Cultural Watersheds

I. Introduction

It has been said that places are created by history; but in Freedom's Frontier history is very much shaped by place. The region's natural landscape affected the village, trade and hunting patterns of Indian peoples; the location of trade centers; the placement of overland trails; the settlement patterns of Euro-Americans; movements of troops, bushwhackers and jayhawkers during the Border Wars; and the post-Civil-War economies. Because the story of the Missouri/Kansas Border War was marked by destruction, there are few buildings left today that interpret the events. However, natural environment that shaped these events lives on.

In the years before electric power, a culture's success or failure hinged upon its access to natural resources. Water, in the form of rivers, provided the basic elements of life, including water to drink, fish and game to eat, timber for basic shelter, and fertile soil for subsistence farming. Indian peoples placed great significance on the life-giving rivers, strategically locating villages at regular intervals along the river valleys in the regions they controlled.

As cultures evolved from subsistence to trade and cash economies, rivers were also essential transportation routes – for canoes, keelboats and steamboats. Over time, trading cultures relied on larger and larger boats to transport goods, from furs and hides to cash crops. Various groups competed for access to the largest rivers and the natural resources they fostered. Where necessary, the navigable water routes were connected by overland trails. Euro-American traders and settlers continued to develop ancient Indian trails and trade routes, forming the Santa Fe, Oregon, Mormon and California Trails.

Like the Indian villages and frontier forts that preceded them, Euro-American cities and settlements followed along river valleys. The needs of Indian and Euro-American subsistence farmers could be met by tributaries and creeks. Planters, manufacturers and wholesalers on the other hand required access to major river routes, particularly from the 1830s to 1860s, when steamboats dominated freighting. The success of an early city could succeed or fail by the existence of a ferry, steamboat wharf, landing or bridge.

Rivers played a key role in the story of the Border Wars, physically and culturally segregating settlements of the staunchest pro-slavers and free-staters. Where these natural boundaries did not exist, the contingents collided. In the post-Civil-War years, the network of river cities and trails established the first rail connections and, subsequently the first major highways.

Freedom's Frontier can be divided into four principal river valleys, each with its own unique history and culture: The Missouri River Valley, Kaw River Valley, Osage/Marais des Cygnes River Valley, and Neosho River Valley.

II. The Missouri River Valley: Throne of the Invincible

> *"The soil of the Missouri is the most fertile in the Universe." M. Truteau, Illinois Trading Company.*

The nation's longest river, the Missouri, forms the irregular boundary between northeast Kansas, northwest Missouri and southeast Nebraska; then it flows east, bisecting Missouri and

emptying into the Mississippi River at St. Louis. Before the area was purchased as part of the Louisiana Territory, it was home to Native American farmers/hunters including the Missouri tribe, "people with the dugout canoes," after which the river was named.

For centuries before Euro-American settlement, the Missouri River was both an agricultural center and trade route among Indian tribes throughout the nation. During the 18th century, French traders established relationships with the native peoples in what was then French Louisiana, trading manufactured goods for furs. After the Louisiana Purchase, American traders like the Chouteaus shipped furs down the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans.

With an average of over thirty inches of rainfall per year and prime alluvial soils, the Missouri River Valley drew the attention of Euro-American settlers. When Lewis and Clark left St. Louis on their westward journey in 1804, they recorded the edge of the frontier as forty-four river miles west of the Mississippi River along the Missouri. On their return trip, just two years later, the explorers were astonished to find that settlement had advanced an additional fifty miles.

Many of the Euro-Americans who settled in the fertile Missouri River Valley hailed from the Upper South, the vast majority from the frontier states of Kentucky and Tennessee. Their interests were championed by Tennessean Andrew Jackson and Kentuckian Henry Clay. Jackson, the nation's first frontier president took on the causes of Indian Removal, Manifest Destiny and states' rights. Kentucky Congressman and Jackson rival Henry Clay engineered the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state. Although many cultural and ethnic groups filled the Missouri Valley region, its strong geographic, cultural and political ties to the Upper South, instrumental in the state's early development, still resonate today.

Like the Upper South, Missouri was settled mostly by yeoman farmers. But the Missouri River Valley hosted its concentration of planters who raised cash crops like tobacco and hemp. The Missouri River Valley was dubbed "Little Dixie" because of its concentration of slaveholders. In 1860, slaves made up more than 15% of the population of Platte, Jackson, and Ray Counties. In Lafayette County, where an acre of Missouri Valley farmland yielded as many as 2200 pounds of hemp, forty-seven percent of the population was slaves.

By the 1830s, the Missouri River Valley had been settled to the state's original western boundary, at the junction of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers. As Missouri's frontier faded, the traditional safety valve that, according to western historian Frederick Jackson Turner, "defused social discontent" was dammed up by the Missouri/Kansas border. In the Missouri River Valley, various groups, including Mormons, Indians and New England emigrants, became the objects of social discontent.

Mormons were among the first Missouri settlers. In 1831, after Joseph Smith declared that Independence, Missouri would become a "New Jerusalem," nearly one thousand Mormon settlers arrived, nearly tripling the county's population. Suspicious of the armed northern colonists who did not endorse slavery, non-Mormon settlers drove Mormons across the river to Clay County. In 1838, after non-Mormons made efforts to prevent members of the sect from voting in state elections and Missouri Governor Boggs issued a decree calling for Mormon extermination, the tensions escalated into the Mormon War, after which the Mormons fled to Illinois.

Tensions over increasingly scarce lands caused settlers to seek new frontiers. The advancing Missourians knew that some of the richest lands in the Missouri River Valley lay beyond the

state's western boundary. In 1836, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton introduced successful legislation to expand Missouri to include the land bounded by the Missouri River and the state's original western border. The measure, known as the Platte Purchase, stipulated that the land would be ceded to the State of Missouri once title had been secured from its Indian owners. The Sac and Fox Indians were moved to northeast Kansas, the next in a long series of "permanent" Indian territories.

With the Platte Purchase, Missouri gained not only some of the nation's most fertile farmland, but also additional access to more of one of the nation's most significant trade routes, the Missouri River. This most recent chapter of westward expansion coincided with the development of steamboat transport. Until the Platte Purchase, Independence (est. 1827) and Westport, Missouri were the westernmost points on the Missouri River, the place where river travel ended and overland travel west began. The Platte Purchase paved the way for new trade centers at Weston and St. Joseph. St. Joseph grew up around an Indian trading post established by fur trader Joseph Robidoux in 1826. Weston, which dubbed itself "Queen of the Platte Purchase," was founded in 1837, immediately after the state of Missouri acquired the land from the displaced Indians.

All of the Missouri River towns were poised to take advantage of steamboat trade, which by 1848 included an onslaught of California-bound gold-seekers. In 1850, more than 300 steamboats docked at Weston alone. Steamboats shipped passengers west and cash crops, such as tobacco and hemp, east. The area's phenomenal success inspired Missouri expansionist William Gilpin to dub the river valley the "throne of the Invincible."

By 1850, 225,000 Americans made their homes in the Missouri River Valley. In fewer than ten years, the frontier would leave Missouri in its wake. (By 1860, all of Missouri's counties had exceeded a population density of two people per square mile, a definition used to indicate the closing of the frontier.) As the state filled with Euro-American settlers, Americans became increasingly familiar with the lands west, and capitalists and politicians dreamed of a transcontinental railroad, the nation turned its covetous eyes toward the "permanent" Indian frontier.

Opening Kansas would require the further displacement of Indian tribes; but the debate centered on the potential to disrupt the nation's fine balance of free and slave states. Congress would open two new territories, Kansas and Nebraska, and let each decide on its slave status. Confident that Kansas would choose to enter the Union as a slave state Missouri's Congressional delegation joined its Kentucky colleagues in their overwhelming support of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. When long-time Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton voted against the act, he lost his seat in Congress.

When the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened Kansas for white settlement, pioneers continued their march west along the Missouri River. Missouri settlers concentrated in Kansas's Missouri River border counties of Atchison, Doniphan and Brown. Businessmen from St. Joseph platted three Kansas border towns. Weston speculators platted and developed Atchison, at a strategic location in the river's "elbow region" and at Leavenworth, along the river near the western outpost of Fort Leavenworth, established in 1827 to monitor the Indian frontier.

Soon Leavenworth and Atchison had overshadowed Weston as the belles of the Missouri River. In late 1854 the Big Muddy shifted, leaving the Weston wharf a half mile away from its banks. Half of Weston's residents followed the speculators across the river to Leavenworth. By 1858, Leavenworth had eclipsed Weston and was the largest settlement between St. Louis and San

Francisco, with a population of 8000. Although Leavenworth had pro-slavery beginnings, its commercial aspirations outweighed any philosophical differences among its settlers and investors.

As a commercial center, Leavenworth attracted a heterogeneous mix of people. The Missouri River Valley had long been home to German immigrants. In Leavenworth, as in Lexington and Platte County, German farmers and merchants contributed to the cultural fabric. Because the majority of them were anti-slavery and pro-Union, many Germans suppressed their opinions to avoid retribution.

Like Leavenworth, Atchison was founded by pro-slavery interests, including Missouri Senator David Rice Atchison and Weston investors. Unlike Leavenworth, which early on recognized the economic advantages of indiscriminant trade, Atchison clung to its strong pro-slavery political opinions. The town outfitted as many as 4000 Mormon settlers in 1855; but it refused to trade with New England emigrants. The city's philosophy changed in 1857, when the New England Emigrant Aid Company, recognizing the importance of a Missouri River settlement, purchased the controlling interest in Atchison. By then, it was clear to the town's founders that Kansas would enter the Union as a free state. The town began to diversify and became a lead supplier for western pioneers and traders.

Atchison and Leavenworth's political shifts were due in part to the transportation opportunities the Missouri River afforded – because the life-giving river provided opportunity not only for emigrants from the Upper South, but also for their New England rivals. To curtail their rivals, "Border Ruffians" stopped, searched and sent back Missouri River steamboats carrying northern emigrants; but the effort merely redirected northern emigrants farther inland from the border via the Lane Trail, an alternate route through Iowa and Nebraska that which terminated in Topeka.

The Missouri River continued to play a critical strategic role during the Civil War when both sides fought battles to secure sites along essential Missouri River transportation routes, like Lexington, Westport, and Independence.

Following the Civil War, the nation focused its attention back on the development of the transcontinental railroad, which had been one of the aims of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The river towns of recent success would become the region's first railroad towns. The railroad first reached Freedom's Frontier in 1859, when the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad became the first railroad to cross Missouri. Soon, the rail line stretched across the Missouri River to Atchison.

The railroad bypassed some prominent river cities like Lexington, Missouri, and created the new metropolis of Kansas City. While other river towns, like Leavenworth, Atchison, and St. Joseph, focused on the trade routes that ruled during the days of overland freight by connecting to St. Louis, Kansas City linked with both St. Louis and Chicago. Soon, Kansas City was a banking, real estate, meatpacking and milling center.

The Missouri River Valley was prized for its prime farmland and its access to the river, a major transportation route. For centuries, the Missouri River Valley was home to the Missouri Indians. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the majority of those who occupied the river valley in Freedom's Frontier were natives of the Upper South states of Kentucky and Tennessee. Although many, particularly those who arrived early, were subsistence farmers, others were planters who relied on slaves to cultivate hemp and tobacco. Because the Missouri River Valley was the place where river travel ended and overland travel began, it became a commercial

center for traders and emigrants. This commercial and industrial legacy continued with the development of rail lines and lives on today in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

III. The Kansas River Valley: Beautiful River of the Prairies

> *"We cross the prairies as of old the pilgrims crossed the sea, To make the West, as they the East The homestead of the free." John Greenleaf Whittier*
>
> *"What is that on the deck of the steamer? … that is a Yankee city going to Kansas, and …. In six months will cast one hundred Abolition votes." Senator David Atchison*

The Missouri businessmen who platted the town sites on the Kansas side of the Missouri River could not have anticipated the northern response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Before the measure was enacted, abolitionists began laying plans to populate the Kansas Territory with free-state voters. When two agents of the New England Emigrant Aid Company arrived in Kansas in June 1854 to identify town sites, the best Missouri River sites had already been taken. Other options, like the recently abandoned Fort Scott, were too far from any navigable rivers. So, like the Kansa Indians before them, the Company chose sites along the only other available navigable waterway in the Territory, the Kansas River.

The Kansas or Kaw River, which extends 138 miles east from Junction City to the Missouri River, takes its name from the Kansa Indians, relatives of the Osages, who had lived there for at least two centuries before white settlers arrived. Like the Euro-American settlers that followed them, the Kansa Indians had moved west from the Missouri River Valley to the Kansas River Valley, reaching as far west as present-day Geary County by 1800. By the time of Indian Removal, the tribe had established 20 villages along the Kaw.

The New England Emigrant Aid Company's interest in a navigable river was rooted more in its aims to establish commercial cities than in any desire to provide for agricultural exports. In fact, only two of the original twenty-nine emigrants were farmers. At the time the territory opened for Euro-American settlement, the Kansas River was slated as a main transportation route between Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley, established 1853. The towns were placed not only along the Kansas River, but also along the Oregon, California and Santa Fe overland trails. Vicinity to these overland trails became essential when the Kansas River's navigability quickly proved problematic.

The New England Emigrant Aid Company established its first free-state town, Lawrence, at "the first desirable site on the Kansas River to which the Indians had ceded their rights." Topeka and Manhattan (originally named Boston), also on the Kansas River, would follow. By the time of the first territorial election in March 1855, the New England Emigrant Aid Company had brought 800 New Englanders to Kansas.

In an attempt to curb free-state emigration, pro-Southern bands at Lexington and elsewhere blockaded the Missouri River in 1856. The blockade only encouraged the further settlement of free-state communities further inland by diverting emigrants to an overland trail that passed through Holton and terminated in Topeka.

When the first Euro-American settlers arrived in the Kansas River Valley they found a prairie landscape, shaped for centuries by the Kansa Indians who set fires to encourage new growth that would attract bison. The landscape bison hunters relied on, however, was misunderstood by non-Indians, who were unaccustomed to the wide open spaces. In the words of Frank Mayo, "The prairie … they found to be one vast waste of land, without a fence or tree or shrub to give it a pleasant appearance…"

The open prairie landscape left Kansas River Valley communities vulnerable to guerilla attacks. Although the New England Emigrant Aid Company and other free-state entities established many colonies, Lawrence became a target for so-called "Border Ruffians." Lawrence, which was close to Missouri and home to Free-State leaders like James Lane, was unable to avoid two infamous sackings. The first of these, on May 21, 1856, was carried out by pro-Southern Douglas County Sheriff Jones and his posse, who burned the Free State Hotel and destroyed the free-state printing offices, dumping their type in the Kansas River. The second was the infamous "Quantrill's Raid," on the morning of August 21, 1863. Although pro-Southern guerilla William Quantrill knew a raid on Lawrence would be risky, he knew it would have a significant impact. In Quantrill's words, "Lawrence is the great hotbed of abolitionism in Kansas … All the plunder – or the bulk of it – stolen from Missouri will be found stored away in Lawrence, and we can get more revenge and more money there than anywhere else in the state." By the end of the raid, Quantrill's men had killed 150 citizens and burned many houses and all but two of the city's businesses, including the Eldridge Hotel, which had been rebuilt after the 1856 Lawrence Raid by Proslavery Sheriff Samuel Jones.

By the time of Quantrill's Raid, organized efforts at New England emigration had long-since ceased and settlers from the Old Northwest, Germany and countless other places outnumbered those from New England. Still, the Kansas River Valley's ties to New England were touted by both border ruffians and Kansans alike. Because New Englanders established many of the state's earliest cities and institutions, their influence lives on in the state's folklore and culture, which came to compare the settlement of Kansas to the colonization of New England:

> *They came to Kansas as the Puritans came to America, in the name of liberty. They were stern, unyielding, purposeful men and women, sure of the presence of divine leadership, and their character has deeply influenced the Kansas people. This influence has made them hate oppression; it has made them demand justice and fair play; it has made them value people for their personal worth; it has made them believe in the equality of human rights, and in the ability of the people to govern themselves. These are characteristics of every true Kansan and the qualities that make the Kansas spirit.*
> Anna E. Arnold, A History of Kansas, State of Kansas, 1916

By the end of the Civil War, Kansas had abandoned any hopes of river-based commerce, opting instead to place its bets on the railroad. In 1864, a year after the Union Pacific began laying tracks along the Kansas River Valley, the Kansas legislature declared the Kansas River un-navigable in order to expedite the construction of railroad bridges. In the process, it allowed for the construction of dams to harness waterpower.

The Kansas River Valley attracted peoples who settled in groups, from the Kansa Indians to the New England Emigrant Aid Company. The Euro-American settlers placed their hopes on trade with frontier forts and with emigrants on the overland trails. Ties to the New England Emigrant Aid Company made these instant cities, particularly Lawrence, a target for pro-Southern guerillas. Although settlers of all stripes outnumbered New Englanders in Kansas by the end of the Civil War, a heavy concentration of Northerners remained in the Kansas River Valley.

Because Northerners established many of the state's earliest cities and founded some of the state's first institutions, including those that became the University of Kansas and Kansas State University, the group shaped the state's mythology, culture and self-image.

III. Osage/Marais des Cygnes River Valley (Vernon, Bates, St. Clair, Barton (MO), Bourbon, Osage, Franklin, Miami, Linn)

Not in vain on the dial
The shade moves along
To point the great contrasts
Of right and wrong;
Free homes and free altars
And fields of ripe food;
The reeds of the Swan's Marsh,
Whose bloom is of blood.
Lines from "Le Marais du Cygne" By John Greenleaf Whittier

Many Missouri River settlers were traders and planters who needed the river for transportation, while many early Kansas River settlers were politically motivated to make Kansas a free state. The Euro-American settlers who occupied the Osage River Valley at the time of the Border Wars, however, were subsistence farmers motivated by cheap land, fertile soil, and a well-managed mix of prairie and wooded valleys. In the Missouri and Kansas River Valleys, northerners and southerners were separated by the wide Missouri and great distances. The Osage/Marais des Cygnes River Valley, which straddled an arbitrary political line, provided no such protections. The valley's geography and natural landscape created a breeding ground for violence – before and during the Civil War.

Before Indian Removal, the Missouri/Kansas boundary meant little to the Osage Indians who historically occupied the place. The Osages, whose legends called them "Children of the Middle Waters," established villages along the Osage River and hunted the region bounded by the Missouri, Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers, in the present states of Kansas and Missouri. By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, the Osages were the most powerful Indian nation in region, in part because of their alliances to French fur traders. The tribe first ceded land to the federal government in 1808, just five years after the Louisiana Purchase. In 1825, under increasing pressure from encroaching white settlers, the Osages signed an additional treaty that relinquished all remaining ancestral lands in Missouri, and relocated the tribe to the next "permanent" Indian frontier in the Neosho and Verdigris River Valleys of southeast Kansas. With the loss of their ancestral lands the Osage tribe weakened, pitting the tribe against those who had acquired their former village sites across the border. Violent conflicts, including an 1838 Indian "raid" into Vernon County, were among the bloody events that would come to define the Missouri/Kansas border.

Although the Missouri side of the Osage River Valley had been settled by Euro-Americans beginning in the 1830s, the area was sparsely populated at the time of the Border Wars. Much of the region lacked the wharf access needed to transport cash crops to larger markets. Those who wished to subsidize subsistence farming supplied goods, including corn and pork, to nearby Fort Scott, established 1842. As these farmers improved their lot, they began to purchase slaves. They generally owned one slave who worked alongside them in the fields. During the 1850s, an increasing percentage of households in Bates and Cass Counties owned slaves.

Kansas's Marais des Cygnes River Valley provided an outlet for Missouri subsistence farmers seeking cheap land. In January and February 1855, a territorial census of the district that would become Kansas's Osage, Coffey, Bourbon, Franklin, Anderson, Miami and Linn Counties, identified 430 heads of household in the district. 242 of these were from Missouri. Nearly 70% were from southern states, including Missouri. An 1856 list of Marais des Cygnes settlers identified 24 settlers as Free-staters and 34 as pro-slavery. Among the free-staters were 2 Kentuckians, 3 Missourians, and 19 settlers from the Old Northwest. The pro-slavery and free-state neighbors in the area had managed to avoid violence – until Lawrence was sacked in May 1856. A report to the Kansas National Committee, a free-state organization, noted that 6 of the free-state families in the Marais des Cygnes River Valley were "in distress."

Although the New England Emigrant Aid Company (NEEAC) had decided to establish its colonies in the Kansas River Valley, one party from New York chose to settle in the Osage/Marais des Cygnes River Valley. After the NEEAC agent failed to meet the party in Kansas City, the founders of Osawatomie mistakenly located the town in an area overwhelmingly occupied by Missourians. The events that followed may have been inevitable. Still, they were only further provoked after the arrival of a man named John Brown.

Brown arrived in 1855 to help his sons, who had established a settlement they called "Brownsville" west of Osawatomie. When the free-state settlers heard about a planned attack on Lawrence in May 1856, the Pottawatomie Rifles, a militia headed by John Brown, Jr. took up arms. Unable to reach Lawrence in time to help, the group instead chose to attack the pro-slavery settlement along Pottawatomie Creek. Before the night was through, they had violently murdered five settlers. A pro-slavery militia crossed into Kansas in August 1856 to attack Osawatomie. Although John Brown and his men fought back, the so-called "border ruffians" burned the free-state town. In 1858, Missourians killed five free-state men in what has come to be called the Marais des Cygnes Massacre.

In the years prior to the Civil War, the battle lines were not clearly drawn. To protect themselves from violent attacks from both sides, settlers in Missouri's Osage River Valley established their own militias. Once the nation was at war, Missourians no longer had the option of remaining neutral. When delegates voted that Missouri would not secede from the Union, the state remained in limbo. Like Kansas in the years before the war, Missouri was administered by two competing governments. The Union Army challenged the pro-Southern state militia for control of the cities and major river valleys. But in the Osage River Valley, bushwhackers ruled.

After the start of the Civil War, the Union Army, particularly the Kansas troops under General James H. Lane, exacted its revenge on the Osage River Valley. In a letter to headquarters dated September 10, 1861, James Lane reported his intentions of "clearing out the valley of the Osage," then "clearing out the valley of the Marais des Cygnes, Butler, Harrisonville, Osceola, and Clinton." The most violent attack was on Osceola, a bustling steamboat trade center located just 65 miles east of the Kansas-Missouri border. With a population of nearly 1800, Osceola was one of the largest towns in western Missouri. At the start of the Civil War, one-third of Osceola's population was loyal to the Union. But Lane and his men did not discriminate between "loyalists" and "rebels," murdering 10 citizens; burning 100 houses and every store, shop and warehouse; and stealing $8000 from the bank. The damages totaled $1 million. Lane's personal share of the booty included silk dresses, a piano, and $1000 in gold, all of which he hauled home in a stolen carriage.

The raids only further polarized western Missourians who came to see the pro-Southern guerillas and state militia as protectors. Many abandoned their loyalty to the Union after Lane's attacks. In the Osage River Valley, border ruffians had the protection of both the residents and the hilly and vegetated landscape. Guerillas responded with bushwhacker raids on Kansas towns. Although the Union Army controlled Missouri's major rivers by 1862, the Osage/Marais des Cygnes remained untamed. In all, there were five Civil War battles in the Osage/Marais des Cygnes River Valley: Battle of Marais des Cygnes, Battle of Mine Creek, Battle of Marmiton River, Battle of Dry Wood Creek, Battle of Lone Jack. As a result of these battles, the Union continued to maintain control of pro-Union Kansas and the Confederacy maintained control of southwest and western Missouri.

When pro-Southern guerilla William Quantrill raided the free-state stronghold of Lawrence, Kansas in 1863 his men cried out "Osceola." Although they may have been exacting their revenge for Lane's raid, Quantrill and his men only intensified the Union's resolve to "clear out" the guerilla-harboring Osage River Valley. After Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence, the Union Army issued Order #11, which called for the forced evacuation and burning of four counties along Missouri's western border, dubbed the Burnt District. Although the terms of the order gave residents two weeks to evacuate their homes before the army plundered and burned their properties, many were forced out with little or no notice. Cass County's population plummeted from 10,000 to 1600 as thousands of western Missourians became refugees. Missouri State Treasurer George Caleb Bingham, who immortalized the events in a famous painting, gave the following account in 1877:

> *I can affirm, from painful personal observation, that the suffering of the unfortunate victims were in many instances should have elicited the sympathy even from hearts of stones … Bare-footed and bare-headed women and children, stripped of every article of clothing except a scant covering for their bodies, were exposed to the heat of an August sun and compelled to struggle through the dust on foot. All their means of transportation had been seized by their spoilers, except an occasional dilapidated cart, or an old and superannuated horse, which were necessarily appropriated to the use of the aged and infirm. George Caleb Bingham, 1877*

For centuries, the Osage Indians, who had ceded all of their Missouri lands by 1825, shaped the land into a mix of timber and prairie that attracted Euro-American farmers. Because the valley had limited access to navigable rivers, the land was cheap and, therefore provided an outlet for subsistence farmers. When Kansas opened for settlement, Missourians moved across the state line, mixing with northern subsistence farmers who did not share their political views. Because the valley straddled an arbitrary political line and occupied a vegetated landscape, it bore witness to many of the violent events of the 1850s and 1860s. As many as two-thirds of the settlers affected by Order #11 never returned. Of those who later settled in the Burnt District 60% were from northern states. Although the nativity of its residents changed, the Osage/Marais des Cygnes River Valley continued to offer an outlet for subsistence farmers for the subsequent decades.

V. Neosho River Valley

> *"The Neosho is a bold, rapid, rocky stream, water clear, unfit for navigation, but affording admirable water-power. The bottom lands along its tributaries are of the finest description, and covered with excellent timber, and in much greater quantities than in the Kansas Valley."* Joseph H. Moffette, *Kansas and Nebraska*.

In his study of the settlement of Kansas, James Shortridge called southeast Kansas "the first of the post-Civil War frontiers in Kansas." Unlike the Missouri, Kansas and Osage River Valleys, much of the Neosho River Valley remained off-limits to Euro-Americans before the Civil War. All of Cherokee County and parts of Crawford and Bourbon Counties were held in reserve for the Cherokee Indians following Indian Removal, from 1838 to 1866. The land occupied by Labette, Neosho, Wilson, Montgomery and Chautauqua Counties was held by the Osage Indians, who ceded the last of their Kansas lands in 1870. Even after 1870, the Neosho Valley was economically and culturally linked to the native peoples who had called it home.

The Neosho River is 450 miles long, with 300 miles falling within the political boundaries of Kansas. The river stretches south from Wabaunsee County to Oklahoma, where it empties into the Arkansas River. The Osage Indians occupied the Osage and Neosho River Valleys by the 17th Century. In 1825, the tribe signed a treaty that ceded its Missouri lands and established a reservation in southeast Kansas. Under the conditions of an 1839 treaty, the Osages received $20,000 per year for 20 years for additional land. By 1842 an Osage Census counted 3580 Osages living in five Osage villages on the Neosho River in Kansas. Where the Osages established their new settlements, the Jesuits established a Mission, near the site of present-day St. Paul in Neosho County. The mission was active from 1847 until the tribe ceded the remainder of its Kansas lands and moved to Oklahoma in 1870.

Between the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and the various tribes' final removal to Oklahoma, Indians and Euro-Americans lived in uneasy co-existence. In May 1856, colonist Miriam Davis Colt noted that there were "Four thousand Osages just across the Neosho from us, living in their city of wigwams." Colt lived in a utopian vegetarian colony established on the banks of the Neosho River where promoters promised fertile soil ideal for growing vegetables. On September 8, 1861, a band of pro-Confederate Osages and Cherokees, apparently looking for runaway slaves, raided Humboldt. Founded by Germans from Hartford, Connecticut who learned about Kansas in German-language abolitionist newspapers, Humboldt had a reputation as a place that harbored runaway slaves.

Tensions increased after 1859 when the Osages' annuity payments ceased. Like many tribes, the Osages split their allegiances during the Civil War. A thousand Osages moved south to join the cause of the Confederacy.

As pro-Southern Indians moved out of the Neosho River Valley, pro-Union Indians moved in. When the Union army abandoned its posts in Arkansas and Oklahoma, pro-Union Indians were exposed to Confederate raids. In 1861, Muskogee Indian leader Opothleyahola left his plantation to lead as many as 10,000 followers, including Indians and their black slaves, on a treacherous wintry 14-day journey to Union territory in Kansas.

With no warning and few resources, the 70 to 80 men garrisoned at Fort Row in Wilson County were woefully incapable of meeting the needs of thousands of Indian refugees during the dead of winter. This left a desperate Opothleyahola pleading with the federal government for protection and aid. To assist the thousands of refugees, the federal agents arrived with only five wagonloads of supplies, including quilts, 40 pairs of socks, 3 pairs of pantaloons, 7 undershirts, 4 pairs of drawers, a few shirts, pillows, and pillow cases. The government's paltry response proved too little too late. Hundreds of Indians died as they waited for aid to arrive.

The Indians were resolved to regain their territory from the Confederates. Those who were able formed the First Regiment of the Indian Home Guard. The black slaves served as interpreters between the Indians and their white officers.

In the years following the war, the Osages and Cherokees struggled to maintain control over their diminished reserves. By 1865, there were an estimated 1000 Euro-American families on Cherokee lands. Without government support to keep settlers off their property, the Cherokees ceded the remainder of its Kansas reservation in 1866. By 1869, just three years after the cession, 20,000 Euro-Americans had had settled there. The majority of those who had settled in Cherokee and Crawford Counties by 1870, as many as 75% of the men, were Union Civil War veterans. Among the veterans who settled in the Neosho Valley were the so-called "African Creeks," the black slaves who served in the Indian Home Guard.

Like the Cherokees, the Osages were unsuccessful in obtaining assistance in keeping squatters off their lands. When the federal government finally sent troops to assist, Governor Crawford revoked the removal order. Although the Osages signed the Sturges Treaty to cede their Kansas lands in 1868, tensions escalated while Congress debated it. In 1870, federal troops were sent to Montgomery County to quell tensions, but they did not remove the squatters. The treaty was finally settled later that same year.

Ironically, the Neosho River Valley was sought after by Euro-American settlers and speculators alike for its proximity to Indian Territory. A month before the Sturges Treaty was approved, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (KATY) Railroad was awarded the contract to lay the first track through what would soon become Oklahoma. The railroad raised capital for its venture by selling 5000 acres of trust lands in the Neosho River Valley. With the establishment of the railroad, the Neosho River Valley entered a new period in its history – a period in which its livelihood depended upon its ties to the railroad.

Railroads made possible not only the settlement of the Neosho River Valley's prime farmland, but also the settlement and development of places that lacked both navigable river access and the most fertile ground. The railroad allowed speculators to substantiate long-circulated rumors about coal in southeast Kansas and southwest Missouri. Where coal was found, coal-fired industries followed. By 1907, nine zinc smelters in Iola, Kansas were producing 60% of the nation's capacity. Some industries, like brick-making and cement manufacturing in Coffeyville and Humboldt, required both access to water (Verdigris and Neosho Rivers) and to the first railroads that generally followed river routes (such as the Lawrence, Leavenworth and Gulf Line). Others, like lead and coal in Galena and Pittsburg, relied solely upon rail access via the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad, which followed the path of the military trail that connected Fort Leavenworth, Fort Scott and Fort Gibson.

The patterns established prior to the Civil War helped form "the first of the post-Civil War frontiers in Kansas." By the early nineteenth century, the Osage Indians developed dozens of villages in the Neosho River Valley. Their ancestral lands were diminished when they ceded lands to emigrant tribes like the Cherokees. As pro-Southern factions of the tribes left the area during the Civil War, pro-Union factions moved in, creating a complex web of occupants that included white squatters. Euro-American settlers, many of them Civil War veterans, continued to arrive after the Osages ceded the remainder of their lands in 1870. Although many of these settlers engaged in farming and ranching, the arrival of railroads allowed for the establishment of the area's industrial economy. Whereas early farms and villages were confined to river valleys, newly desired natural resources, like coal, attracted railroads, which eclipsed both rivers and trails as the region's principal means of transportation.