

CHAPTER 19

THE SPECIAL MANHATTAN

It Just So Happened that our second Kansas "Port of Call" really was a port of call, or had been, where the Big Blue and the Kansas/Kaw rivers converge, and where real passenger boats once came and went: Manhattan.¹ A place of importance that more people ought to know about. So I shall tell them.

THE PLACE. In 1855, March 24, sundown, four men climbed Bluemont Hill.² They were searching for a place to establish a new town to help bring the Kansas part of the Kansas-Nebraska Territory into statehood as a free state, not a slave state. One of those men, looking out across the prairies from the top of that Bluemont Hill, was a college professor and Methodist minister named Isaac Goodnow. He said, "This is the place".³

The four men standing on that hill were being financed by the New England Emigrant Society: an anti-slavery society established to fund New England people who would move to Kansas territory, which was on the verge of becoming a state. That state must come into the Union free! Goodnow who was teaching in a Methodist college in East Greenwich, Rhode Island, told of his real conversion to the freedom cause:

I had been an Anti-Slavery voter since 1840. Fully believing that the rule of slavery or of freedom in the nation would be settled on the prairies of Kansas, I felt impelled to throw myself into the scale, on the side of Freedom.

I corresponded with Dr. Denison [his brother-in-law] then preaching in Boston. We met in the city of Providence, Dec. 1854, and listened to a rousing lecture by Eli Thayer, the founder of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. With him after the lecture we discussed the pros and cons of the enterprise till near midnight. The decision was for emigration.⁴

Manhattan was a town founded for freedom, so, appropriately, some one hundred years later the first woman mayor of Manhattan led a parade in support of the civil rights movement that had just been viciously assaulted in

¹The Kansas/Kaw River extends 169 miles from Junction City to the Missouri River.

²An ancient Indian burial ground.

³He thus made the same declaration that Brigham Young had made looking down on the plains in the Utah territory a few years earlier, only Goodnow was righter than Young. I have been to both places. I know.

⁴See Carolyn Jones, *The First One Hundred Years*, Official Souvenir Booklet of the Manhattan Centennial, Inc.

Selma, Alabama.

THE DIE WAS CAST. The New England emigrants, already assembled and waiting, headed for that territory you can still look down on with sundown pleasure from Bluemont Hill. They had come with a passion for freedom, morality and education.

BOAT FROM OHIO. Then It Just So Happened that another group of people "landed" at the convergence of the Big Blue and Kansas/Kaw. Those people were from Ohio. They, too, were intent on establishing a town in Kansas. But, apparently supported by New York money, they had come for more economic reasons than had the New England emigrants. But they were Ohioans and certainly not pro-slavery.

As they came up the river, the Ohioans had no intention of joining forces with some other group in establishing a town. They, apparently, according to some contractual agreement with their New York financial supporters, were to find a place and establish a town which was to be called Manhattan. But It Just So Happened that just where the New England group was just beginning their settlement, the Ohio boat went aground, which was not hard to do in those shallow waters.

The New England emigrants did not want to see another town established nearby, so they agreed to name the town they were establishing Manhattan, if the Ohioans would stay and help them build it. The Ohioans agreed and so on February 14, 1857, the Kansas territorial legislature granted a request to incorporate a town under that name on some land that spread out west of Bluemont Hill.⁵

FIRST MAYOR. Among the Ohioans was a man named Andrew J. Mead. In February of 1857 he was elected Manhattan's first mayor.⁶

Mayor Andrew Mead was not only a politician. He was also strongly religious and was soon busy raising funds to erect St. Pauls Episcopal Church. The Methodists already had their church building constructed by the time the city was incorporated. And the Congregationalists had a cornerstone laid. Now the Episcopalians were on their way, also.

DOWNTOWN. By 1859, Manhattan's main avenue, Poyntz Avenue, was on its way to future business success: a store-post office, the Manhattan Hotel, and the first public school in the area. Also, Manhattan was on its way to becoming a place where "graffiti type" Saturday night high school cruising would joy the hearts of kids like Tremmel kids a hundred or so years later.

Also on May 21, 1859, Manhattan got its first newspaper--the Western Kansas Express, changed soon to The Express, then The Independent, and eventually The Manhattan Mercury, where two young men of the Tremmel

⁵Thus another much better place to live than that New York Manhattan was on its way.

⁶The Manhattanites also elected ten councilmen at the same time.

Clan were to get their first introduction into the world of business and finance. They were paper carriers. Also, Michael was awarded a Manhattan Mercury scholarship when he graduated from high school.

A MAJOR PRIORITY AND K-STATE ON ITS WAY. To be a place of freedom and morality, the founders of Manhattan insisted that education must be placed in priority. Fifteen days after the town was incorporated a meeting was held to discuss the founding of a college. Under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church,⁷ Blue Mont Central College was founded--the cornerstone laid in 1859, first classes held in 1860. Isaac Goodnow, was "the acting president" of a five member faculty.

A SMART MOVE. Kansas became a state in January 1861. The Morrill Act (a federal act for funding public colleges for the purpose of advancing both technical and intellectual education) was passed July 2, 1862. That act appeared as a perfect opportunity for the administrators of Blue Mont Central College to realize their initial concern to combine classical and practical instruction. They made their move and a petition for land-grant status was presented to the territorial governor just 13 days after the Morrill act had been approved.

MORE THAN PLOWED FIELDS. But those early Manhattanites had other concerns besides practical and classical instruction. They were

concerned with morality and religion, so they made another move. They requested the presiding bishop of the Kansas Methodist Episcopal Conference to appoint the Reverend Joseph Denison as President of Blue Mont Central College. Denison was to be established as the first president of the new college which was to be called Kansas State Agricultural College. Also the church was to have three members on the board of trustees.

Kansas State Agricultural College, which was the first land-grant college in America, was to be a college "teaching agriculture and mechanical arts," without excluding "other scientific and classical studies." This it soon became.⁸

The first KSAC classes happened in the Blue Mont building in 1863. Fifty-three students enrolled, divided almost exactly between male and female

⁷Today the United Methodist Church.

⁸As can be seen from two pictures taken in front of Anderson Hall in 1892 (picture preserved in Jones' *The First One Hundred Years*, footnote #4), there were 34 faculty members, of which seven were women (School of Home Economics), and an orchestra of some 23 members. (See footnote #4.) Later this orchestra was called the college-civic orchestra; an orchestra in which, some seventy-seven years later, WCT ended his career as a trumpet player. No public appearances from that time on, but an occasional private concert on the shores of Lake Carroll.

students.⁹

AND RELIGION ALSO. The college in Manhattan, Kansas had gone public and secular, but not completely so. For a long time students were required to attend chapel and go to religious services on Sundays. Fact was that when the Tremmels made their invasion of Manhattan and Kansas State University (the new name happened just as the Tremmels happened to arrive) there were two beautiful chapels on campus, which are still there, and William C.'s first job was titled Director of Religious Affairs.

NOT EXACTLY A FRONTIER TOWN. The second editor/owner of a Manhattan newspaper, James Humphrey, back sometime in the 1860s, summed up both the old and the new Manhattan in a comparison he made between Manhattan and Junction City:¹⁰

Two different ideas underlaid the foundation of Manhattan and Junction City. In the case of Manhattan the original scheme comprehended a finished community: schools, churches, college, libraries and literary societies all existed in embryo, ready to be launched forth at the earliest opportunity. In Junction City a town-site was platted, hotel and saloon started, and the rest expected to follow by a process of natural evolution. In the one, social, intellectual, and moral needs of the people were anticipated; in the other those needs were left to call into existence the means for their own satisfactions. Manhattan bore the image and superscription of New England-- Junction City of the frontier.¹¹

⁹Tuition for 13 week term was \$4 in the "common branches" and \$5 in the "higher branches" including languages. Extra charges for musical instruction ran as high as \$8 a term for piano lessons.

¹⁰Junction City was/is a Fort Riley stomping ground about 20 miles southwest of Manhattan. It is generously referred to by Manhattanites as Junk Town.

¹¹And neither town ever got over its beginnings.