but there are no recorded conflicts between the people of Lane and the Native Americans.⁶ In 1880, there was a petition to change the name of the post office to Avondale, the same name as the railroad station that had preceded it, but the idea was rejected by older settlers, and the town and post office kept the name of Lane. The town began thriving in 1879 when the Missouri Pacific track from Paola to Leroy was opened. 1881 was the beginning of Lane's most successful years, with a population of 300 in the town. Many business and institutions opened this year, for example, George Keener's Lane Mills, a roller mill for grain. Lane school was also built this year, of coralline marble (actually a type of limestone that looks similar to marble

⁶ Cutler, William G. "History of the State of Kansas", *Kansas Collection*

native to England) quarried by the Hanway brothers, one of which was the town Judge. Judge Hanway built two houses to the south of town that are still used as residences today, near John Brown's residence.⁷ By 1882, one hotel was in operation, likely the "Old Commercial Hotel" owned by the Gray family, as illustrated below.



Figure 4. An illustration by Merle "Bus" Cornelius of the "Old Commercial Hotel", the only known illustration or photograph of the hotel. C. 1918. This hotel was the only hotel to have existed in Lane, and was under the operation of many families during its existence. SOURCE: *Bus Cornelius' Lane Kansas – An article through kancoll.org*

There were three general stores in operation, one operated by E R Beeson & Co., one by W J Ellis, and one by James A Miles. Miles inherited his general store from L. Hendrickson, who inherited it from D. Holiday, one of the first businesses at the Lane town site. Other businesses included "a drug store, a boot and shoe story, two millinery stores, two blacksmith shops, a wagon shop, an agricultural implement depot and a marble shop", showing that Lane was doing quite well by this point.⁸ The illustration below is a recreation of a postcard picturing Lane before 1900.

⁷ Polk, R. L. & Co. "Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory." *Kansas Memory*.

⁸ Polk, R. L. & Co. "Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory." *Kansas Memory*.

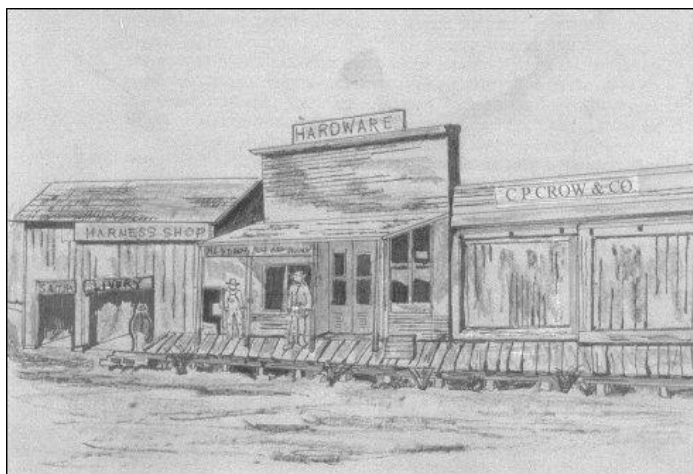


Figure 5. An illustration traced from a postcard, done by Merle "Bus" Cornelius of the main street in Lane, Kansas Ave. C. 1880. Note the raised boardwalks, as well as the stores selling hardware, lumber, and a harness shop. SOURCE: *Bus Cornelius' Lane Kansas – An article through kancoll.org*

By mid 1882, there were 60 homes in the town of Lane, and the town's population was rising. Established the same year, Lincoln Park is located in the north part of town and still exists today as a fairground and park. At the time, it was on land owned by T.J. Crowder, who donated one half and farmed the other. It was used as an open gathering space with a non-denominational tabernacle, and drew large crowds for meetings, concerts, as well as religious events.⁹ A bank existed from 1892-1923, and in 1892, the first Lane fair was held in Lincoln Park.

Lane has never been a large town, but as far as small towns go, it was quite successful. With a population as high as 500 in 1900, the decline to 272 in 1910 was rapid and drastic. Because of the time period, the likely factors of decline are fairly obvious. With the panic of 1907 and the arrival of the automobile to rural Kansas, the first decade of the new century proved fatal for some small towns, however, it did not wipe out Lane. It is likely that many people moved away from the town to either their farmland or to larger cities, because of the

⁹ Cutler, William G. "History of the State of Kansas." *Kansas Collection*.

mobility that the automobile presented. In this case, Ottawa was only twenty miles away, which probably pulled many residents from Lane. These national events played a large role in the decline of small towns everywhere, and Lane is no exception.

Today, Lane has between ten and fifteen buildings on its main street, Kansas Avenue. These are pictured below. The post office, a restaurant, and until recently, a café, operate. The United Methodist church still stands and is well maintained, as is the cemetery, established in 1901. The current population of Lane is around 224, and there are still many houses in Lane – it is hard to tell how many are occupied, but most are somewhat kept up. As far as small towns go, Lane seems to be doing quite well – it is slow, and it is quiet, but that’s just what the people of the town want.



Figure 6. An onsite photograph of the East side of Kansas Ave. 2016 Notice the tall brick building – this may have been one of the original structures in Lane. Taken by author.



Figure 7. An on-site photograph of the West side of Kansas Ave. 2016. Some of these buildings may be original to the town. Taken by author.

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