

# Kansas History

Kansas takes its name from the Kansa Indians. Kansa means “People of the South Wind.” Kansas entered the Union on January 29, 1861, marking the end of a long period of exploration and settlement, and following a brief but bloody and bitter struggle between early settlers over the extension of slavery. Ahead were days of growth and development that contributed to the strength and prosperity of our American nation.

## Early Exploration of Kansas

The region that is now Kansas had been inhabited by Indians for thousands of years before the first white man appeared. In 1540, the Spanish conquistador Francisco Vasquez de Coronado marched north from Mexico in search of the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola. In New Mexico he was told of the land of Quivira, and in 1541 he turned east and north in search of this fabled place of wealth. Coronado found no gold in Quivira but he called the country, which is now a part of Kansas, “the best I have ever seen for producing all the products of Spain.” This was 80 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.

Coronado returned to New Mexico, but the next year a priest who had accompanied him was back in Kansas. Father Juan de Padilla hoped to bring Christianity to the Indians. He was killed, however, by those he tried to help. The exact place of his death is unknown, but it is presumed to have been in present central Kansas. Father Padilla is said to be the first Christian martyr in the United States.

By the late 17th century, France claimed all the land drained by the Mississippi River. This vast territory was named Louisiana by the French explorer LaSalle in honor of his king, Louis XIV. French fur-traders reached present northeastern Kansas in 1702, and in following years the explorers Claude Charles du Tisne, Etienne de Bourgmont, and Paul and Pierre Mallet traversed the area. In 1744, a French military post and trading center, Fort Cavagnolle, was constructed near present Leavenworth. French claims were ceded to Spain in 1763, but in 1800 title was returned to France, from whom the United States purchased the entire Louisiana territory in 1803. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, exploring the new purchase, made camp at several points on the Kansas side of the Missouri River in late June and early July 1804. Two years later Lieutenant Zebulon Pike, of the U.S. Army, crossed the Kansas area on an exploring expedition during which he met with the Indians and treated with them as the representative of the new “White Father.” He continued westward on this journey to discover the high mountain, which is called Pike’s Peak.

## The Santa Fe and Oregon Trails

As the exploration of Kansas continued, trails were established by traders and immigrants. Many followed earlier routes used by the Indians. William Becknell, a Missouri trader, opened the Santa Fe Trail to trade with the Spanish in what is now New Mexico. Early in the 1820s, wagon trains were being sent over this route from the Missouri River to Santa Fe. The trail was about 800 miles long.

The Oregon Trail, used by emigrants to California and the Northwest during the middle decades of the 1800s, crossed the northeastern section of the state. Some who traveled this route were so impressed by the possibilities in Kansas they stopped and made their homes here, while others returned later to settle on the rich farm lands. Still others came after hearing of the new lands from those who had crossed the area while on the trail.

## The Territorial Period

Passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act by Congress in 1854 opened the territories to white settlement. It also gave rise to the historic struggle between proslavery and free-state forces that made "Bleeding Kansas" known across the nation as a battleground for freedom. Settlers representing both groups flocked into Kansas: proslavery men from the southern states and from Missouri, and free-state people from the eastern and northcentral states. As they came into conflict, acts of terrorism were committed by both sides. For the next few years Kansas was the scene of many violent encounters. Among them were the Pottawatomie Massacre, in which John Brown and his men killed five proslavery partisans in Franklin County; the battles of Black Jack, Franklin and Hickory Point; the burning of Osawatomie; and the Marais des Cygnes Massacre in Linn County.

In 1857, word began to circulate of rich gold discoveries in the western part of the territory, "near Pike's Peak, Kansas." For the next year, gold was a principal subject of conversation and a leading topic in Kansas newspapers. Hundreds of Kansas settlers left for the mountains, and many more from eastern states crossed Kansas on their way to the gold fields. Stage lines were started and travel became faster.

Soon it became important to inaugurate a better system of communication with the West Coast. Members of the Leavenworth firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell, a large freighting concern, established the Pony Express in 1860. Speedy horses and hardy riders carried the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in the amazingly short time of seven to ten days. The route led across the northeastern corner of Kansas, through Elwood, Troy, Kickapoo, Seneca and Marysville. The last relay point in Kansas was at Holenberg Station, where the only unaltered Pony Express building in the country still stands in its original location near Hanover, Kansas, as a state museum. From there, the route led into Nebraska and west across the mountains. The Pony Express made its last run in October 1861, when it was made obsolete by the completion of the transcontinental telegraph.

## Statehood Begins

Several attempts were made during the territorial period to draw up a constitution under which Kansas might be admitted to statehood. The first attempt took place in 1855, when a free-state constitution was framed in Topeka. However, it was never given serious consideration by Congress. In 1857, a second constitution, written at Leecompton, provided for a vote on the admission of Kansas with slavery. The constitution was adopted in an election in which free-state men refused to vote, and later was rejected at a second election in which the proslavery men took no part. This constitution was sent to Washington, but while it was being debated by Congress a third constitutional convention convened at Leavenworth. The constitution drafted there was adopted by the people in 1858. But this, too, failed to gain congressional acceptance.

The fourth and last convention assembled at Wyandotte (now part of Kansas City) in July 1859. This time the free-state advocates were solidly in control, and the document they drafted barred slavery and fixed the present boundaries of the state. This constitution was accepted by a vote of the people in October, and in December a provisional state government was elected. In April 1860, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to admit Kansas, but the Senate, under proslavery domination, refused. Statehood for Kansas thus became a national issue, and the Republican platform of 1860 included a plank for immediate admittance. The victory of Abraham Lincoln in November was followed by secession of southern states. The withdrawal of their senators and representatives gave control of Congress to the Republicans even before the change of administrations. The Kansas bill was passed by both houses on January 29, 1861. Kansas thus became the 34th state of what at the time was a rapidly disintegrating union.

## **The Civil War**

Kansans had known civil war since the territory was organized in 1854. Now large-scale rebellion faced the entire nation.

In answer to President Lincoln's first call for troops in April 1861, Kansas supplied 650 men. Before the war ended in 1865 the state had furnished more than 20,000 men, a remarkable record in view of the fact that the population included less than 30,000 men of military age. Kansas also suffered the highest mortality rate of any of the Union states. Of the African-American troops in the Union army, 2,080 were credited to Kansas though the 1860 census listed fewer than 300 of military age in the state; most actually came from Arkansas and Missouri.

Although Kansas soldiers saw action in many of the important engagements of the war, only one major battle was fought within the state. This was the Battle of Mine Creek, which took place in Linn County October 25, 1864. Some 25,000 men were involved. The Confederate army under Major General Sterling Price was defeated, and the threat of a southern invasion of Kansas was ended. Civil War action within the state consisted primarily of guerrilla skirmishes and raids. Of these, the most notorious was William C. Quantrell's surprise attack on Lawrence August 21, 1863, in which 150 residents were slaughtered and most of the city was looted and burned.

## **Late 19th Century Development**

After the Civil War, a series of Native American attacks threatened the western frontier. The tribes were alarmed by the steady encroachment of white settlers, and although undermanned military outposts did their best to protect settlers and travelers, and federal commissioners held peace talks with the chiefs, no permanent peace was obtained. The attacks reached their height in Kansas in 1867, when nearly 130 settlers were killed. By the end of 1869, most of these troubles had shifted to other areas. However, western Kansas continued to have conflict until the last Native American raid, which took place in Decatur County in 1878.

Meanwhile, rapid settlement was being made. Towns were founded, schools established, businesses and small industries started, and railroads were pushing westward across the state. In 1869 the Kansas (now Union) Pacific reached the Colorado line, and by the end of 1872 the Santa Fe had done the same.

The era of the great cattle drives, which focused national attention on several Kansas towns, came in with the railroads. Abilene became a shipping center for Texas cattle in 1867 when Joseph McCoy persuaded Texas drovers to use the extended Chisholm trail to bring their herds to the just-arrived Union Pacific, Eastern Division (later the Kansas Pacific). Newton, Ellsworth, Caldwell, Wichita and Dodge City were other towns that became prominent as tracks were built south and west.

The introduction of Turkey Red wheat by Mennonites from Russia in 1874 was a milestone in Kansas agriculture. This hardy winter wheat was ideally suited to crop-growing conditions in the state and provided the early basis for the preeminence of Kansas as a producer of wheat.

A prohibition amendment to the Kansas Constitution was adopted in 1880. It remained in effect until 1948 when a system of licensed liquor sales was established. At the turn of the century Carrie Nation became a national figure, symbolizing the strong temperance sentiment among church and other groups as she traveled about smashing illegal saloons with her famous hatchets.

## Kansas in the 20th Century and Beyond

Significant changes occurred in agriculture, industry, transportation and communication in the years after 1900. Mechanization became almost universal in farming; heavy industry began replacing individual shops and mills; transportation entered a new era that was to be characterized by diesel-powered trains, commercial air travel and multi-lane highways; and communication was revolutionized by radio and television that augmented the state's large publishing industry. World War I brought an unprecedented boom in agriculture because of the demand for food from the warring nations of Europe. Thousands of previously uncultivated acres were planted in wheat, and this land, allowed to lie fallow during the recession of the 1920s, became part of the "dust bowl" of the 1930s. Conditions improved in the 1940s. New industries came to Kansas, and by the early 1950s industry for the first time surpassed agriculture as the state's largest source of income. Kansas became steadily more urbanized as industry concentrated more and more in the population centers around Kansas City, Wichita, Topeka and other major Kansas communities.

A number of Kansans have gained national prominence during the 20th century. William Allen White, famed editor and publisher of the *Emporia Gazette*, was the confidant of U.S. presidents. Charles Curtis of Topeka, for many years a U.S. senator from Kansas, served as vice president of the United States under Herbert Hoover. Alfred M. Landon, governor of the state from 1933 to 1937, was the unsuccessful Republican presidential nominee in 1936.

Mrs. Georgia Neese (Clark) Gray, Topeka banker and business woman, became the first woman appointed treasurer of the United States in 1949 and served in that capacity until January 1953.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Abilene, commander-in-chief of the Allied armies in Europe during World War II, was president of the United States from 1953 to 1961.

Nancy Kassebaum Baker, Burdick, became the first woman elected to the United States Senate in her own right in 1978. She served as a U.S. senator until 1996.

Former U.S. Senator Bob Dole, Russell, was the Republican nominee for vice president of the United States in 1976 and for president in 1996.

In the field of athletics, Jim Ryun, of Wichita and the University of Kansas, held the world record for the mile run. William Inge, a native of Independence, was a Pulitzer prize-winning playwright, and Gordon Parks, born at Fort Scott, was a world famous photographer, writer and motion picture producer.

Kansas also is home to three astronauts. Ron Evans, command ship pilot during the flight of Apollo 17 to the moon, was born in St. Francis, and graduated from Topeka public schools and the University of Kansas. Chapman native Joe Engel, who commanded two space shuttle missions, graduated from Chapman High School and the University of Kansas. A graduate of Salina Central High School and the University of Kansas, Steve Hawley was a mission specialist on four space shuttle flights.

## To the Stars

Kansas, now in its second hundred years, takes pride in its fine schools, its leadership in the field of agriculture, and its rapid economic development. A financially solvent state government, low taxes, low unemployment and good highways and recreation areas are additional achievements.

With solid achievement in the past and bright promise for the future, Kansas is fulfilling its motto: "Ad astra per aspera" (To the stars through difficulties).