

CHAPEL HILL, MISSOURI: LOST VISIONS OF AMERICA'S VANGUARD ON  
THE WESTERN FRONTIER

1820 TO 1865

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by  
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ABSTRACT

Despite its present circumstance as an extinct Missouri town in the geographic heart of the Midwest, Chapel Hill College was once the vanguard of the burgeoning American empire. In 1852, Chapel Hill College stood as a monument to the triumph of the small slaveholding society that migrated laterally across the Mississippi and settled in western Missouri. The school's success and inevitable failure is a microcosm of the history of migration into western Missouri that was aided and abetted by government, churches, and men perched atop the pinnacle of power.

The history of the region around Chapel Hill has been eclipsed by the rise of Kansas City, Bleeding Kansas, and the Civil War. From the 1840s until the mid 1850s the towns southwest of present day Kansas City thrived along with the trade and travel connected to the Santa Fe and Texas trails. The communities around Chapel Hill, Pleasant Hill, and Lone Jack were flourishing until they were destroyed by the tumult of

the Border War that merged into the general violence of the Civil War. Several small Missouri towns went up in smoke and along with them went their histories. Chapel Hill is exactly such a town.

This thesis examines the factors that created the town and the college on the geographic edge of the American frontier. It argues that settlers to the area had historic and cultural roots that eased their migration. Technological innovations expedited their move west and shaped the way they thought of the future. The society that built the school was supported economically and militarily by government, underpinned by small-scale slavery, and girded by religion. It further argues that the wealth generated from the Santa Fe trade created a local economy that allowed the school to briefly thrive.

The school and town were destroyed during the war and have virtually disappeared in the historic record. According to the scant historic record, the school closed amidst a drought and a downturn in the economy. This thesis examines evidence that suggests the swirling political storm over Bleeding Kansas was an additional cause for the closing of the school.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis entitled “Chapel Hill, Missouri: Lost Visions of America’s Vanguard on the Western Frontier 1820 to 1865,” presented by Robert Anthony O’Bryan-Lawson, candidate for the Master of Arts Degree, and certify that in their opinion it worthy of acceptance.

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This work is dedicated to the Jackson-Campbell family, a Missouri farm family with deep roots in Lone Jack, Missouri. Without their kindness, patience, and generosity my pursuit of happiness through learning, teaching, and public service would not be possible.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Every year during the dog days of western Missouri's dry summers, a ghostly shape from the past appears on the lawn of Leon Bottomueller's farmhouse. This apparition takes the form of a fifty by sixty foot beige rectangle of shallow rooted grass that is the first to go dormant in the summer drought. Beneath the crispy wisps of well-mowed grass lay the physical remains of the stone foundation of what was once the preeminent institution of higher education in western Missouri. The beige rectangle on the lawn marks the spot where, before the Civil War, an elite class of citizens brought their children by oxcart and mule drawn wagons to study Natural and Moral Philosophy, Greek, Latin, Math, and Music. The school was a denominational school administered by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and although the school was called Chapel Hill College, it was technically a private academy that educated students from eight years old up to young adulthood. The community that built the school and its students and faculty are illustrative of a past that has been largely forgotten. The ghostly apparition on the Bottomueller's lawn is a metaphor of the community's history; the faded grass above the stone foundation walls is a pale reminder of the promise of its green springtime glory.

With a system of support that included policies and money from federal and state governments and with churches as community organizing forces, American settlers from the Upper South (the Carolinas, Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee) quickly dominated western Missouri. But from nearly the beginning, these newcomers turned their eyes on

the West. From the 1820s until the 1850s, braided muddy ribbons of trails spreading out from Lexington, Missouri marked the main routes to the Santa Fe Trail and army forts in the West.<sup>1</sup> When the Santa Fe Trail opened in 1821, farms, wagon shops, inns, and eventually towns sprang up along the trail in the region that encompasses present day Lafayette, Jackson, Johnson, and Cass counties. A wave of new settlers established small villages along the network of old Indian trails. The hamlets of Chapel Hill, Greenton, Mt. Hope, Lone Jack, Pleasant Hill, Blue Springs, and Harrisonville soon became bustling frontier towns along the Santa Fe and Southwest trade routes from Lexington. This region of central western Missouri, where the nation switched from rivers to trails as it expanded to the West, became one of most prosperous areas of the state. When Chapel Hill College was chartered by the state in 1849, it was representative of the success of the wealthy and powerful men who were perched atop the pinnacle of social, economic, and political power in western Missouri. Within a generation of settling in western Missouri, the community leaders of Chapel Hill, supported by the economy of the flourishing Santa Fe trade and the labor of the fastest growing and largest slave population in the state of Missouri, built a college in southwestern Lafayette County that they proudly boasted was the “best in the West.”<sup>2</sup> The completion of the construction of the stone school building

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<sup>1</sup> David Drary, *The Santa Fe Trail, Its History, Legends, and Lore*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 240.

<sup>2</sup> From 1830 through the 1850s, Lafayette County’s white population increased 93 percent and the black population increased 364 percent. These numbers hint at the tremendous amount of land speculation in the area, as well as the enormity of the slave trade. Douglas R. Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri’s Little Dixie*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 218.

in 1852 marked the apogee of Missouri's small-slaveholding society on America's western frontier.

The only known pictures of the school are copies from a single daguerreotype that was owned by L. W. Jack of Warrensburg who was a student of the school.<sup>3</sup> Two local historians, Chris Cooper and Craig Bryan, found a paper copy of the daguerreotype in a pawnshop in Warrensburg, Missouri sometime in the 1990s. They reproduced the image and donated copies to several local archives. The lone image of the school, its students, and faculty is by far the most attention-grabbing record of the school's history. It freezes a moment in time in which Missouri's small-slaveholding society was at its zenith, just before it attempted to swell onto the prairies of Kansas. It captures an image of forty-five men, women, and children standing on the stairway and in front of the school's main building. Some young men can be seen peering from the windows on the second floor. The school's founder Archibald W. Ridings is reported to be the tall man standing alone holding his arms behind his waist. He is the dark headed figure dressed in a vest and black frock coat standing farthest to the right in the photograph and is the only person in the photo who can be identified. The tall male figure in the white hat standing behind two women at the foot of the stairs is allegedly George Bent, who became Indian Agent to the Cheyenne. George was the son of Santa Fe trader William Bent, who in the 1830s established an adobe fortress called Bent's Old Fort along the Arkansas River in Colorado. He sent two of his Mexican-born children to Chapel Hill College. Along with

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<sup>3</sup> "The Story of Chapel Hill," *Kansas City Star*, (Kansas City, MO), Nov. 19, 1894. A drawing made from the 1852 daguerreotype accompanied this news article. According to the article, Lee. W. Jack was the owner of the daguerreotype image. Cooper and Bryan traced the origin of the photograph to D. J. Knueppel who apparently made the paper coy in his Warrensburg studio sometime in the 1930s.

a few Wyandot Indians and students of mixed Indian and American cultural heritage who attended school at Chapel Hill, they represent not only the cultural diversity of the American frontier, but also Missourians' willingness to at least partly overcome cultural differences in favor of commerce.

Posed on the stairs of the school are men who moved on from Chapel Hill to graduate from West Point and Harvard—men who will become high ranking Confederate army officers who served under General Shelby, a Missouri governor, lawyers, a poet laureate, doctors, ministers, merchants, a Wall Street broker, a Missouri Senator and a United States Senator, who served for thirty years before being appointed to the Interstate Commerce Commission by Teddy Roosevelt. They represent the pinnacle of power in antebellum Missouri.<sup>4</sup> The school not only matriculated a number of these notable Missourians, but also accepted women, Indians, and Mexicans at a time when such cultural diversity of students was an anomaly among American institutions of higher learning. Many of these female students became the brides and mothers of prominent Missouri men. [See Fig. 1]

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Collins Barile, *The Santa Fe Trail in Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 83-92. See also William Patrick O'Brien, *Merchants of Independence: International Trade on the Santa Fe Trail 1827-1860* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2014), 3- 23.



Fig. 1 Chapel Hill College circa 1852. Students and faculty.  
Photograph used by courtesy of the Johnson County Historical Society.

Within a generation the community captured in this image had transformed the landscape and within a generation it would change again. When the town's post office was officially named Chapel Hill in 1850, it was at the edge of the contiguous United States and it stood as a proverbial and literal city on a hill. It was testimony to the triumph of the dreams of generations of American families that first crossed the Appalachian Mountains and spilled into the Mississippi and Missouri River valleys, where they steadily dispossessed the Indians of their land. Many of these settlers brought with them the agricultural and cultural practices of their original eastern homes, transplanting both diversified commercial agriculture and small-scale slavery in western Missouri. The society they formed was a confluence of diverging American cultures—

part Southern, part Northern, and part Western. This hybrid culture flourished as the nation expanded into new territory. In the same year that Chapel Hill was platted, the citizens of Independence won the federal freighting contracts to provide service to the West.<sup>5</sup> Soon thereafter, Westport, Independence, and Kansas City began to rise to usurp Lexington's regional importance as the preeminent access point to the far West. As the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail moved progressively farther west up the Missouri River, the merchants, and farmers in the region southwest of Lexington faced stiff competition from the newer, more western towns. Simultaneously, the approaching railroads were revolutionizing the Missouri countryside as they created towns along the rail line from St. Louis into western Missouri. A gravel bed and steel tracks through a town could make or break its future and the fledgling towns in the region competed with one another to win the railroads. When the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 opened the Kansas Territory, it changed the priorities of the population of western Missouri as the fight to make Kansas a slave state became a crisis that occupied their time, money, and energy for the next six years.

The Civil War halted most all progress on the railroads in western Missouri. Guerrillas sometimes harassed the mostly Irish work gangs as well as burned bridges and destroyed telegraph lines. The long and bloody conflict left the area depopulated and much of the infrastructure destroyed. After the war, railroads became the new force that shaped the future of western Missouri. The towns that won them prospered, while those

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<sup>5</sup> William Patrick O'Brien, *Merchants of Independence: International Trade on the Santa Fe Trail 1827-1860*, 3- 23. The effort to capture the government contract to haul freight was led by Dr. David Waldo, an early supporter of Chapel Hill College and the namesake of a south Kansas City neighborhood.



that did not often falter and became extinct. As Kansas City became the new regional transport hub, the towns around Chapel Hill, which are older than Kansas City and Westport by about a decade, fell into the city's orbit, became stagnant, or like Chapel Hill, became virtually extinct. As they declined, an important part of the region's antebellum history became virtually lost.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of Chapel Hill's early prominence, the rarity of primary sources from the community seems to have kept historians at bay. Much of the record of the Chapel Hill community was lost or destroyed as a result of the ongoing violence between 1855 and 1865. Homes, churches, whole towns—including Chapel Hill—literally went up in smoke during the Border War that merged into the general violence of the Civil War. Many people, along with their histories, were snuffed out during the conflict as they moved away or died. Fire again struck the historic record in 1911—this time at the state capital building in Jefferson City, where lightning sparked a fire that destroyed a portion of the archives. In addition, there is little remaining historical record of Chapel Hill College. Neither monument nor markers indicate its location and neither the college nor the town is discussed at length in any history book. The college and its founder, Archibald Wellington Ridings, are mentioned in two voluminous Lafayette County histories and a United States Biographical Encyclopedia produced in the 1880s and

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<sup>6</sup> William Worley, "History Timeline of the Kansas City Region" (unpublished manuscript on CD-ROM, Kansas City, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2010). In this extensively detailed timeline Worley carefully plots regional events chronologically. He notes that in 1849, a cholera epidemic killed 700 people, mostly Indians, around the place still called Kawsmouth. From the chronology it is clear that these towns that are now suburbs and rural communities of Kansas City were all platted in the 1830s, while the Town of Kansas was not incorporated until 1850.

1890s. The combined histories of the Border War, the Civil War, and the ascent of Kansas City as a regional metropolis have overshadowed much of the history of the antebellum college and community at Chapel Hill.

Dr. C. A. Phillips of Warrensburg published a few paragraphs about the school in an October 1938 edition of the *Missouri Historical Review* and there is evidence from that journal that local historical societies were giving talks and newspapers were publishing short historical sketches of the school in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> The information they provide is useful, however, much of it is repeated in way that served to create an early mythology of the school and Archibald Ridings. For years, all except a few locals forgot about the school. In 2003, after nine years of part-time research, genealogist Craig Bryan's self-published manuscript, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College," was the first contemporary history of the nearly forgotten school.<sup>8</sup> Although he located most of the available primary source material on the school in local archives and compiled a list of students and teachers, his study is genealogical in nature and does not provide a broader historical context. Several brief essays and newspaper articles produced at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Craig Bryan's genealogical research manuscript, and a vertical file at the Missouri Valley Reading Room of the Kansas City Public Library comprise the sum of scholarly historical research and published material on Chapel Hill. These brief early histories and

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<sup>7</sup> C. A. Phillips, "History of Chapel Hill College," *Missouri Historical Review* 3-4 (April-May 1938): 380.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Bryan, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill" (Kansas City, MO, self published manuscript, 2003). Available at Missouri Valley Reading Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri [hereafter Missouri Valley Reading Room].

biographies and the solitary photograph of the stone school building are much like the ghostly remains in the Bottomueller's lawn; they are mere shadows of what is a much larger story. [See Fig. 2]



Fig. 2 Leon Bottomueller's lawn circa 1992. The foundation of the school can be seen by the rectangles of dormant grass

Although direct primary sources are scarce—Chapel Hill was never a large town, it was virtually destroyed during the Civil War, and neither the school nor its founder left behind an archive or papers, it is possible to reconstruct the past through other means. Chapel Hill's history can be uncovered by exploring sources as varied as biographies, genealogies, personal memoirs, newspapers, church histories, census data, and county histories written in the last decade of the nineteenth century, as well as informed by the work of scholars who write on the Civil War era history of western Missouri and of communities that share similarities with Chapel Hill.

The methodology of John Mack Faragher's seminal work, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*, sets a benchmark for the countless historical community studies that

followed, including the one presented here.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Michael Cassity's *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* provides an excellent template for a social history of another western Missouri community and its founder—in this case the biography of George Smith and the founding of Sedalia, Missouri.<sup>10</sup> These historians' work inspires and informs this paper by demonstrating that the history of a discrete place can be reconstructed by a thorough examination of its geography, geology, native populations, environment, economics, politics, religion, education, and social history.

Other scholars have addressed aspects of the Chapel Hill story in their histories of the region. Agricultural historian Douglas R. Hurt's *Agriculture Slavery and in Missouri's Little Dixie*, published in 1992, is the most comprehensive monograph of western Missouri.<sup>11</sup> Though he explains the area's antebellum growth in an economic and technological manner, the work is primarily an agricultural study and does little to describe the people who built the region, especially the daily living and working experiences of those involved in the region's central cultural feature, small-scale slavery. Further still, he adds to the obfuscation of the town's history by incorrectly stating that Chapel Hill College was in Lexington. Eighteen years after Hurt's book, Diane Mutti Burke picked up the torch on this topic and elucidated the intricacies and bitter intimacies

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<sup>9</sup> John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Cassity, Michael. *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Douglas R. Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992).

of Missouri slavery in her book, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households*.<sup>12</sup> Her work tells us of the unique attributes of Missouri slavery and provides a lens through which to peer into the society that built communities such as Chapel Hill. Additionally, historians Christopher Phillips,<sup>13</sup> Aaron Astor,<sup>14</sup> Stanley Harrold,<sup>15</sup> Conevery Bolton Valenčius,<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Neely,<sup>17</sup> T. J. Stiles,<sup>18</sup> Joseph Beilien Jr.,<sup>19</sup> and Mark Geiger<sup>20</sup> have all recently written studies that illuminate the economic, social, and political landscape of western Missouri. Kristen Epps's 2010 doctoral dissertation examines how small-scale chattel slavery briefly flourished along the Missouri-Kansas

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<sup>12</sup> Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Phillips, *Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Making of Southern Identity* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Neely, *A Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> T. J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Joseph M. Beilein Jr., "'The Presence of These Families is the Cause of the Presence of the Guerillas There': The Influence of Little Dixie Households on the Civil War in Missouri" (PhD diss., University of Missouri, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Geiger, *Indebtedness and the Origins of Guerrilla Violence in Civil War Missouri 1861-1865* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

border.<sup>21</sup> And in 2011, Nathan Woodward's thesis examines the ambivalent attitudes towards slavery held by the Baptists at William Jewell College and the residents of Liberty, Missouri.<sup>22</sup> Despite their insightful and groundbreaking work, all of these authors have overlooked Chapel Hill, a significant western Missouri community that boasted of one of the region's preeminent educational institutions.

This thesis is an effort to recapture the faded history behind the lone picture of the school; to tell of Chapel Hill's promise, its proverbial springtime glory, and restore it to its rightful place in Missouri history. By using the geographic region around Chapel Hill as a case study, it takes note of how the environment, natural resources, and ecology shaped regional history. The chapters are organized in a loose chronological fashion in order to explore the overarching themes of migration, the process of settlement, and the growing sectional crisis over the issue of slavery. Chapter Two "Charter Generation," uses national, state, and county histories to trace the development of the town. It reveals how gold rushes, wars, trade with the Indians and Mexicans, cheap available land, and slave labor created one of the wealthiest areas of the state within two decades. In addition, it uses archeological evidence, oral histories, personal interviews, biographies, newspapers, maps, and census data to outline the details and dynamic forces that made Chapel Hill a consequential and potentially important town in antebellum western Missouri. It argues that Archibald Ridings deliberately chose the site of Chapel Hill for the location of the school specifically because of its geographic and environmental

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<sup>21</sup> Kristen K. Epps, "Bound Together: Masters and Slaves on the Kansas-Missouri Border 1825-1865" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Nathan Woodward, "Baptists and Slavery in Frontier Missouri" (master's thesis, Colorado State University, 2010).

advantages. Fresh air, clean water, raw building material, and proximity to the Santa Fe Trade and cheap land made the site particularly desirable as location for building a school with aspirations that it might become a larger college such as the state universities and large denominational seminaries in the east. Chapter Three, “Pearl on a String”, sorts the details of the school’s history, as well as education in antebellum America, in order to place the school in proper perspective among other academies, seminaries and universities. And it takes note of the school’s unique features that make it worthy of recognizing as an important part of Missouri history. The chapter also looks at technology and the coming of the railroads as developments that influenced the behaviors of town founders, such as Archibald Ridings. It concludes with an examination of the events that resulted in the closure of the school and compares historic evidence against the claims made by its students and other historians.

The intricate and overlapping topics of social class, religion, economics, and politics are unraveled in Chapter Four, “Recipe for War,” which examines the intertwining factors of labor, class, religion, commerce, politics, and technology in shaping the worldview of the community and the school’s founder, Archibald Ridings. The chapter relates the past of two premier frontier religions that impacted the history of the region and reveals the role of spirituality in forming communities on the frontier. As well, it explores the power and influence of religion in shaping the motives and character of western Missourians, such as Archibald Ridings. Along the way, the analysis pulls apart the interlaced elements of social class, wealth, slavery, religion, and the buoyant economy as a means by which to illuminate his character and opinions. The chapter concludes with an examination of the school’s decline under the administration of the

Cumberland Presbyterians by pointing to supporting historic and scientific evidence to validate the claim that a drought and national economic depression caused the school's eventual downfall. The chapter looks at other factors that contributed to the closure of the school and foreshadows the following chapters with a preview as to how the Bleeding Kansas episode negatively affected the local population. Missourians who lived within a 20-mile radius of Chapel Hill were responsible for many of the depredations and political crimes committed in the Kansas Territory. When the Civil War began, Kansans and Union troops struck back at the region with a vengeance.

The concluding chapter, "This Unhappy Struggle," traces the history of the region during the Civil War and examines the details of the destruction of the society that built the college and the town. It covers the events that affected the population in the vicinity of Chapel Hill and offers new perspectives of the motives behind the violence that marked the Civil War in western Missouri. In the process these chapters uncover the vestiges of a society that once showed promise that it might build an empire in western America and explains why Missourians were willing to risk it all on their bid to make Kansas as slave state.

The challenges of uncovering a past that has been shrouded by the fog of war and then covered by the historic sands of time has been challenging. However, this important piece of Missouri's history is too significant to remain overlooked. This account, therefore, strives to piece together the disparate and far-flung sources and connect them with the currents of American history. By using these primary sources, this study attempts to give voice to the voiceless along the border whose lives were spent building a frontier, participating in its destruction, and rebuilding it in a new way when the war was



over. In the end, the arguments put forth in this thesis reveal that the development of Chapel Hill, Missouri has larger implications to the history of the Santa Fe Trail, Missouri slavery, the pattern of western migration, Bleeding Kansas, and the Civil War. It is a study of how an individual's worldview and entrepreneurial spirit can shape history and leave a lasting legacy. And lastly, it is a discovery of the blessings and shortcomings of democracy, capitalism, and religion on the vanguard of America's western frontier.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHARTER GENERATION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHAPEL HILL, MISSOURI

Contrary to the fond reminiscences by some of its alumni; Chapel Hill College did not arise from the raw western Missouri landscape propelled by the solitary ambitious visions of the school's founder, Archibald Wellington Ridings. Instead, the school arose from a milieu of intertwined and multifaceted environmental, social, political, and economic factors that helped the region develop within only two generations from Osage lands to some of the wealthiest areas of the border state. Western Missouri's charter generation were people who were accustomed to absorbing new lands through lateral migration and the American settlers were quick to establish a local economy that thrived from the international trade through Santa Fe, the Red River Valley in Texas, and New Orleans.

New ideals of democracy and personal liberty, a new sense of nationalism, new technologies, religious movements, and the growing divide over slavery flowed through the nation's veins as it strained westward across the continent. Archibald Ridings moved along with these historic currents as much as he moved them. As early as the mid-1830s, some Missourians were looking ahead to railroads as the rising force that would shape Missouri's future.<sup>1</sup> When the town was officially renamed and platted as Chapel Hill and construction of the stone school building was underway in 1850, the small hamlet sat like

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<sup>1</sup> Delegates to a railroad convention first met in St. Louis in 1836 to lay a plan for Missouri railroads. See Howard L. Conrad, *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri* vol. 6 (New York: Southern History Company, 1901), 428.

a pearl on a string on the trails to the west and southwest. If Ridings could find a way to bring the approaching Missouri-Pacific railroad to the doorstep of the fledgling school he began in his home in the fall of 1840, it would be a springboard that could thrust Chapel Hill into regional prominence. Once unraveled, the details of the town's history suggest it was a prototypical planned community as much as it was the fortunate happenstance of a hunting accident.

After Hernando De Soto and his men journeyed through the Arkansas Valley in the 1540s, the European newcomers began to steadily displace and intermarry with the Indian population to the north in Missouri. Beginning in the early 1600s, however, the powerful Osage controlled and protected the valuable pathways to the Arkansas River Valley and the trails to the west in central and western Missouri. For nearly two centuries, the Osage fended off successive attempts by the French and Spanish to wrest the area from their control. In their efforts, the Spanish parlayed at various times the Otos, Missouris, Shawnee, and Pawnee in strategic war and trade alliances against the Osage. The French, in contrast, were more apt to make strategic trade agreements and intermarry among the Indian clans.<sup>2</sup> After the United States acquired the Louisiana

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<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Duval, *Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). Duval's book is the best account of the European and American conquest of Middle America. Fort Osage, also known as Fort Clark, was established by Thomas Jefferson to build an American monopoly on the lucrative Indian fur trade in the West and usurp the power of the French Chouteau family from St. Louis. This movement by the Osage and the temporary success of the fur trade at the fort points to evidence of the abundant game and wildlife in the area. It was plentiful enough to temporarily support not only a large native population, but also the factory system established at the fort. In addition, it points to the Osage's declining regional power and their increasing dependence on the American government to protect them from other tribes and American settlers. See also Carl H. Chapman, *Indians and Archeology of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 15-16 and 120.

Purchase in 1804, Americans explorers Lewis and Clark, George Sibley, and Zebulon Pike followed the paths of these first European travelers from the region to the west.

By as early as 1810, the population of European Americans dominated and controlled the state demographically and economically.<sup>3</sup> When American settlers wanted the Osage lands in central Missouri they provoked conflicts with the Osage and then waited until the federal government removed them. In 1808, the U.S. government made treaties that encouraged the Osage, about 5000 people, to move from their homes and villages in the Lamine River basin onto four large campsites on the prairie that surrounded Fort Osage, just fifteen miles north of what would become the town of Chapel Hill. [See Fig. 3]



Fig. 3. Stone tools from Chapel Hill area. Archeologist Rex Walter Ph.D. has analyzed these archeological specimens gathered from the 250-acre site surrounding Chapel Hill by Leon Bottomueller. They represent thousands of years of human activity near the spring and trade and travel along the river corridors. Some of these materials come from central and southern Missouri.

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<sup>3</sup> The 1810 Missouri federal census reveals a majority European American population dominated the territory. Walter A. Schroeder, “Populating Missouri 1804-1821,” *Missouri Historical Review* vol.1, no. 4 (July 2003): 263–294.

In 1815, the senate approved the Treaty of Ghent, which set the terms to end the War of 1812 and effectively ended the British and Indian alliance that had stalled the advance of the American settlement in Missouri. Afterward, waves of American families from the Upper South followed their tradition of lateral westward migration as they crossed the Mississippi River to find new homes in Missouri's game rich and fertile river valleys. The first generations of Americans who migrated into Missouri transplanted their Upper South culture in the new land. Despite the hardships of life in on the edge of the frontier, western Missouri settlers were well accustomed to utilizing the area's natural resources, exploiting the labor of their enslaved people, and maximizing the productivity of their livestock. The landscape, climate, flora, and fauna resembled the homelands that they had left behind in the East. Crops and livestock that thrived on their eastern farms and small plantations, such as corn, tobacco, cattle, sheep, and hogs, did equally well in western Missouri. Farmers discovered that wheat grew well in western Missouri's soil and climate and free ranging hogs grew fat feasting on the hickory nuts and acorns found in the forests. Cotton, the staple crop of the Deep South, grew unreliably in the region; however, hemp, which was used to make rope and burlap to bind cotton bales, performed especially well in western Missouri.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Douglas R. Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 115. The use of hemp in the production of cotton bound this area of Missouri economically to the South, while at the same time the local farmers and planters support for high tariffs and demands for federal support for internal improvements tied them politically to the North. See also Romulus Travis, *The Story of Lone Jack* (Independence, MO, Jackson County Historical Society, 1963 reprint of 1907 pamphlet).

These first Missourians were a people who were often on the move and many of them proudly identified themselves as Westerners. Many held little sentimental attachment to the land on which they were born, especially if there were better opportunities elsewhere. They were often the Scotch-Irish and English descendants of parents and grandparents who had fought in the Indian Wars and the American Revolution and as a reward were granted lands west of the Appalachians. When the soils were exhausted, the lands too expensive or unavailable, when the communities too crowded, and when the stratified antebellum slave society stifled opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility, they migrated farther and farther westward. In Missouri there were ample opportunities for small-slaveowning families, ambitious young men, craftsmen, and merchants to prosper.<sup>5</sup> Their pattern of migration and settlement along the riverine corridors in western Missouri allowed for the convenient transport, trade, and sale of the region's agricultural products via the nation's growing river market system. New roads, river ports, and towns appeared almost overnight and the local economy linked with the nation's global trade networks.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the wealthiest families to emerge from this first generation of Missourians earned their profits by finding ways to aid the transport of goods and people

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<sup>5</sup> William Foley, *Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 238-248. Foley has written the most extensive and detailed history of Missouri's early settlers. See also Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 25-37.

<sup>6</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 218.

in and out of the region.<sup>7</sup> River ferries, steamboat landings that offered timber or coal, stagecoach inns, warehouses, dry goods stores, and hotels often returned a good investment of time, money, and labor. Families such as the brothers John, James, and Robert Aull, who began a small business in Lexington exporting beeswax and animal lard to New Orleans, went on to build a small business empire that included slaughterhouses, rope walks, merchant stores, and agricultural land holdings. From a single store opened in 1822 in Lexington, Missouri, they became international travelers and ran a frontier chain of retail stores in Liberty, Independence, Westport, and Richmond by the 1840s.<sup>8</sup> The Ridings brothers would follow in the footsteps of the Aull brothers to become prosperous farmers, wealthy merchants, and influential businessmen and join this first generation of Missourians.

After the rights of the Osage to their remaining land in western and southern Missouri were extinguished in 1825, the first documented American settlers began to trickle into the areas south of Fort Osage, which was still called Lillard County.<sup>9</sup> The first settlers near the place that would become Chapel Hill did not find a vacant wilderness. The Indians had been farming and burning off the under story of the old growth forests for centuries, creating a park like environment in some areas. Seasonal prairie wildfires left the Sni Hills and vast expanses of nearby meadows and fields

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<sup>7</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 19. The Aull family of Lexington, Missouri is typical of this early class of trader merchant.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Lillard County encompassed all of the land from the Saline County line due west to the state line and from the Missouri River in the north to the Osage River in the south. By 1841, the area was divided up into six counties plus parts of two others.

completely treeless. Forests grew only along the streams and riverbanks and extended onto the prairies a few miles at most. And there were already squatters residing on some of the land in western Missouri. They were hardy backwoods types who had long lived in the physical and cultural buffer zone between the American frontier and the Indians who still possessed the land. Many of these first Missouri settlers were of mixed French, Spanish, Indian, and American ancestry.<sup>10</sup> In many ways, Daniel Boone and his son, Daniel Morgan Boone, who both traveled among the Indians and hunted in the region during this period, typify these earliest pioneers. The elder Boone had many close friends among the Osage. Daniel Morgan Boone settled on a farm (at present day 63<sup>rd</sup> and Brooklyn in Kansas City, Missouri) and became an agricultural agent for the government to the eastern Indians who had been moved onto reservations in Kansas by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Missouri statehood in 1821, there occurred another event that shaped the history of the region for the following six decades; Mexico achieved its independence from Spain, which ended the control of the Spanish in Santa Fe and opened the trails west to American traders. The first American to make the trek was William Becknell, who set out from Franklin, Missouri that same year. The Mexicans, who had long suffered from the colonial impulses of the Spanish, welcomed him and were eager to trade gold and silver for American made goods. His trip marked the birth of the Santa Fe

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<sup>10</sup> Many towns and regions of Missouri retain their French names, such as St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, and the Ozarks.

<sup>11</sup> Rick Montgomery and Shirl Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story* (Kansas City Missouri: Kansas City Star Books, 1999), 16.



Trail with its eastern terminus at Franklin, Missouri.<sup>12</sup> Soon, countless Missouri farmers and dry goods storeowners learned the tricks of this trade and joined in to earn profits from the Santa Fe trade.

With physical strength, a durable team of oxen, and a good wagon, a bold young farmer, after planting his spring crops, could lead a caravan from the prairies south of the Missouri River to Santa Fe and back twice a season. Harry S Truman's great-grandfather, Solomon Young, was one of the first masters of the Santa Fe trade, as well as Truman's grand-uncle, Judge John James Chiles, and his son, Jim Crow Chiles, who became supporters of Chapel Hill College when it was chartered in 1849.<sup>13</sup> By trading American-made durable goods and whiskey for furs, silver, and gold with Mexicans at Santa Fe and Indians met along the way, they could earn a substantial sum and have an adventure to tell. A single round-trip took about ninety days, the only hold ups during the journey besides the weather were herds of buffalo in western Kansas that could halt a wagon train for days. The profits these traders earned came in the form of silver and gold, which they used to buy more American trade goods, land, animals, farm equipment,

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<sup>12</sup> By the 1840s the eastern trailhead at Franklin moved gradually westward to Lexington, which in turn competed for trade with the newer and more western towns of Independence and Westport Landing in the 1850s.

<sup>13</sup> David G. McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 17-23. Jim Crow Chiles was a Bushwhacker who rode with Quantrill and a skeleton in the Truman family closet. According to the January 5, 1849, *Columbia Statesman*, "J.C. Chiles" was listed as the judge, who was also on the 1849 Chapel Hill College Board of Trustees that made the nomination to charter Chapel Hill College from the floor of the statehouse. Harry Truman's middle name did not represent anything. The S represented neither side of the Solomon nor Shipp family sides, but was chosen to please both.

and slaves—benefiting both the national and local economies and encouraging even more people to move to western Missouri.

From statehood until the eve of the Civil War, the western Missouri River Valley and its tributaries experienced tremendous population and economic growth, much of it along the Santa Fe Trail. Increasingly prosperous settlers from the Upper South poured into the area in the three decades following the Indian Removal of 1830 Act and by 1860, Jackson and Lafayette counties boasted of some of the largest slave populations in Missouri. Those townships closest to the Missouri River held the highest concentrations of slaves, a fact that indicates that many enslaved laborers likely worked the hemp farms along the river bottoms.<sup>14</sup> To the south and west of the Chapel Hill were tall grass prairies where seasonal grasses grew as tall as a man on horseback. Early settlers preferred to live and farm in the wooded areas in the hills and along the sides of streams on land that they had cleared of trees. Prairie farming was still in its experimental stages in Missouri and settlers believed the prairies were unfertile.<sup>15</sup> By girding trees, draining

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<sup>14</sup> James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822-2011* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 7. The settlement trends in this area were to build farms and travel along the streambeds and riparian corridors that meander north toward the Missouri River. See also Union Historical Company, *History Of Jackson County* (Kansas City, Missouri: Union Historical Company, 1881), 339; and Lyle W. Dorsett, “Slaveholding in Jackson County,” *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Review* 20 (October 1963), 25-37. Also, federal census data from 1850 and 1860 indicates that this is the area of Jackson County that held the largest slave population. Census Browser at University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

<sup>15</sup> James C. George, “The Georges: Pioneers and Rebels, David C. George and Nancy C. George, Their Life and Times” (Columbia, MO: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1965), 314. James B. George was a Kansas City resident and an engineer by trade. In 1958, he wrote this volume of his family history. The George family came from Kentucky and settled in the Sni Hills in the 1830s. He reports that an 1836 state census taker found settlements all along the Little Blue and Sni-a-bar creek to the west of Chapel

swamps, building fences and planting fields, the settlers believed they were making improvements to the land.<sup>16</sup> Characteristic of the settlers elsewhere in Missouri, the settlers at Chapel Hill used the evacuated campsites and crossroads of the Indians as their own.<sup>17</sup> They plowed up the Indian gravesites and flattened their centuries old religious mounds, making way for a world created in their own image.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the fervor for Indian removal led by politicians such as President Andrew Jackson and Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, the federal government became increasingly involved in aiding western migration during this period by working in cooperation with state governments through a number of means to facilitate commerce and westward expansion into Missouri and the West. Teams of scientists were sent out by the government to study the newly-acquired territories. They published scientific reports on the flora and fauna, and information on the availability of food and fuel along the trails to the west. The U.S. government also sent out teams of surveyors to mark the

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Hill but none who built their homes or tried their hand at farming on the area's many prairies. See also Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 60-62.

<sup>16</sup> Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 191-192.

<sup>17</sup> George, "The Georges: Pioneers and Rebels," 255. James George wrote a short history of Chapel Hill College gathered from a variety of sources including oral histories, speeches, and newspapers. He reports that early settlers sometimes excavated the Indian mounds to search for treasures and large flat rocks to use as doorsills to their cabins.

<sup>18</sup> William Young, *Young's History of Lafayette County* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen and Co., 1910), 23-24. At Chapel Hill, archeological artifacts point to human occupation around the springs for a period of 1000 years or more before the 1800s. An early archeological survey counted twenty-nine Indian mounds in Lafayette County alone. See also Figure 3 for a photograph of collection of artifacts gathered by Leon Bottomueller from around Chapel Hill and analyzed by archeologist Rex Walter Ph.D.

trails, plotting longitudes, latitudes, and elevations. They created maps of the new territories, dividing the land up for sale in 640-acre plots and setting aside a section in each for a public school. When initial public offering was deemed too steep an investment for most western farmers, the federal government encouraged land speculation and lowered the price to as little as \$1.25 an acre by the 160-acre lot. When farmers needed roads and bridges, they petitioned the state legislature for internal improvements. The federal government aided navigation of the western rivers by clearing them of snags and favored the railroad companies with land grants.<sup>19</sup> And when the Indians threatened Missouri freighters on the Santa Fe Trail, the U.S. Army built forts to protect them along the way.<sup>20</sup>

In the mid 1830s, the ease of steamboat travel along the Missouri River from St. Louis increased the flow of people into the region.<sup>21</sup> It was a treacherous journey filled with dangerous snags that sunk many boats and the river changed course sometimes overnight due to flooding. Steamboat travel was much easier and faster than travel by wagon, however, and once experienced pilots learned to navigate the river and it was mostly cleared of snags, a trip from St. Louis to Lexington took only about four days. From Lexington, travelers could make the thirty-mile trip by stagecoach south to the area

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<sup>19</sup> Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 281-283

<sup>20</sup> Tony R. Mullis, *Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 16-18.

<sup>21</sup> William Worley, "History Timeline of the Kansas City Region" (unpublished manuscript on CD-ROM, History Department at University of Missouri-Kansas City 2010), 6.

around Chapel Hill within a day. Falling land prices, along with fertile black loam soils eighteen inches deep and easy access to the Missouri River along the flat land created by the Sni-a-bar Creek, Blackwater and Blue River flood plains, enticed many farmers and planters of limited means to move to this area of western Missouri.<sup>22</sup> To the north of the settlement were the rugged Sni Hills, which would become a notorious sanctuary for Confederate partisan guerrillas during the war.<sup>23</sup> To the northwest, the land between the Little Blue and Big Blue Rivers in Jackson County was particularly fertile and tillable and one of the first areas in the region settled by the new American migrants. By the time of the Civil War these areas were the wealthiest in the region. Among the thousands of newcomers arriving by steamboat to Lexington, Missouri in the mid-1830s was twenty-year-old Archibald W. Ridings. He came with his sixty-four-year-old father, Jesse, two brothers, Robert and Thomas, and one sister, Berilla, from their home near Surrey, North Carolina in 1835.<sup>24</sup> The family came to the region among a wave of other

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<sup>22</sup> George, "The Georges, Pioneers and Rebels," 21-22. George reports, "The government was selling the land for \$1.25 an acre." See also, Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 592. The Land Act of 1841 stabilized western land prices and cooled the land speculation market. See also Worley, "Timeline of Kansas City Regional History," 9. Worley reports that the early 1830s were a period of rampant and unregulated land speculation in western Missouri that was ended by the Panic of 1837.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Nichols, *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri, Volume 2, 1863* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Publishers, 2012). Nichols studied the *Official Records of the War of Rebellion* (hereafter *O.R.*) to create one of the most thorough accounts of military actions in western Missouri. The Sni-Hills are mentioned frequently. Additionally, the *O.R.* has been reproduced digitally, it is keyword searchable and accounts of the actions in the Sni Hills are easy to locate. *O.R.* online at Cornell Digital Library, Cornell University, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/>.

<sup>24</sup> Surrey County, North Carolina is noted for granite mining, which suggests that some of the Ridings family slaves may have had experience with mining and stonemasonry. As a

migrants from North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. As was typical of wealthy families who frequently owned slaves, the Ridings family brought along bondspeople on their westward journey.<sup>25</sup>

The Ridings family entered a landscape bustling with activity. Lexington, which tried to bill itself as the new Athens of the West, was a thriving river port with schools, foundries, furniture factories, slaughterhouses, and brick manufacturers. In 1836, seven miles to the east of Chapel Hill, the town of Lone Jack was platted on the prairie along an old missionary trail. A subscription school, Baptist Church, the Cave Hotel, a blacksmith shop, and several stores began operating there soon thereafter.<sup>26</sup> A sure sign of the local farmers moving from subsistence to a market economy were several horse-powered treadmills and water powered gristmills and sawmills that were established during this period. Farmers could more easily store, sell, trade, and transport their grain crops after they were milled and packed, and milled lumber for building meant better quality homes, barns and warehouses. Nearby, hamlets that soon would become towns were taking

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side note, its largest city, Granite City is the birthplace of Andy Griffith and the inspiration for the town of Mayberry, which was the centerpiece of his 1960s television program, *The Andy Griffith Show*. See <http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/>.

<sup>25</sup> The 1830 Federal Census lists “Jesse Ridens” of Surry, NC as having twelve slaves. It is not possible to determine if some of these are the same ten slaves owned by Jesse Ridings, who appear in the 1840 Slave Schedules from Surrey, North Carolina. Data obtained from U.S. Federal Census, Slave Schedules, from Surrey County, NC and Lafayette County, MO, 1830-1860, accessed at Ancestry.com. See also, Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery’s Borders*, 40. While some slaves came to Missouri through the interstate slave trade, most came to Missouri with their owners. See also Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri’s Little Dixie*, 217.

<sup>26</sup> Romulus Travis, *The Story of Lone Jack*, (Jackson County Historical Society, 1963 reprint of 1907 pamphlet), 14. The town was named for the “lone elm” that stood on the trackless tall grass prairie.

shape at Pleasant Hill, Blue Springs, Pink Hill, Rose Hill, Columbus, Oak Grove, Greenwood, and New Santa Fe, which was on the border of what would eventually become Kansas. The first doctors who migrated into the area and the new churches, post offices, blacksmith shops, and whiskey shops that opened—all indicate the region was attracting more new residents as the frontier became settled.<sup>27</sup>

If the senior Jesse Ridings was looking for adventure and opportunity for three his sons, he soon found both in Missouri.<sup>28</sup> Not long after they arrived in Missouri, the Ridings began operating a dry goods store in Lexington. Archibald, most often referred to in the historical record as “A.W. Ridings”, became particularly active in the community. Archibald had attended two schools in the East, Patrick Henry Academy in Henry County, Virginia and Randolph-Macon College in Boydton, North Carolina. He received training as a teacher and taught school before he moved to Missouri. Upon his

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<sup>27</sup> Travis, *The History of Lone Jack*, 21- 29. Travis mentions several families arriving in the area with slaves in 1836, at about the same time as the Ridings clan. Many newcomers that year were families also from North Carolina. David Yankee and Charlie Hopper settled near Lone Jack. The Cave Hotel was built to accommodate travelers in Lone Jack and several stores, mills, and churches opened in the area around Chapel Hill.

<sup>28</sup> Jesse Ridings, the father of the Ridings clan, was born in 1777 and was descended from French Huguenots. His wife was kin to the Poindexters and Wentworths, both families with roots in the colonial period. The family’s oral history claims active participation in the American Revolution through the actions of Jesse’s mother who smuggled letters and contraband items through British Army checkpoints concealed under her red dress. Research into the slave schedules for the Jesse Ridings family revealed that in their home state in the Piedmont region, the family increased their wealth in slave property six fold in the period from 1810 to 1830. The couple had five children, two girls, and three boys and two of their sons, Thomas and Archibald, attended colleges in North Carolina and Virginia with Archibald graduating before migrating to Missouri. See *United States Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Missouri, Vol.2* (New York: United States Biographical Publishing Co., 1878), 885. Accessed at Ancestry.com; also Ridings family descendant, Jack Landers, Ph.D., interview conducted by author, October 14, 2013.

arrival in Lexington in 1835, he taught at one of the schools there. He was involved in the Missouri Mormon War of 1838 and was present at the capture of the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith. In that same year, the family expanded the dry goods business and opened an additional store in southwest Lafayette County at the place that would become Chapel Hill.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the two dry goods stores owned by the Ridings family, evidence indicates that Archibald Ridings had acquaintances and dabbled in the newest and safest way to earn money on the western frontier—the freighting business.<sup>30</sup>

The Ridings store at the community that was still-not-yet-called Chapel Hill was designated as a public meeting place when Sni-a-bar Township was first platted in 1838.<sup>31</sup> In that same year, Archibald and Thomas also bought large farms near the town site that was still called Cool Spring. Thomas Ridings operated a successful farm and land patent records reveal that he and Archibald speculated on land in Jackson County and Cass County.<sup>32</sup> Archibald’s farm straddled the Lafayette and Johnson county line and on his property was a thirty-five foot escarpment of Bethany Falls Limestone that

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<sup>29</sup> Several advertisements in the Lexington newspaper the *Missouri Valley Register* from around September 8, 1866 indicate that the Ridings family owned dry goods stores in Lexington and the Sni-a-bar Township. The Ridings family dry good store in Lexington had gone out of business by 1866, but the new store owners advertised their new business as located in the old Ridings Dry Goods store. *Missouri Valley Register*, Missouri Digital Newspaper Project <http://shs.umsystem.edu/>.

<sup>30</sup> “A. W. Ridings and Co. Receive Contract to Carry Mail Between Independence and Boonville,” *Jefferson City Inquirer*, December 5, 1857; also from interview with Ridings family descendant Jack M Landers Ph. D. on October 14, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Missouri Historical Company, *History of Lafayette County, Missouri* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Company, 1881), 470.

<sup>32</sup> The Ridings brothers filed several patents for tracts of land at Clinton, Missouri during the 1840s. *U.S. General Land Records, 1796-1907*, accessed at Ancestry.com.



forms a ridge and small bluff. This bluff was eventually chosen by the Ridings brothers as the site to build the college. This elevated location, which happened to be one of the highest elevations in western Missouri, overlooked the Blackwater River Valley and surrounding area and offered the settlers lots of fresh air. Lands with fresh air and frequent breezes were thought to be healthier than lands adjacent to stagnant creeks and swampy low-lying areas, which were believed to ooze foul smelling “miasmas.”<sup>33</sup> Death and disease were daily facts of life and in the nineteenth century mindset bad smells were associated with ill health.<sup>34</sup> Malarial fevers, sickness from water borne bacteria, and viral infections spread by insect bites plagued the Missouri’s river valleys every summer and took countless lives, often claiming children and adults in the prime of their lives. Ridings, niece Saraphina died at age eighteen, likely from one of these contagious fevers.<sup>35</sup> Cool and fresh water, which settlers knew was essential to their health, as well as that of their animals, flowed freely from the springs that emerged at the base of Ridings’s bluff.

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<sup>33</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri’s Little Dixie*, 111. Farmers in western Missouri refused to water rot their hemp in ponds for this same reason, preferring dew rotting instead. Dew rotting is less labor intensive and rotting hemp in ponds released sulfurous smells into the air and required slaves to wade into cold ponds in the fall to fetch it out.

<sup>34</sup> Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country*, 117-121. In separate chapters entitled “Airs” and “Waters,” Bolton Valencius discusses the importance of these attributes of the land to settlers in Missouri and Arkansas.

<sup>35</sup> The settlers’ proximity to streams was as much a curse as a blessing. The waterways provided the ease of travel and communication, but living in the proximity of them also often meant the spread of communicable diseases. See Mutti Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 89. Worley’s timeline also indicates that cholera and malaria epidemics regularly swept through the area. See Worley, “History Timeline of the Kansas City Region”; and Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri’s Little Dixie*, 11.

The town became a junction of two local stagecoach lines, both tracked along old Indian trails. One line ran in a north to south direction from Lexington on the Missouri River and to the Santa Fe Trail and the roads to Texas in the south. The other line ran east to west from Independence to Columbus, which was then the county seat of Johnson County, Missouri. Between 1834 and 1836 a small Cumberland Presbyterian seminary operated there as well.<sup>36</sup> From Columbus, the road went on to a growing village on the Osage Prairie called Warren's Corner, officially known as Warrensburg after 1856.<sup>37</sup> From Warren's Corner, the line ran on to Glasgow, which was an important port on the Missouri River. This road across the state tracked closely to a portion of the Shawnee trace, a system of trails used by Spanish royals, French trappers, missionaries, and ranchers moving cattle up from Texas to central Missouri since the 1700s.<sup>38</sup>

In the two decades between 1830 and 1850, the settlement that became the town of Chapel Hill steadily took shape from a watering hole on the trail to a college town on

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<sup>36</sup> *The History of Johnson County Missouri* (Kansas City Historical Company: Kansas City, 1881), 423. Cumberland Presbyterian Reverend J.B. Morrow operated the seminary at Columbus. The seminary was a two-story brick building. Kansas Jayhawkers burned the town of Columbus on January 7-8, 1862. It is yet another western Missouri border town that has become nearly extinct and forgotten.

<sup>37</sup> George, "The Georges: Pioneers and Rebels" 38.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Cassity, *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 5. In 1721, a Spanish caravan followed this route from Santa Fe into the heart of Missouri before being murdered by Missouri Indians who mistook the travelers for their mortal enemies, the Pawnee. This was likely the first direct European contact with Indian people in central Missouri. See also Wayne Gard, "The Shawnee Trail," *The Southwest Historical Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 3 January (1953): 360.

the region's southwestern edge.<sup>39</sup> On the earliest maps of the region, the area was called Cool Spring, which hints at its importance for travelers who led their draft animals there for water. In 1838, one mile east of the spring, Daniel Shores operated a post office from his home, which indicates that neighborhood was growing in the area around the spring. In later years, teams of mules hauled spring water up the bluff in barrels in order to provide water for the town.<sup>40</sup> The site chosen to build the town of Chapel Hill was in an upland range of low wooded hills and adjacent to fertile bottomland along the Blackwater River and Sni-a-bar creek basins. These hills mark a watershed that divides the waters flowing into the Ozark River Basin from those flowing into the Missouri River Basin. The springs at the base of the bluff form the headwaters of the Blackwater River, which flows in an easterly direction into the Ozark River Basin through the Lamine River. From there the Lamine River empties into the Missouri River at Boonville, which was the site of the first large settlement of Americans to migrate into central Missouri. North of the town, all of the waters flowed into the Missouri River. The diversity of habitats that surrounded the town created a rich ecosystem with an abundance of game for the table, timber to build homes, and fuel for the fireplaces. All of these environmental factors were the essential elements for building a college town on the frontier of the fledgling American empire. The only things lacking to build this town were Archibald Ridings's

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<sup>39</sup> Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew*, 2012, 14. The commerce generated by the three trails west (Santa Fe, California, and Oregon) was central to the region's economy. By 1850, with 1600 inhabitants, Independence claimed to be the second most populous city in Missouri.

<sup>40</sup> "The Story of Chapel Hill," *Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), Nov. 12, 1894. Available in the "Chapel Hill" Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri [hereafter Missouri Valley Reading Room].

plan for the future and a large amount of backbreaking labor—most all of which was provided by the increasing population of enslaved people brought into the area between 1830 and 1860.

Cool Spring increased in regional importance in 1842 with the establishment of Fort Scott in the Indian Territory and the continued growth of Lexington as both a port to the west and shipping port for the region's agricultural products. The proximity to arteries of traffic, the fresh air, clean waters, along with fertile bottomland, were sure selling points for land speculators and men who might desire to establish a college and build a town—men such as Archibald Wellington Ridings. Around this time, Ridings began teaching private classes to a handful of students in a building attached to his home. This first classroom was the embryo of Chapel Hill College, whose history will be explored in details at the end of this chapter.

James W. Harris established the first post office near the springs and crossroads in 1844 naming the place Harrisburg after himself.<sup>41</sup> The post office operated under this name until it was changed to Chapel Hill on December 12, 1850.<sup>42</sup> Federal mail contracts with local farmers that were printed in newspapers of the time reveal that the route from the river to Harrisonville, Butler, and on to Fort Scott tracked directly through the town. Once wagon trains reached the town from Lexington, a road down the bluffs

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<sup>41</sup> Local historian, Chris Cooper, claims with some evidence that James W. Harris ran the post office out of his home, which was one mile due east of the present town site of Chapel Hill.

<sup>42</sup> Missouri Historical Company, *History of Lafayette County, Missouri* (St. Louis, 1881), 38. U.S. postal service ran to this location until October 7, 1863 when it was ended by the tumult of the war. It was restarted in May of 1864 and continued until sometime in the 1930s. Today, there is no post office at Chapel Hill.

led to the town of Lone Jack, seven miles to the east. From there lay roads west to Santa Fe and due south towards the Arkansas Valley and Texas. Martin Rice, a resident of the period, who was also a student and later teacher at Chapel Hill College, claimed that in the 1840s, the trails leading west out of Jackson County to Santa Fe were the easiest 800 miles that could be traveled by wagon on the American continent.<sup>43</sup> The traffic along this route between Lexington, through Chapel Hill, Lone Jack, Pleasant Hill, Harrisonville and on to Fort Scott, Fort Riley (in central Kansas), and Fort Union (in New Mexico) increased after the Mexican-American War when the United States took control of the ceded territories in the Southwest. In 1855, the Lexington freighting firm Russell, Majors, and Waddell won the federal contract to supply these military outposts—the largest freighting contract in U.S. history to that date. The firm built warehouses, bunkhouses, and stockades just west of Lone Jack to store their wares and accommodate wagon masters and their teams on their routes to the forts and Santa Fe.<sup>44</sup>

Missourians with an eye toward the future, such as Thomas Hart Benton, Robert Van Horn, David Rice Atchison, George Smith, and Archibald Ridings, saw the coming of the railroads as the likely key to the success of their towns as the nation moved from travel and transport by rivers and trails to that by iron, timber, and rails. Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton talked about trains that would someday travel at sixty miles per

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<sup>43</sup> *History Of Jackson County* (Kansas City: Union Historical Co., 1881), 940-941.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Lund Settle and Raymond Lund Settle, *Empire on Wheels* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1949), 9-17. See also, Mary Lund Settle and Raymond Lund Settle, *War Drums and Wagon Wheels: The Story of Russell, Majors, and Waddell* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 158; and, “City to Protect Wagon Swales,” *Kansas City Star*, June 23, 2006, available on microfilm at the Missouri Valley Reading Room.

hour across the state. Two of the first running railroads in the state were not in the east, but rather in the west. In the late 1840s, western Missourians built two mule and horse-powered trains that ran on oak and walnut wood rails. One shuttled people and products from the Wayne City landing on the Missouri River to Independence, and the other, which was north of the Missouri River, ran about five miles from the rich farmland in Ray County around Farmville to a river port nearly directly across from Lexington. These two rail lines indicate the desire of the locals to get material in and out of the region, as the Wayne City rail was built to bring goods and settlers to the Independence area, while the Richmond landing mostly sent farm products out.<sup>45</sup> The two rail lines point to the availability of engineering skills, technology, raw material in lumber, and the labor force that were required to build and lay the rail lines. Slaves were often involved in the industries and businesses related to the overland trade, whether in the working at inns, merchant stores, in warehouses, or on docks. As well, they worked in the artisan trades, in driving cattle, in brick factories, in saw and grist mills and as domestic servants. Construction projects such as these rail lines and the fine college building that was built at Chapel Hill are a clear indication that not only were regional businessmen looking to rails as a springboard to prosperity, but also that Missourians were doing much more with

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<sup>45</sup> William Patrick O'Brien, *Merchants of Independence: International Trade on the Santa Fe Trail, 1827-1865* (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2014), 6. See also R.B. Oliver, "Missouri's First Railroad," *Missouri Historical Review*, Volume 26, Issue 1, (October 1931): 12; and Howard L. Conrad, *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri* (New York: Southern History Company, 1901), 128.

the growing slave and immigrant labor force than just producing large quantities of hemp.<sup>46</sup>

The town continued to develop along with the trade and transportation infrastructure in this geographic region as the fast growing nation switched from rivers to trails as means of travel to the burgeoning West. During the 1840s of Missouri history, towns, townships, and counties began to compete with one another in an effort to draw businesses, lucrative state contracts and college grants, and railroads that would benefit local economies.<sup>47</sup> Archibald Ridings' dry goods store and the land he owned near Cool Spring were an asset for the area and he did what he could to promote the fledgling town near the spring that was growing along with the Southwest trade. In 1845, the private school that Archibald began in a room attached to his home a few years earlier, moved into new facilities and began accepting students from the public. In that same year, starting with a meeting at the home of Lone Jack store owner David Yankee, Archibald Ridings, who by then was a Lafayette County judge, and other wealthy farmers, merchants and slave owners organized an effort to create a new county carved out of sections of the surrounding Lafayette, Jackson, Johnson, and Cass (then called Van Buren) counties. They desired to name their new county "Donelson", after Andrew Jackson's adopted stepson, who supported and aided the annexation of Texas—an act that indicates the popularity of that historic event in western Missouri. Lone Jack was at

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<sup>46</sup> Kristen K. Epps, "Bound Together: Masters and Slaves on the Kansas-Missouri Border, 1825-1865" (PhD diss. University of Kansas, 2010), 75-89. See also, Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 107-110.

<sup>47</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 183.

the new county's geographic center and was chosen as its county seat. The move would separate the southwest corner of Lafayette County and make Chapel Hill the only college in the new county. A popular petition to create this new county circulated in the local communities and made it all the way to the state house, but failed to pass in the lower house of the state legislature by a margin of one vote.<sup>48</sup>

This ambitious act to make the area separate from its neighboring counties is an indication of the political power, wealth, and will of the residents of the rural communities around Chapel Hill and Lone Jack, who hoped to shape their future independently from the ever-growing influences of the towns of Lexington, Independence, Westport and Kansas City. Independence's efforts to capture the western freighting business had already begun to pay off as travel along the Oregon and California trails increased in 1845. Trade, travel, and commerce were what made a town flourish and town fathers, men such as Archibald Ridings, knew that railroads would be the key that could make that happen. If the Lone Jack and Chapel Hill communities could not win the railroads in the next decade, they would lose the race to make their towns into cities. For the next thirty years, small towns' efforts to convert their muddy trails into iron rails marked local politics. Railroads could make, break, or create a town's future.

The Pacific Railroad, or as it became known in 1872, the Missouri Pacific Railroad, began to lay tracks outside St. Louis in 1851. Three years later, the Board of

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<sup>48</sup> Pearl S. Wilcox, *Jackson County Pioneers* (Independence: Jackson County Historical Society, 1975), 96. Wilcox refers to Ridings as "Archibald Riddings" and writes he was a county judge in 1845.



Directors of the Missouri Pacific Railroad expressed an interest in Chapel Hill and passed a resolution indicating the railroad would pass through or near the town and on its way to Wayne City on the Missouri River above Independence. The railroad route hinged on the provision that area citizens subscribe to \$200,000 in bonds.<sup>49</sup> A railroad through the town would bring more people and commerce into the region and it portended a bright future for the Ridings' family store and the school that he was building at Cool Spring.<sup>50</sup> Archibald Ridings surely campaigned locally in favor of the matter. But the bond issue was difficult to sell to many farmers who were content with doing things the way they had for generations—making deals with a handshake and working through barter and trade to get their needs met. They were always strapped for cash and commonly in debt with their money tied up in their farms, slaves, and equipment.<sup>51</sup> Other towns such as Kansas City, Westport, Harrisonville, Blue Springs, and Pleasant Hill were also prospering. The citizens and town fathers all wanted and campaigned for a railroad to pass through their towns, too. Additionally, when Kansas Territory opened for white settlement in 1854, farmers became increasingly preoccupied with the political situation on their western border. The conflict halted most all progress on the rails in the area, but after the war, the towns that won the railroads and the towns that railroads built, won the future. While those towns that did not were often condemned to obscurity or extinction.

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<sup>49</sup> Craig Bryan, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College" (Kansas City, MO, self published, 2003), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Although the community was known as Chapel Hill by the early 1850s, the town was never incorporated as a city. Ridings officially platted the town as Chapel Hill on May 26 1857. Plat maps indicate five east-to-west streets and four north-to-south streets.

<sup>51</sup> Cassity, *Defending a Way of Life*, 18.

## CHAPTER 3

### PEARL ON A STRING: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE COLLEGE

Chapel Hill's meteoric rise was an integral piece of settling of western Missouri. It was a western outpost of small-slaveholding societies from the Upper South built to transmit and propagate culture on the American frontier. For a brief time in the early 1850s, the school that began in Archibald Ridings' home became the dominant denominational state chartered school of higher education in the region. When the stone school building was completed, it was the westernmost college in the contiguous United States and showed potential to become one of the preeminent schools in Missouri. It sat along one of the nation's first important highways to the West—it was Archibald Ridings' proverbial pearl on a string. If, in the next decade, the town could win the route of the railroads making their way across the continent it would become a diamond in the rough and Archibald Ridings' version of a city on a hill.

According to his brief biographies, Archibald Ridings had neither the aptitude nor the attitude for farming and his “deep and abiding interests in the education of the masses” was his true calling.<sup>1</sup> It would later be said about him that his lifetime ambition was to create a Cumberland Presbyterian college.<sup>2</sup> He was trained as a teacher and taught

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<sup>1</sup> *United States Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Missouri, Vol. 2*, (New York: American Biographical Publishing Co.), 885. [hereafter *USDGPG*]

<sup>2</sup> This claim about Ridings was an accusation by a resident of Warrensburg when Ridings, acting as a member of the Board of Regents, tried to take fiscal control of the

school in the East, before finding work teaching immediately after arriving in Missouri. The reality of Ridings' prior teaching experience conflicts with the school's origination story which claims that the school was the fortunate result of an accident that left his brother-in-law with a physical handicap. Instead, the building of the college at Chapel Hill was Ridings' plan for a community that was a reflection of his priorities and ambitions and an outward display of his faith, wealth, status, and learning.<sup>3</sup>

Even though there are not many official records of the school, there is a common narrative of Chapel Hill College shared by oral historians and early recorders of the school's history. The tale of the college begins with a hunting story, or rather, the story of a hunting accident. The area around Chapel Hill has long been noted for its rich hunting grounds. From the earliest French accounts, down through Lewis and Clark—all who came found the area rich with game. Milton Stapp, Archibald Ridings' brother-in-law, was a young man who loved to hunt. One day in 1840, while out hunting with some friends, seventeen-year-old Milton was accidentally shot in the leg by a companion. He luckily survived the accident, but unfortunately lost his leg during the surgery that saved

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property on which the Normal School was built. "Preserve the Trust," *Standard* (Warrensburg, MO), July 1, 1875. Found in, Effie Bass, "Notes on Central Missouri State Teachers College" Vertical File, Library Archives, Central Missouri University at Warrensburg, MO.

<sup>3</sup> This narrative of the school's history is a compilation of details from the three short historical sketches and two *Kansas City Star* newspaper articles all contained in the vertical file for "Chapel Hill," which is available in the Missouri Valley Reading Room at the Kansas City Public Library. See "Chapel Hill," Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room. Additional information was obtained from a website and online archives maintained by the Historical Foundation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of America, Cordova, Tennessee. See, <http://www.cumberland.org/>. See also, Craig Bryan, "Best in the West," *Kansas City Genealogy*, vol. 3 no. 22, also available in the Missouri Valley Reading Room.

his life. His family, fearful for the young boy's future as a person with a physical disability living in a frontier community, stepped in to help. Archibald Ridings took the task of educating Milton Stapp in the home he shared his wife Mary, who was Milton's sister. The Ridings family constructed a room with extra lodging and space to accommodate his young student. Concerned that the young man would feel lonely, Ridings invited three or four of Milton's friends from the neighborhood to share in the private instruction.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the term Ridings dismissed his students and told them to return in the fall. News of the private instruction offered by Ridings spread through the area by word of mouth and the next autumn more students returned to join the original four or five. The school began as a private enterprise in the Ridings home as an "evening school" for boys and young men and over time attracted new students from the neighborhood. The students boarded at the home of Archibald and his brother Thomas. Several brick homes were built and it began to look like a town. As the enrollment increased an inn was built at the crossroads to house students and the passengers from the stagecoaches that passed through from Warrensburg to Independence and from Lexington to Harrisonville.

Beginning in 1845, under the leadership of Ridings, Chapel Hill accepted girls at the school. In that same year, Ridings, in order to devote more time to the family's dry goods business, "entered negotiations with the Cumberland Presbyterian Synod of

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<sup>4</sup> "The Story of Chapel Hill," *Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), Nov. 12, 1894. Available in the "Chapel Hill" Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room, Kansas City Public Library.

Missouri” to take over a portion of the administration of the school in order to start a seminary to train ministers.<sup>5</sup> The school’s coeducational policy continued with the Cumberland Presbyterian administration of the school and increasing enrollment demanded the need for more space and for the hiring of two additional teachers. In 1848, the school began the construction of an additional two-story wood frame structure for classrooms. C. G. McPherson from Cumberland University in Tennessee, and a local man, Martin Rice, were hired to help Archibald Ridings teach the subjects of Natural Philosophy, Math, Latin, and Greek. Several cabins were built as dormitories for the young men, while the girls boarded with ladies and families in the town.<sup>6</sup> Small front porches attached to the front of the boys’ dormitories were a place of leisure and former students recalled many fine evenings spent there.

Alumni of the school later boasted that for a time Chapel Hill was the finest two-story college in western Missouri. In 1849, the school became a state chartered institution with a board of trustees and operated as a part college and part seminary under the administration of the Cumberland Presbyterians. The school lured some of the wealthiest families in the region to send their youngsters to the little town in southwest Lafayette County to receive instruction. It also attracted students from afar as indicated by the several Mexican and Indian students who attended the school. In addition to the children of elite Missourians, a few children of the lower social classes attended the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

school as well. Archibald Ridings paid the tuition costs of a few of “poor, but deserving” young men from the neighborhood.<sup>7</sup>

The school was often referred to as an “academy”, which suggests that it may have offered curriculum in some trades for young men who were from the lower classes and not expected to enter professional careers.<sup>8</sup> Historians of antebellum American education classify three types of schools. First, were district or public schools, which were coeducational and offered free schooling for children up to the fourth grade level. These schools taught basic reading, writing, and math skills, and perhaps a bit of geography. Next were academies, which were attended by mostly children of the upper and middle classes. Generally speaking, men were trained to enter business and farming and women were trained to be teachers. Academies were occasionally open to some men in the lower classes who learned skills that prepared them for work in the trades and industry. Artisan crafts such as pot makers and carpenters, and the trades such as coopers, furniture makers, cloth weavers, and blacksmiths—even farming required a

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<sup>7</sup> We do not know exactly who these 37 “poor but deserving” young men were, but it is reasonable to suppose that they were upwardly mobile, local, white, from the Upper South, and members in good standing with Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In a memoir of the early church the biography of Chapel Hill alum, Reverend William Suddath, mentions “feelings of gratitude” toward Archibald Ridings, which may indicate that he was one of the local boys that received a free or discounted tuition. R. C. Ewing, *Historical Memoirs: Containing a Brief History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Missouri* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874) 177-218.

<sup>8</sup> Roger L. Geiger, ed., *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 153-158. This study examines the regional distinctions of antebellum colleges and universities. The author notes that in the West, denominational schools supported by the local community, such as Chapel Hill, were the norm. These schools catered to the demands of the community and as a result were multipurpose schools that served a variety of needs in the community.

good working knowledge of mathematics and geometry. Last were colleges and state universities. These schools concentrated on educating nearly exclusively men and trained them to become doctors, lawyers, professors, ministers, and other professional careers, as well as prepared them to assume future roles as the leaders of their society.<sup>9</sup> Although relatively few antebellum Americans earned what were essentially high school educations at academies, the Chapel Hill students were a fair representation of the free white community that supported the denominational college.

Under the direction of the Chapel Hill Board of Trustees, the construction of the stone building was ordered in 1849. The next six years the school was in its most active period and produced its most renowned students. During its peak years, enrollment hovered from 100 to 150 students. The school established an endowment of \$9000, a small library, and contracted a principal and ten full time instructors. Chapel Hill College advertised their classes in editions of the *Missouri Cumberland Presbyterian*, a newspaper that began publication in Lexington, Missouri in 1850.<sup>10</sup> The Federal Census that same year recorded Archibald Ridings as living with his wife Mary at their farm near the school. Both listed their occupations as “School Teacher” and living with them were

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> There are no extant copies of the *Missouri Cumberland Presbyterian* from this period in the newspaper archives of the State Historical Society of Missouri. Craig Bryan found corrections for advertisements that ran in this paper that were published in the *Lexington Weekly Express*. See, Craig Bryan, “A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College” (Kansas City, MO, self published, 2003), 20. Available at Missouri Valley Reading Room. Also, The Historical Foundation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has some archival material and information about Chapel Hill College at their website which can be viewed at <http://www.cumberland.org/>.

sixteen students from the school; the majority of them were female, one was Archibald Ridings' niece, Saraphina Ridings.<sup>11</sup>

The construction project of the stone college building at Chapel Hill is a testament to the wealth, engineering skills, and strong labor force of this Missouri slaveholding community. Quarrying the stones and setting them in place was a labor-intensive three-year project. Patrick Donley and Peter A. Hall, a stonemason living in Fayetteville, Johnson County were two of the contractors hired for the construction of the school.<sup>12</sup> Both of these men were Irish immigrants and neither owned slaves so they likely hired enslaved craftsmen to work on the project from local slave owners. Members of the community may have contributed, traded or hired out their labor and the labor of their skilled bondspeople to the project of building the school.<sup>13</sup> It also is possible that some of the labor or skills used to build the school were bartered for tuition to attend the school.<sup>14</sup> Missourians who owned slaves worked closely and daily with their

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<sup>11</sup> The 1850 U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedules for Lafayette County, accessed at Ancestry.com.

<sup>12</sup> Craig Bryan found the names of the contractors in the Seawell Family Papers at the Missouri Valley College archives. Using Ancestry.com, I traced "Patrick Donley" to Patrick Donnelly, who was a stonemason residing near Warrensburg, Missouri. Peter A. Hall, also a stonemason, lived in Fayette. Both men listed their birthplace as Ireland. See Craig Bryan, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College" 12.

<sup>13</sup> 1840 through 1860 census data show that the three Ridings brothers held in bondage fewer than thirty slaves collectively and most of those people were young women and children. It could not have been the work of the Ridings slaves alone and "hiring out" is a hallmark of Missouri small-slaveholding societies. It is most likely slaves were hired for the school's building project from the local population. This data was obtained from the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Federal Census, Slave Schedules, and Lafayette County, MO, accessed at Ancestry.com. See also Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 107-118.

<sup>14</sup> Cassity, *Defending a Way of Life*, 18.



bondspeople and a passerby of the college construction site may have seen both white and black members of the community laboring side by side.<sup>15</sup> Slaves with passes were regularly seen traveling on the roads performing duties for their masters or on visits to their families on other farms.<sup>16</sup> It is likely that the busiest construction periods occurred during times of the year when people's labor was not needed for the vital planting and harvesting tasks. It is not known for certain the amount of slave labor used to build the school. However, when the large slave population of the area and Missourians' preference for using slave labor is taken into consideration, it is safe to say the amount was substantial.

The building's stone construction speaks to Missourians' propensity to utilize raw materials they found in the local environment. Bethany Falls Limestone is noted for its exceptional hardness. It is difficult for stonemasons to work with because of hidden stratification planes that cause the rock to sometimes fracture unevenly and in unpredictable places.<sup>17</sup> Surely the most labor intensive of phase of construction was the shaping of each stone block that created the exterior walls of the school. Each rectangular block measured approximately five and a half by twenty by ten and a half inches and weighed eighty to ninety pounds. Manageable chunks of rock were split off

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<sup>15</sup> Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 242-252.

<sup>16</sup> Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 254.

<sup>17</sup> Over millennia, manganese and iron minerals from rain and ground water leech through the rock and chemically bond with calcium making it exceptionally hard compared to fossiliferous limestone. The qualities of Bethany Falls Limestone are discussed in E.R. Buckley and A. H. Buehler, *The Quarrying Industry of Missouri* (Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Bureau of Geology and Mines, 1904), 229.

from exposed bedrock then broken into smaller pieces and hauled a quarter mile uphill to the construction site. There they were formed into blocks by hammering and chiseling them into the desired shape. This task required thousands upon thousands of blows with a hammer and chisel. This type of work is the definition of hard labor. The lifting, final fitting and placing of the stone blocks must have been difficult and dangerous work. As mentioned, Missourians intensively used slave labor in a variety of manual labor jobs, skilled tasks, and artisan trades.<sup>18</sup> Many Missourians preferred slave laborers for the most arduous tasks and even believed they were more suitable to the tasks than white laborers.<sup>19</sup> Considering this preference and the large size of the slave population in the townships that surrounded the school, it is certain that the bulk of the hardest labor of lifting, loading, and leveling the rocks was performed by the area's enslaved bondsmen.<sup>20</sup>

[See Fig 4 and 5]

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<sup>18</sup> Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 97-98, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 106-107.

<sup>20</sup> The total slave population for Jackson, Cass, Lafayette, and Johnson counties in 1850 was 8,941. This data was obtained from the U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedules Historical Census Browser at University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.



Fig. 4 Showing chiseled stone and uneven fracture along the back



Fig. 5 Quarried Stone block front and top

Construction of the college's two-and-a-half story stone building was no small task in a proto-industrial society where some Missourians were scratching out a living in windowless cabins with dirt floors and surviving a hardscrabble existence at the subsistence level. Not only were stonemasons, stonecutters, bricklayers, and the tools to quarry and shape the stone required, but also a small company of carpenters and cabinetmakers to frame scaffolding, deck floors, and build furniture, the roof, doors, trim, and sashing. Plasterers were needed to finish the interior walls and blacksmiths were needed to do piecework and mend the iron tools, doubtless worn dull in shaping the hard limestone into blocks. Animals were required for duties such as heavy hauling, plowing, pulling, and to move the necessary stones, lumber, people, food, and water to the jobsite. Missourians preferred mules for those types of tasks and this required additional equipment in the form of wagons, hitches, and harnesses.<sup>21</sup> And consideration must be given to the managing, feeding, and housing of this large work force and the livestock needed during the construction period. In addition to the school, two low stonewalls were built alongside the road to Lexington during this period.<sup>22</sup> The overall construction

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<sup>21</sup> The area became known for its quality mules that were a hybrid of animals from Mexico crossed with those from Kentucky. As late as the twentieth century, the U.S. Army sought out this sturdy breed of mule for pack work in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Today, in Warrensburg, the University of Central Missouri's and Lone Jack High School's mascot is the Missouri mule. See Hurt, Douglas R. Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 146.

<sup>22</sup> Local historian Chris Cooper and archeologist Douglas Shaver have located and photographed the remains of the stonewalls near the school on the property of Leon Bottomueller. Interview with Chris Cooper, conducted by author, June 25, 2014.

project was an expensive and time-consuming enterprise; the building was built to impress and built to last. [See Fig. 4 and 5]

The effort to build the school was a testament to American culture and progress and when it was completed the school stood as a shrine to American education and Cumberland Presbyterianism in western Missouri. Chapel Hill College stood fifty feet tall by sixty feet wide and cut a striking figure in the landscape that could be seen for miles around. The building was topped with a cast bronze school bell housed in a steeple. The stone building enclosed four large classrooms on the first floor and two classrooms and a small chapel on the second. A large attic space on the third floor was used for a library and meeting space. During peak enrollment the classrooms doubled as dorms for boys. Some of the boys slept on beds in the classrooms at night and used ropes to hoist their bunks into the rafters to make way for classes during the day.<sup>23</sup> The stone building was flanked on each side by buildings made of logs used as boarding houses. These structures were added on to as needed to accommodate more students. The exterior log walls of these cabins were overly “pointed” with mud in the style of the chinking used to fill the cracks on log cabins. The extra mud chinking, probably applied by students to keep out cold winds and rain, made these structures look like “Indian

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<sup>23</sup> Confederate soldier, Pete Lane, reported seeing Chapel Hill miles distant when his regiment traveled north from the central part of the state. Pete Lane, “The Civil War Memoir: Recollections of a Volunteer” (Columbia: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1865), 3, Civil War eBook Collection, <http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/>. Additional details found in “Chapel Hill,” Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room.

pueblos” and they were described as “straggling.”<sup>24</sup> The ramshackled image this description of the students’ dormitories conjures stands in contrast to the photograph of the sturdy stone college.

In many ways Chapel Hill College was a typical Western academy of its time. It was multipurpose and catered to both the social elites and the needs of the local community. The development of the school is a case study of the trial and error process of the evolution in American education from 1850 to 1890. Chapel Hill College marked the beginning of the American university as it is known today.<sup>25</sup> However, Chapel Hill was a unique school among antebellum Missouri schools for a number of reasons. First, the school’s construction at an outcrop of Bethany Falls limestone, quarried and shaped into blocks on site, is unusual in an era when most two-story structures were made of lumber and brick.<sup>26</sup> Second was its location; in 1850, the school was located at the western edge of the nation. Until William Jewell College was built in Liberty, it was the westernmost college in Missouri. Texas did have three colleges by 1850, but California did not charter its first colleges until after its statehood; Santa Clara was among the first and it was a Jesuit school. And although Chapel Hill College was not located near an

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<sup>24</sup> These specific details are from, Nellie McCoy Harris “Chapel Hill, Alma Mater of Missouri Pioneers,” *Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), Nov. 1, 1908. Found in “Chapel Hill” Vertical File, Missouri Valley Room.

<sup>25</sup> Roger L Geiger, *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>26</sup> This website is administered by Professor Ray Brown at Westminster University in Fulton, MO. It is an aid to discovering the history of early Missouri colleges. Research there indicates that Chapel Hill and the University of Missouri at Columbia are the only colleges west of St. Louis with stone school buildings over two stories in 1852. See <http://collegehistorygarden.blogspot.com/>.

important city, or along the river, it was built on an imposing natural landscape—the highest elevation of hills in western Missouri.<sup>27</sup> Its location at the junction of an early regional crossroads near the Santa Fe Trail traffic suggests Ridings thought Chapel Hill was a town that could become at least a small city. His dreams for Chapel Hill might have been fulfilled if only the railroad had come and the war had not. The primary feature that made Chapel Hill exceptional is the students who attended the school. Their diversity is a reflection of its location and the character of the antebellum Missouri frontier. Mexicans, Indians, Scottish immigrants, and even a few New Englanders mingled with the charter generation Missourians in the classrooms and dorms. Chapel Hill College was coeducational, and it was multiethnic at a time when only white males from the upper classes of society attended most American colleges and universities.

Chapel Hill College is unique; however, it is not exceptional. This era of American history witnessed a proliferation of public and private seminaries and colleges. In Missouri, Chapel Hill was only one of several new colleges and academies founded in the decades preceding the Civil War, including the University of Missouri, Westminster College, Howard College, and William Jewell College.<sup>28</sup> Missouri's antebellum subscription and public schools, which covered the curriculum of grades one through eight, accepted girls; however, most academies, colleges, and seminaries enrolled either

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<sup>27</sup> Data from a website for mountain climbers confirms that Chapel Hill is in a range of hills that are the highest point in western Missouri. To be exact, the college was about one-fourth mile from the highest point. However, one hill in south Jackson County is twenty feet higher. See <http://www.peakbagger.com/>.

<sup>28</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 198-204, and Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 109.

boys or girls. Education for females beyond fourth grade was a progressive idea in the mid-nineteenth century, although one rapidly gaining in popularity among upper and middle class families.<sup>29</sup> The establishment of separate schools for girls, such as Columbia Female Academy, the Baptist Female Academy at Lexington, and Arrow Rock Female College, suggest the rigidly defined gender rules of the antebellum era.<sup>30</sup> Those strict antebellum sexual mores began to loosen slightly in the 1830s, yet coeducational schools still held separate classes; each with different curriculums aimed at training each gender to be masters and mistresses of their separate realms. As time progressed, curriculum for men and women reached toward parity. However, careers for women were limited to teaching, and their education was more an indication of class status; they were expected to marry.

To calm the worries of parents, coeducational schools advertised in newspapers the manner in which they physically and scholastically separated the genders.<sup>31</sup> A relationship with the wrong type of boy or girl or an early pregnancy could destroy parents' hopes for the future of their children. Young girls' education aimed to make them desirable partners, good wives and mothers, while young boys were trained to become masters of their patriarchal world. Some parents expected their daughters to

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<sup>29</sup> Roger L. Geiger, ed. *The American College in the Nineteenth Century*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> Oberlin College in Ohio was one of the first coeducational colleges. Radical abolitionists founded that school in 1835. See Howe, Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171-176.

<sup>31</sup> Lauren Petrillo, "Martha McDonald France: Southern Middle Class Daughter on the Western Border" (presentation, 9<sup>th</sup> Annual University of Missouri-Kansas City History Graduate Student Association Conference, May 4, 2013).



teach school before marriage and the girls' classes often focused on music, grammar, and geography.<sup>32</sup> Their assigned roles required them to be pleasing partners for their husbands and musical skills were an attribute that helped make them attractive and desirable. Music was taught at the Chapel Hill, but not as a part of the normal curriculum and an extra fee was charged for the course.<sup>33</sup> Other parents used their daughter's education to ensure their families made beneficial social connections and met similarly wealthy and socially connected young men.<sup>34</sup> Boys were expected to enter careers in law, politics, engineering, farming, and medicine. They focused their studies on Math, Greek, Latin and Natural and Moral Philosophy and were taught to assume their roles as leaders.<sup>35</sup> After four years, students received a diploma, which was held with great esteem in a society where very few received an education beyond fourth grade. Although a few Chapel Hill alumni moved on to graduate from more advanced medical schools, state colleges or military academies in the East, for most students at Chapel Hill College, as at colleges elsewhere, regardless of their chosen career path, the training they received at the school was the only formal education of their lives.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "The Story of Chapel Hill," *Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), Nov. 12, 1894. Available in the "Chapel Hill" Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room, Kansas City Public Library.

<sup>34</sup> Christine Farnham asserts that the goal of making social connections was the purpose of many southern girls' college education. Christine Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

When the stone building was opened in 1852, Chapel Hill College competed with other colleges by offering what was perceived as a comparable education to schools in the East. It was the only school of its kind in the region south of the Missouri River. Parents saw Chapel Hill as a viable local option. The costs were equivalent and at least some of the faculty were trained and graduated from the more prestigious eastern schools, such as Cumberland College in Tennessee or Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. Many teachers at the school, like Archibald Ridings, had devoted their lives to teaching and were respected members of the community. His wife Mary was quite likely a graduate from one of Lexington's female academies. Reverends Cornelius McPherson and Robert D. Morrow both taught at schools in the east before they became presidents of the school. Some of the teachers at the school went on to spend their lives in teaching and ministerial careers. William Washington Suddath, Archibald Ridings' brother-in-law, graduated from Chapel Hill in 1850. Suddath went on to Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, but returned to Chapel Hill and began teaching there and eventually became the last Cumberland Presbyterian president of the school in 1857.<sup>36</sup>

Another plus for the school was proximity. Parents could keep their children close enough for occasional visits and monitor their children's academic and social lives. They could make appearances at academic recitals and spelling bees. The school attracted not only the traditional, white, male and female students from the slaveholding

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<sup>36</sup> R. C. Ewing, *Historical Memoirs: Containing a Brief History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Missouri* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874) 177-218.

class, but also a coed population from Missouri's growing urban middle class from nearby towns, such as Lexington.<sup>37</sup> The school enrolled students from the local area, as well as from as far away as the Southwest.<sup>38</sup> The multicultural backgrounds of the students who attended the school are an indication of both how Ridings tailored his school to meet the needs of the growing community and the progressive and pragmatic nature of America's frontier societies.

The price for an education at Chapel Hill was in the range of other Missouri schools and students paid tuition on average between \$9 and \$12 per semester, which was about 21 weeks long. Room and board was an extra \$1.25 to \$2 per week. Students paid 50 cents for supplies that included paper, pencils, candles, and slate. One of the school's alumni reported that it was not unusual for there to be only one book in the classroom and often it belonged to the teacher. Seminary students attended the school tuition free. One record found by Craig Bryan in the Jackson County probate records includes a bill from A. W. Ridings for three female children who attended the school. From this record, it appears that the rates for classes were charged by the topic and perhaps pro-rated by age. Arithmetic cost \$5, while Philosophy was only \$1.

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<sup>37</sup> Mutti Burke's book examines education, families, and the antebellum slaveholding and middle class. Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 83-88. See also, Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 196-199.

<sup>38</sup> This passage is a from a compilation of details from the brief historic sketches of the school and they all agree about Indian and Mexican students from the Southwest, but only Milton Moore's brief sketch of the school contained in vertical file the mentions a student from Arkansas. "Chapel Hill," Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room. See also Craig Bryan, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College," 81-83. The student roster lists compiled by genealogist Craig Bryan confirm two students named Lopez from Mexico or New Mexico attended the school as well as Joseph Watrous from the New Mexico Territory.

The college owned a strip of land adjacent to the school where students relaxed, held picnics and played games called “town ball” and “bull pen.” The favorite recreation of the young men, however, was hunting. It was game rich area and wild turkeys could be bought from local hunters for only 25 cents. Even today the area is known for plentiful wildlife in the surrounding woods. Several of the few personal accounts of the school by students fondly recount leisure time spent on the front porches of the boys’ dormitories and the abundance of delicious jams, hams, jellies, pickled food, and cakes—all for cheap—offered by the local residents of the town.<sup>39</sup>

The few essays and articles authored by students and early historians of the school referred to it as a “pioneer college” or “frontier school”; some have even called it “Mr. Riding’s school.” While Chapel Hill certainly was on the frontier, those authors also wrote of the community’s trade with the Southwest and the Mexican, Indian and “half breed” students who attended Chapel Hill.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned, Santa Fe freighters Alexander Majors, James B. Yeager, and William Bent were supporters of the school.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> James C. George, “The Georges: Pioneers and Rebels, David C. George and Nancy C. George, Their Life and Times” (Columbia, MO: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1965), 110. Also, these specific details about food and a lodging are from, Nellie McCoy Harris “Chapel Hill, Alma Mater of Missouri Pioneers,” *Kansas City Star* (Kansas City, MO), Nov. 1, 1908. Found in “Chapel Hill” Vertical File, Missouri Valley Room.

<sup>40</sup> F. M. Cockrell’s historic sketch of the school written in the form of a brief letter mentions a “Wyandot” and he uses the derisive term “half breed” when talking about students with mixed ethnicity at Chapel Hill. “Chapel Hill,” Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room.

<sup>41</sup> A person with the last name of Waldo is also listed as a supporter and on the 1849 Board of Trustees of the school and I suspect that this person may be Dr. David Waldo, a noted Jackson County pioneer, Santa Fe trader, farmer, stockman, land speculator, and founder of the town of Waldo, now a neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri. See Craig Bryan, “A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College” 81-83.

Additionally, the Santa Fe traders James Chiles and Dr. David Waldo are listed on the school's 1849 Board of Trustees. Joseph Hambright, whose home and father's wagon shop was located just south of Fort Osage and marked the official mile one of the Santa Fe Trail, was a student at the school. The Marmadukes sent their children to the school and they too were involved in the Santa Fe freighting business. Archibald Ridings hauled freight and mail for the government. In nearby Lone Jack and in Van Buren Township, two of the wealthiest citizens listed their occupations as "Teamster" and "Freighter." These facts point to the source of wealth in the area around Chapel Hill and Lone Jack. It is not unreasonable to suppose that these men, with their bondspeople and ox and mule teams, were traveling through the Kansas Territory to Santa Fe, trading with Mexicans and Indians, taking news of the college to the Southwest, and bringing back Chapel Hill students with them.<sup>42</sup> All of this evidence suggests that perhaps Chapel Hill is best remembered as the school that the Santa Fe freighters built on America's antebellum frontier.

Among the alumni of Chapel Hill are generals, lawyers, doctors, Wall Street bankers, politicians, teachers, engineers, ministers, as well as the wives of prominent Missouri men. Collectively they represent the elite class of Missouri's small-slaveholding society. At the start of the war, a number of Chapel Hill alumni, such as

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<sup>42</sup> Data gathered from 1850 U.S. Census, Slave Schedules, indicate some of the wealthiest men living near Lone Jack and in Van Buren Township in neighboring Jackson County list their occupation as "Teamster" or "Freighter," specifically Warham Easley and Henry J. Chiles. This information was obtained by cross-referencing the names on the list of the 1849 Chapel Hill College Board of Trustees available from Craig Bryan, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College," 81-83 with the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Census Data from Ancestry.com.

Colonel John T. Crisp,<sup>43</sup> and Hiram Bledsoe<sup>44</sup> became noted high-ranking Confederate officers and served with fellow Lafayette Countian General Jo Shelby.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Major General John Sappington Marmaduke and his brother Vincent,<sup>46</sup> Colonel Hiram Bledsoe, Brigadier General Francis Marion Cockrell<sup>47</sup> and his brother Jeremiah Vardman Cockrell<sup>48</sup> were also students of Chapel Hill. General Milton Moore was one of the last

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<sup>43</sup> John T. Crisp was a Confederate officer, lawyer and politician and State Senator who ran for Missouri governor after the war. He was also a law partner with Thomas T. Crittenden in the famous “Old Drum” court case. *Souvenir of the Missouri Legislature, State Officers etc., 1897-98* (Jefferson City, MO: Scroggs and Davis, 1897). For details about Crisp’s involvement with the Missouri Supreme Court “Old Drum” decision see the Missouri State Archives website, “Man’s Best Friend: The Old Drum Story,” <https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/>.

<sup>44</sup> Hiram Bledsoe was a colonel in charge of a battery under Shelby’s command and later state senator. *General Jo Shelby: Undefeated Rebel* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 125.

<sup>45</sup> Confederate General Jo Shelby’s family owned ropewalks near Waverly in Lafayette County, Missouri. Daniel C. O’Flaherty, *General Jo Shelby: Undefeated Rebel* 22-23.

<sup>46</sup> John and Vincent were the sons of Missouri Lieutenant Governor Meredith Miles Marmaduke. Both sons attended Chapel Hill College. After attending Chapel Hill, John Sappington Marmaduke attended two years at Yale, two at Harvard and graduated from West Point in 1857. He served in order generals Price, Hardee, and A. P. Johnston. Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959).

<sup>47</sup> Francis Marion Cockrell graduated and taught at languages at Chapel Hill and he is the author of one of the three short essays that form the Chapel Hill narrative. He was a brigadier general in General Braxton Bragg’s Confederate Army and later a Missouri state senator for thirty years before being appointed Secretary of Commerce by President Theodore Roosevelt. Stuart Symington, *The Senator from Missouri: The Life and Times of Francis Marion Cockrell* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 15-29.

<sup>48</sup> Jeremiah Cockerell went to California for gold in 1849, returned in 1853, studied law and entered the Confederate army at the start of the war. At the end of the war, he settled in Texas and served as a Democrat in the U.S. Congress. Colonels Cockrell and Upton Hays were in charge of the Confederate assault at the Battle of Lone Jack on August 16, 1862, eight miles from Chapel Hill. *Biographical Dictionary of the U.S. Congress from*

students to attend Chapel Hill and he served in the Civil War and Spanish American War.<sup>49</sup> The education they received at Chapel Hill ushered a handful of these Missourians to prosperous lives; some began and ended their academic careers at Chapel Hill, while others went on to West Point or Harvard. But all—including the unnamed enslaved individuals whose hands and minds formed the school’s stone blocks—shaped Missouri’s antebellum history.

The school prospered until after 1855 when enrollment suddenly declined and several of the school’s instructors lost their employment. There is ample evidence in the historic and scientific record that indicates a drought in 1855 wrecked the regional economy and depleted the incomes and savings of local farmers. Many simply could not afford to send their children to school.<sup>50</sup> The price of hemp, the region’s leading agricultural export, also crashed in 1855—the mid-century hemp bubble burst and would

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*1774 to Present*. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>. For an account of the Battle of Lone Jack see Matt Matthews and Kip Lindberg, “Shot All to Pieces: The Battle of Lone Jack August 16, 1862,” *North and South*, Volume 7 Number 1 (January) 2007, 56-72.

<sup>49</sup> A brief biography of Milton Moore indicates that he was also a “wagon master” on the Santa Fe Trail for a time. Walter S. Barlow, *Missouri the Center State 1821-1915, Volume Three*, (St. Louis: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915), 768.

<sup>50</sup> Meteorological evidence gathered from tree rings concludes the Great Plains did in fact suffer a ten-year drought that began in 1845. These climate scientists used tree rings and records from the U.S. Army Medical Corps stationed at Ft. Leavenworth and Ft. Scott to calculate the climate in this period. Their report ends at the Kansas state line but Chapel Hill is only 20 miles distant. Some primary sources mention the hot and dry summers of 1854 and 1855 along the Kansas-Missouri border in a passing manner. Connie A. Woodhouse, Jeffery J. Lukas and Peter M. Brown, *Drought in the Western Great Plains 1845-1856* (Boulder, CO: American Meteorological Society, October 2002), <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/>.

never recover.<sup>51</sup> The histories and memoirs written of the school suggest these two reasons, a drought and a downturn in the regional economy, were the primary causes for the close of the school. However, there also is evidence that in 1854 the farmers and planters around Chapel Hill were preoccupied with what they considered an eminent threat on their western border. The Kansas-Nebraska Act enflamed Missouri's western border in the political debate over the expansion of slavery into the territories and many local farmers participated in a series of raucous proslavery conventions, one which was held at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Lexington. It was proposed at those conventions howsoever went Kansas in the upcoming territorial election, whether free soil or slave, so would go the nation.<sup>52</sup> Two representatives at that convention, James Chiles and Meredith M. Marmaduke, were supporters of Chapel Hill College. Also, notable among those present at the proslavery convention in 1855 were the president of the University of Missouri Reverend James Shannon, Sterling Price, Claiborne Fox Jackson, and David Rice Atchison. Shannon delivered a two-hour biblical defense of slavery mixed with anecdotal tales of personal experiences with the institution. In private Shannon told his students to invade Kansas and vote for slavery. Speeches were made suggesting that local farmers should "husband our resources, concentrate our energies and exhaust all peaceable means to protect our right and save the Union" in the upcoming fight over Kansas.<sup>53</sup> Several resolutions were passed; one that noticed that in the 18

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<sup>51</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 274-276

<sup>53</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 287



border counties Missouri shared with Kansas 50,000 slaves were held at an estimated value of 25 million dollars.<sup>54</sup> One St. Louis newspaper noted that if Kansas became a free state, Missouri would become a peninsula of slavery surrounded on three sides by free states. The author resolved that all the slave property of the state would become “valueless.”<sup>55</sup> Although the actual number of slaves in those border counties was 26,730 and this inflated figure included slaves in Clay, Ray, Platte, and Lafayette Counties, the exaggerated claims by extremists on the slavery side of the debate point to the fear mongering and rabble rousing that was fomented at these proslavery conventions.

Local slave owners formed secret societies, often called “Self Defensives” and “Blue Lodges”, to guard against abolitionists and watch for escaping slaves.<sup>56</sup> Local farmers gathered at secret meetings held in clandestine locations. Chapel Hill College was the scene of some of these secret meetings and it is likely that the Ridings brothers were in attendance among old friends and farmers from Jackson, Cass, and Johnson counties. Money was collected from local farmers to begin a proslavery version of the New England Emigrant Aid Society that would pay and encourage slave owners from the

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<sup>54</sup> The 18 border counties include the 14 Missouri counties that adjoin the state line. The additional four counties in this claim included Clay, Ray, Lafayette, and Johnson — these latter four were in a twenty-five mile proximity to the Kansas border. These four counties had slave populations between 15 percent and 30 percent or more in 1860. Lafayette County held the largest slave population in Missouri in that year. This data was obtained from the U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedules Historical Census Browser at University of Virginia Library, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

<sup>55</sup> As quoted in, Ken Spurgeon, *A Kansas Soldier at War: The Civil War Letters of Christian and Elise Dubach Isley* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013), 26.

<sup>56</sup> Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 47-49.

South to move to Kansas. Young men who were once engaged with their education and social life surely became distracted as they and their families became increasingly embroiled in the growing political conflagration in Kansas. Some proslavery farmers in western Missouri began to make preemptive claims to land in Kansas to thwart Northeasterners aided by the many Emigrant Aid companies out of New England from getting there first. Some of the money, time, and energy that western Missourians had formerly expended on education at Chapel Hill was now earmarked for the campaign to make Kansas a slave state.

People in western Missouri also may have increasingly considered Chapel Hill to be in a remote location as the efficiency of river and road travel to other areas, such as Kansas City, increased over time.<sup>57</sup> Lexington, once a starting point for the Santa Fe wagon trains that crossed through town, decreased as an important river port with the rise of other ports farther up the Missouri River at Ft. Leavenworth and St. Joseph. In the 1850s, Independence and Westport were faster growing towns than Chapel Hill and Lone Jack and began to compete with these more rural areas for the coming railroads. This is supported by newspaper advertisements appearing in the *Westport Border Star* in the late summer and fall of 1859 and summer of 1860 concerning a bond election in which Kansas City outvoted rural voters in the counties. If approved, the sale of bonds would attract the Missouri Pacific Railroad to designate Kansas City as its western terminus. From the tone of one article it is apparent the communities around Chapel Hill and Lone Jack were concerned their townships would not benefit from service by the coming

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Dave Boutros, Director, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Research Center, March, 11, 2013.

Pacific Railroad despite voting for the bonds.<sup>58</sup> Town founders and politicians in these areas south and east of Kansas City and Westport fought for the future of their towns with petitions and citizens' rallies to overturn the results of the bond election. Their loss in this election marked a victory for railroad promoters in Kansas City, such as city father Robert Van Horn, who would go on to lead the charge to win the Hannibal Railroad Bridge over the Missouri River after the war.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, the bridge shaped the history of the region after the war and made Kansas City the Paris of the Plains. But without the railroads, which never came, Chapel Hill and Lone Jack have remained forever rural.

Each semester after 1854 brought fewer students and without a substantial endowment the school could not survive the economic downturn and decline in tuition dollars. In November 1857, after years of dramatically declining enrollments, the Cumberland Presbyterians, with the help of Archibald Ridings, placed the school up for sale. In that same month, a newspaper article in the *Liberty Tribune* announced the

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<sup>58</sup> These advertisements indicate the citizens in the towns of Van Buren Township and parts of south Jackson and Lafayette, and northern Cass and Johnson counties were not getting Missouri Pacific railroad service despite voting for bonds. The first is an advertisement for a public meeting, the second a petition to the court with twenty-two names of those desiring to change the route of the railroad to the south of Kansas City. A mocking reply was signed, "by near six hundred names most of whom reside in and about Kansas City." Kansas City's urban-against-rural conflict started early. See advertisement "Public Meeting," *Westport Border Star*, (Westport, MO), Sept. 12, 1859. And "Extra From the Comedy Court," *Westport Border Star*, (Westport, MO), Oct. 8, 1860. These newspaper articles can be found online at the State Historical Society of Missouri, Missouri Digital Newspaper Project, <http://shs.umsystem.edu/newspaper/index>.

<sup>59</sup> See A. T. Brown, *Frontier Community: Kansas City to 1870*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963); and Montgomery and Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story*, 61-80, See also Louis Potts and George F. Hauck, "Frontier Bridge Building: The Hannibal Bridge at Kansas City 1867-1869," *Missouri Historical Review*, vol.89, issue 2 (January 1995), 139-160.

Cumberland Presbyterian Synod of Missouri was considering opening a new college in the town of Independence. It would be closer to the Missouri River and the new starting point of the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon Trails.<sup>60</sup>

A news article from the January 1, 1858 *St. Louis Christian Advocate* headlined “Chapel Hill College—Change of Name” described the sale of the college by Ridings to the Methodist Episcopal Church South [hereafter M.E.C.S.].<sup>61</sup> The article was promotional in nature and announced the opening of a “first class” school. It provided details about the school and some insight into the values of nineteenth century Missourians who were shopping for a school to send their children. The author’s description of Chapel Hill claimed, “there is no place where people have better health” and “there is not, and I believe never has been, and hope there will never be, a whisky [sic] shop in the place...Three dry good stores, two blacksmiths’ shops, one sadlers’[sic] shop, two public houses, and about a dozen family residences make up the village, near the center of which stands the college edifice.” The building was described as “of good size, tolerably well designed, and very well constructed of stone, though it lacks a trifle of being finished.” From the college portico it was possible to see Warrensburg twenty-five miles to the southeast. The region was one of “the prettiest countries in the State, surrounded by the richest soil, fine farms, and tidy dwellings.” The author pointed out that Lafayette county was one of the wealthiest counties in the state and although “some were poor,

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<sup>60</sup> *Liberty Tribune*, November 13, 1857, State Historical Society of Missouri, Missouri Digital Newspaper Project, <http://shs.umsystem.edu/>.

<sup>61</sup> For the details of the schism that created the Methodist Episcopal Church South see, Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 126-134.

many of them were able and willing to educate their children.” The surrounding counties were filled with the “right kind of citizens...denominationally, the country is the right kind to insure success to a Methodist school.” The M.E.C.S operated a girls school in Independence “where young ladies were educated in the right way but these counties require more than one school under the supervision of the M. E. Church South. Good and sufficient teachers will be hired, and good boarding houses provided so that young gentlemen and ladies shall have as good accommodations, as at cheap rates, as anywhere in the State.”<sup>62</sup>

For a price \$400.00 over the liability” M.E.C.S. in Lexington finally completed the purchase of the school in 1860. As the small-slaveholding society went to war with free-soil advocates and abolitionists in Kansas, enrollment continued to decline. The school continued to sputter along with fewer students. When the war began the school body included only girls. The classes offered were English, ornamental leatherwork, oriental pearl painting, and hair work. With a marked decline in the level of sophistication in the curriculum offered, the school held its last classes and shuttered the doors in July 1861.<sup>63</sup>

Contrasting with this glowing review of the region, the first paragraph of the article is a hint of the declining influence of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at Chapel Hill. The title of the article indicates a desire to brand the school under the new

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<sup>62</sup> “Chapel Hill—Name Change,” *St. Louis Christian Advocate*, (St. Louis, MO) January 28, 1858, accessed at Missouri Digital Newspaper Project <http://shs.umsystem.edu/>.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* See also “Chapel Hill”, Vertical File, Missouri Valley Reading Room; Craig Bryan, *History of Chapel Hill*, 21; and James, *The Georges*, 44.

regime of the proslavery M.E.C.S. The author begins the article stating, “many of your readers are aware that there has been for several years a college at Chapel Hill, Lafayette County, Mo. under the supervision of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church; and some are also aware that for some years, for reasons not necessary to mention, the school has been on the decline.”<sup>64</sup> The author’s polite omission of the specific reasons for the school’s decline could suggest that bankruptcy was not a topic of nineteenth century public discussion. Pecuniary failure was the gracious term of the time and there is not mention of that. The author could likewise be cryptically alluding to the Cumberland Presbyterians’ ambivalent attitudes toward slavery and moderate opinions on the extension of slavery into Kansas. Church founder Reverend Finis Ewing had once beseeched slave owners to treat their slave families fairly and to prepare them for freedom by teaching them to read and write. Some Cumberland Presbyterian ministers such as Ewing granted their slaves freedom in their wills and others were gradual emancipationists in favor of colonization. The church tried to remain flexible in an era of increasing ideological entrenchment on the issue of slavery. The sale could be an indication of a divide between Ridings and the clergy of his church. The school did not close; it stayed open under the administration of the M.E.C.S. The combined evidence points to the conclusion that it was not only, the weak economy, prolonged drought, preoccupation with Kansas, and increasing remoteness of the school that were the reasons for its downturn in enrollments; it was additionally the Cumberland Presbyterians

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<sup>64</sup> “Chapel Hill—Name Change,” *St. Louis Christian Advocate*, (St. Louis, MO) January 28, 1858, accessed at Missouri Digital Newspaper Project <http://shs.umsystem.edu/>.

reputation as moderates on the issue of slavery. In the rush to war in western Missouri, even proslavery Unionism was bad for business.

## CHAPTER 4

### RECIPE FOR WAR: DEEP ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT IN KANSAS

In addition to the environmental, historic, and cultural factors that shaped the history of Chapel Hill, Archibald Ridings himself was the product of a social environment that formed his identity and enabled his actions. As a slave owner, he was the patriarch of his family, which included all of his slaves. As well, he was the master of his realm, which included all of the land that he owned, the fields that his slaves worked, and all of his business holdings. His personality and character were the sum of these and he was an actor in an historic situation that shaped his behaviors. Although biographers portray him as a kindhearted and benevolent entrepreneur, the details of the past reveal that he was equally an opportunist who took advantage of the labor of his slaves and exploited the natural environment to create economic and social advantages for himself, his family, and other members of his race and social class. Missouri's frontier socioeconomic system of small-scale slavery, mixed with industry, supported by law, and under girded by religion, showed promise as a successful method of Manifest Destiny. Archibald Ridings was both a participant and beneficiary in this burgeoning system of empire poised on conquest of the continent. Inevitably, the failures of politics to provide a peaceable solution to the issue of slavery in Kansas offered instead a recipe for war. It caused Archibald Ridings' world to spin out of control and left his stone college on the vanguard of the burgeoning American Empire a smoldering pile of rubble.



Archibald Ridings fits the ethnographic archetype of new Missourians in every way and the Ridings clan typifies the upwardly mobile social class of migrants from the Upper South who shaped western Missouri's early history.<sup>1</sup> Central to his identity was his wealth and social status and those came from the labor of enslaved people. He was among the 2.3 percent of individual Missourians who owned slaves in 1860 and of those very few owned more than twenty.<sup>2</sup> From 1830 to 1860, 117 families in Lafayette County owned slaves; of these, the Ridings were one of the six families who owned more than ten.<sup>3</sup> The Ridings brothers, on average, individually owned between six and fifteen slaves in the period from 1840 to 1860.<sup>4</sup> In comparison with their Missouri neighbors, the Ridings were a wealthy family. In western Missouri there was not much social distinction between those who held four or five bondspople, those who had one or two, and those who rented slave labor.<sup>5</sup> However, those who held more than six and upwards of ten people in bondage were high on the social ladder and viewed with considerable

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Geiger defines this social class of men who rule this period of Missouri history as "rural magnates." Mark Geiger, "Indebtedness and the Origins of Guerrilla Violence in Civil War Missouri," *The Journal of Southern History* 75 (2009): 1-34.

<sup>2</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 307.

<sup>3</sup> The "117" figure comes from the total of slave owning families in Lafayette County and information about the number of slaves the family owned comes from U.S. Census Slave Schedules for the years, 1840, 1850, 1860, Manuscript Census Schedules, Slaves, Lafayette Co, MO for the years 1840, 1850, 1860 accessed at Ancestry.com.

<sup>4</sup> Manuscript Census Schedules, Slaves, Lafayette Co, MO for the years 1840, 1850, 1860, accessed at Ancestry.com.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Harrison Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865" (Phd diss. John Hopkins University, 1914); Tony O'Bryan, "John Calvin Iseman's Mean Neighbors: A Historic Look at Jackson County" (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011). Iseman's observations about Missouri slave society agree with Trexler's assertions.

esteem. The Ridings increased their slave property throughout the period with nearly thirty slaves owned between the remaining two brothers, Archibald and Thomas, by the time of the 1860 census. The families' human chattel placed them at the top of their social class. There is no doubt that profits from slave labor contributed to the wealth of the family and to the founding and construction of Chapel Hill College. The Ridings certainly participated in the hiring out scheme that was characteristic of Missouri slavery. According to the 1860 census record, many of the Ridings slaves were young children and it is likely the family needed to hire adult male slaves to work their farms and dry goods stores in Lexington and in the Sni-a-bar Township. Nine male slaves in their twenties worked nearby on the farm of Strother Renick who was the patriarch of an extended family of settlers from Kentucky. At least five of that clan's children were students at the school. Ridings could have bartered with local slaveowners such as the Renick's and exchanged tuition for labor.<sup>6</sup> The exchange returned Ridings' investment in

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<sup>6</sup> The slave schedules for 1860 indicate that Archibald held eighteen slaves, twelve of these were female, the six remaining males ranged in ages from twenty-one to one year old. Strother Renick held fourteen slaves, five females, and nine males between the ages of ten and forty years old, the majority of these were in their twenties. Manuscript Census Schedules, Slaves, Lafayette Co, MO for A.W. Ridings and Strother Renick for the year 1860, accessed at Ancestry.com. Reverend Robert Renick was an instructor at the school and his daughter Elizabeth attended, which indicates that tuition could have been paid through variety of bartered exchanges. For a more complete list of students and teachers of the school see Craig Bryan, "A History of the Community and Chapel Hill College" (Kansas City, MO: self published manuscript, 2003), Missouri Valley Reading Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, MO [hereafter Missouri Valley Reading Room].

the form of not only students for his school and income for his businesses, but also established the trust and loyalty of his neighbors.<sup>7</sup>

For many men such as Archibald Ridings, the decades of the 1820s through the mid-1850s were a time of great potential for economic reward and upward social mobility, especially in western Missouri. But the potential rewards came with great risks; boom and bust cycles created and destroyed fortunes within a lifetime.<sup>8</sup> Although most Missourians on the frontier eked out hardscrabble lives with a subsistence existence, with the right amount of luck and entrepreneurship, small fortunes could be accumulated within a generation for those willing to take the risks and endure the hardships. The Ridings clan was among the fortunate few who made it all the way to the top of Missouri's frontier society.

The possibility existed in western Missouri for ambitious men from humble beginnings to acquire great wealth and wield public influence and political power. If men could not earn it themselves, they could sometimes move up the social ladder by marrying women from wealthy families. Similarly, powerful men could consolidate wealth and power by marrying into equal or wealthier families. John Wornall, one of the wealthiest men living near Westport, married the daughter of wealthy Thomas Johnson, founder of the Shawnee Indian Mission. Claiborne Fox Jackson, the man who became

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<sup>7</sup> Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 107-110.

<sup>8</sup> James West Davidson, William E. Geinapp, Mark H. Lytle, and Michael B. Stoff, *Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic, Volume I: to 1877* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 364-370; and James M. McPherson and James K. Hogue, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (1982. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 5-8.

Missouri's Confederate governor in exile, married into the wealthy Sappington family three times. George Smith married into a prosperous Missouri family with railroad company connections in St. Louis and became the primary founder of the town of Sedalia. Likewise, Archibald Ridings married into the prominent Stapp family of Lafayette County. Mary J. Stapp was the brunette-haired daughter of Judge John Stapp, an early Lafayette County legislator, and pioneer. Mary was one of ten siblings, eight sisters and two boys—several of whom also married notable Missourians, such as Francis Marion Cockrell, a teacher at Chapel Hill and later a U.S. Senator.<sup>9</sup> Archibald and Mary did not have children, but Mary was also a teacher at the school and helped board children in her home, so the Ridings touched the lives of many children. In a short biography of A. W. Ridings written in 1881 he is quoted as saying Mary was “nearer his ideal of perfection in form and face than any woman he had ever met.” They were partners until Archibald's death in 1878.<sup>10</sup>

Once ensconced in the upper social class, men such as Archibald Ridings influenced politics and often ran for political office, becoming judges, lawyers, and representatives. They established post offices, built mills, hotels, owned banks, and controlled towns. When these men reached the pinnacle of patriarchal power, as an emblem of their status they magnanimously promulgated their social and political status

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<sup>9</sup> Archibald Ridings and Mary Stapp were married on October 8, 1840. *United States Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Missouri, Vol.2* (hereafter *USDGP*), Ancestry.com.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also C. R. Barnes ed., *Commonwealth of Missouri; a Centennial Record*, Part 6, “The Great Cities and Towns of Missouri,” (St. Louis: Bryan and Brand Publishers, 1877), 864.

by joining societies and supporting local interests, such as schools, seminaries, and especially churches. John Wornall donated the land and money to begin the Westport Baptist Church. The Aull brothers and William Russell funded and supported the Baptist Female Seminary in Lexington. Joseph Orville Shelby, whose family owned hemp plantations and ropewalks near Waverly, Missouri and who would later become the only Confederate to never surrender, founded a college in 1851 near Alma, Missouri. William Jewell donated \$10,000 to begin a Baptist college in Liberty in 1849. George Park donated the \$500 that began Kansas State University and the land for Park College, which opened after the war. Membership in Masonic lodges and fraternal orders were signs of status and fellowship and practically a requisite for men in the upper classes. In 1853, Archibald Ridings was a dues paying member of a local committee to promote “agriculture and mechanical interests.”<sup>11</sup> And like the Aull’s, Wornall’s, and Shelby’s, Ridings used his family’s wealth to establish Chapel Hill College. He received support from his fellow Cumberland Presbyterian, Alexander Majors, as well as George Bent, the Santa Fe freighter who sent his Mexican-born son, Alfredo, to Chapel Hill College—both men were among the first millionaires west of the Mississippi River. Building and supporting schools such as Chapel Hill College was characteristic of men in Archibald Ridings’ social class and the school is a reflection of his aspirations and core values.

In addition to his status and identity as a wealthy westerner and slave owner, Archibald Ridings, like many Americans during this era, was piously religious. His faith

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<sup>11</sup> “Fifty Years Ago,” *The Lexington Intelligencer*, Aug.1, 1903, accessed at *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

motivated his actions and his religion facilitated his patriarchy and his rationalized his politics. Religion was a powerful force in forming the social structure of frontier communities; it transformed the American frontier, but it was also transformed by the American frontier.

Membership in good standing with a local church was a means to make social and business connections, as well as an indicator of individual and family social status. Ridings' status as a wealthy slaveowner, his business interests, and contributions to the church place him at the heights of his society. He lived at a time when one-third of the population was associated with a church or organized religion and the nation was building one thousand churches per year.<sup>12</sup> American Protestant churches were in a competition with one another and the growing number of Catholic churches and schools to gain new members. Protestant ministers and Catholic priests trafficked in a trade where human souls were the commodities. At least one newspaper of the period, *The Union and American*, published in Nashville, Tennessee, regularly calculated and reported the number of faithful for each denomination, as if they were the scores of sports teams.<sup>13</sup> Religious colleges and denominational seminaries outnumbered public universities Missouri during the nineteenth century. The period of 1830 to 1860 saw the

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 180-182.

<sup>13</sup> "The Christianization of Negroes," *Nashville Union and American*, (Nashville, Tenn.), Feb. 20, 1861, accessed at *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

beginnings and endings of many American churches, religious schools, and seminaries—Chapel Hill College is among them.<sup>14</sup>

Religion went hand in hand with important social rituals such as weddings and funerals. Church ministers were respected members of the community and were sometimes sought out for conflict resolution between congregants. To early settlers the church building symbolized civilization in the untamed landscape, and in some cases small church buildings were the first structures built when migrants established a community. Churches offered a means of social support through dissemination of information and networking, which encouraged new migrants and helped them settle in upon their arrival. Churches were gathering places for public meetings and religious holidays and served as both a connection to their former homes and a way for emigrants to bring their customs along with them as they established new communities. This is not to say, however, that all Missourians were as pious as Archibald Ridings, in fact many early circuit preachers complained that the locals were particularly irreligious. Nonetheless, churches were a strong social and organizing force and they created the framework for Missouri's antebellum society by establishing norms, customs, and mores, as well as serving as the social and entertainment centers of Missouri communities.

Churches also facilitated chain migrations that drew whole families, and at times, entire communities to western Missouri. The new towns were often rudimentary recreations of the ones they left behind in the East. Most everything from the layout of

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<sup>14</sup> Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 170. Howe attributes competition with Catholic schools as a factor in the number of seminaries and colleges being built in the West from 1830-1840.

their streets to the architecture of their churches and homes resembled those of communities in the Upper South—oftentimes they even borrowed the names for their new places from their old homes. Reverend Finis Ewing named the Missouri community he established around the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Cooper County, New Lebanon Township, after his old Kentucky home. He later moved to Greenton, a village just north of Chapel Hill, and served as the local preacher, postmaster, and ran a dry goods store.<sup>15</sup> Even Archibald Ridings borrowed the name for his college from his home state of North Carolina—the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—one of the three oldest public universities in America.

Archibald Ridings' membership in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and his tacit support of it is a window through which it is possible to peer inside the man, as well as a reflection of the society from which the denomination was born. The church arose from the remote woods and cane breaks in the hill country of central Kentucky and Tennessee, a place where camp meetings often lasted for days and attracted thousands of attendees. These emotion-packed religious revivals became a distinctly American cultural phenomenon in frontier communities in the Upper South and the influence of these Protestant evangelicals soon spread into western Missouri. The early Cumberland Church fathers lived in the epicenter of these religious events and were deeply affected by them. The Cumberland sect embraced the emotional fervor of revivalism slightly more than mainline Presbyterians, creating a fault line that divided the church from

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<sup>15</sup> Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 243; and Allen Jackson and Dumas Malone, eds. *The Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. IV (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons 1931), 233. I believe Ewing's first name is pronounced "Fin-ee." He was the youngest of twelve children and his parents gave him this name hoping he would be the last.



mainline Presbyterianism. Additionally, because of the need for ministers to lead the growing frontier church congregations and the desire to keep pace with the Baptists and Methodists who sent out their ordained men with little or no religious training, the Cumberland Synod required less formal training for their ministers than was typical of Presbyterian ministers. They simply could not afford the time and money to send their ministry candidates to seminaries in the East for training and ordination.<sup>16</sup>

The Cumberland denomination also divided from the mainline Presbyterian Church over philosophical differences surrounding the doctrine of free will. Calvinists believed in strict predestination, whereas the Cumberlands adopted the doctrine of “Whosoever Will”, which was based on the New Testament quote, “Whoever will hear the word of God, let them hear.” The Cumberlands Presbyterians used this line to build a religious philosophy that leaned toward personal choice in a person’s destiny rather than the fatalistic view of predestination.<sup>17</sup> The General Assembly dissolved the Kentucky Presbytery and expelled Finis Ewing and several other ministers over those issues in

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Wilbur McDonnald, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, (Memphis, TN: Board of Publication of Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1899), 431-434.

<sup>17</sup> I grew up in a Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Kentucky and I am familiar with how this message was taught. The fable of the three frogs was my favorite sermon by Reverend James Mills Sr. The tale involves three frogs that fall into a bucket of cream. Two of the frogs, ostensibly the Catholic and Calvinist ones, decided it was predestination and providence that had landed them in their situation. One frog gave up and sank to the bottom and drowned; it was God’s Will. The other fought for a while to make a good show, said some prayers and he also drowned. The Cumberland Presbyterian frog used his will to fight his way out. He kicked and struggled so hard he turned the cream into a solid lump of butter on which he stood upon to hop out of the bucket. It is easy to see how this message would appeal to a struggling class of people on the American frontier.

1807. Finis Ewing joined with other ministers who were disenfranchised with the mainline Presbyterians and formed an independent synod in 1810. It was a democratic act by the regional church hierarchy and an organic response of Christian liberty to fill the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of the frontier community it served.<sup>18</sup>

Cumberland Presbyterian Church ministers, like most ministers in the Protestant faiths, followed the admonition of St. Paul to “Be all things, to all men.” They accordingly adopted their message of salvation to different races, classes, occupations, and regions.<sup>19</sup>

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church congregations’ regional organizing bodies called synods rapidly multiplied in number in the Upper South.<sup>20</sup> In 1826 the church opened Cumberland College in Princeton, Kentucky to train their ministers. The church opened and administered several other schools in the antebellum years, such as Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee in 1842 and Bethel College in McKenzie, Tennessee in 1847. There were churches established in Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois, but the sect would remain most popular in the Upper South with the vast majority of the churches and schools located in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri. Only a few Cumberland Presbyterian churches existed in the Deep South on the eve of the Civil War. One was in Louisiana and the others in Mississippi where the church missionaries made

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<sup>18</sup> The word Presbyterian comes the Greek “presbyr”, which means elder, and refers to the church as ruled by church elders rather than a hierarchy of priests and bishops. The name Cumberland refers to the region in central Kentucky and Tennessee where they first established synods separate from the mainline Presbyterian Church.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 187. Howe applies this to all Protestant ministers, not just Cumberland Presbyterians.

<sup>20</sup> McDonnald, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, 431.

inroads with the Indian population.<sup>21</sup> The church had only one school in the North, Waynesburg College in Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, which was established in 1850. Chapel Hill College was the Cumberland Presbyterian's westernmost school and seminary in antebellum America. No matter where on the continent they went, Cumberland Presbyterians would remain true to the progressive causes of temperance and literacy and that fact is well expressed by the construction of Chapel Hill College and by the exemplary civic mindedness of Archibald Ridings.

Slavery was an issue that divided many churches in the years before the Civil War and the Cumberland denomination struggled to keep the public debate out of their pulpits. Founder of the Cumberland Presbyterian denomination Finis Y. Ewing, who possessed inherited slaves, was one of the first Cumberland Presbyterian ministers to preach in Missouri. The other two founders openly opposed slavery. Church founder Reverend McAdow so disliked slavery that he left Tennessee to preach in Illinois so that his children would not be reared in a slave society.<sup>22</sup> In 1836, at New Lebanon, Missouri, after "a long, painful and prayerful investigation" of the matter, Ewing began to make pronouncements against slaveholding and vowed to emancipate the slaves he owned. Setting an example, he began to prepare his younger slaves for freedom by teaching them to read.<sup>23</sup> Like many mainline Presbyterians in the South, he favored the colonization of slaves to Liberia. Regardless of their opinions on the morality of slavery, most white

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 385-411.

<sup>23</sup> R. C. Ewing, *A Brief History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Missouri* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1874), 30-45.

Americans of the time could not imagine living among a free black population. Ewing, like other Cumberland Presbyterian preachers, implored slaveholders that they had a duty to treat their bondspeople well, respect their marriages, and teach them to read; literacy, after all, was a hallmark of the Presbyterian faith.

In addition to responding to the egalitarian social concerns of a frontier society, which required the labors of everyone to function and thrive, as well as fulfilling their spiritual and moral convictions, the Cumberland Presbyterians also practiced progressive policies toward women and African Americans.<sup>24</sup> They were among the first Protestant denominations to admit women into their colleges and seminaries, as well as accept their roles as leaders in the church community. They also accepted and trained black ministers in the Presbyterian faith and there is one 1836 account of a black Cumberland Presbyterian minister preaching to a white audience in Missouri.<sup>25</sup> Despite this indication of progressiveness, over time the demographic make up the Cumberland Presbyterian Church began to change as more slave owning families joined the church. In the process the church's attitude about the morality of slavery became divided along the same sectional lines that were splitting the nation.

Archibald Ridings did not leave behind a record and it is impossible to know his personal opinions on slavery. It is likely that he held a range of views that changed over

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. See also McDonnald, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* 434; John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*, 237; and Anthony Harrison Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865" 126.

<sup>25</sup> McDonnald, *History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church*, 434. After the Civil War, African Americans formed a separate branch of the church called the Colored Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, an act that indicates the popularity and deep roots of Cumberland Presbyterianism in American black culture.

time. He may have believed as did many Christian slave owners that slavery was an inherited condition passed down from the greatest civilizations to their own. Slavery was social good. In many southerners' worldview, slavery was innate to black and white relationships—a part of the natural order. Consequently, some slave owners believed they were performing a moral duty by preparing their slaves for civilized Christian lives—slavery was not only ordained, it was a proper Christian act. Ridings may have believed in gradual emancipation for his slaves and held faith in colonization ideas that were shared among some of the mainline Protestant clergy. Of course, freedom for their slaves existed at a time that was always in the unwritten future.

If the Ridings were the typical slave owner, he used religion as mechanism of psychological control over his slaves by using Bible passages that beseeched his bondspople to be good and faithful servants to their masters. Likewise, Ridings may have used the Bible to defend slavery on moral grounds by finding Old Testament passages that hallowed the institution. He might have been one of the proslavery advocates who used that argument to declare the immorality of abolitionists. Ridings may have held extreme proslavery views and argued that slavery was a positive good for African Americans—proximity to the white race lifted enslaved people up from their depravity. Some of the most ardent defenders of slavery sincerely believed they were doing enslaved people a favor by advocating for the extension of slavery into the Kansas Territory.<sup>26</sup> Ridings may have been among those along the Kansas-Missouri border who absorbed the rhetoric of fire-eaters such as Missouri Judge William Napton who said,

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<sup>26</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 285-288.

“...if slavery is evil...its most manifest emigration to the new territories will ameliorate the condition of the slave as well as the master. Our own experience here in Missouri establishes this not as a conjecture, plausible and reasonable, but as fact everyday under observation.”<sup>27</sup> Their strident voices were heard the loudest and the impact of their actions felt the most when the question of the extension of slavery into Kansas became a national political issue in 1854.

In the mid-1830s, the growing abolitionist movement created a crisis in many Southern churches. In response to the conflict created by growing abolitionist and antislavery sentiments, Southern religious institutions increasingly accommodated the will of the slaveholding society. The result was a progressive entrenchment toward a proslavery ideology in the South. The divide became so severe that the national Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches divided along sectional lines over issues involving slavery a decade before the Civil War.<sup>28</sup> Locally, the Baptist Church in Lone Jack began to split into cliques over the issue of whether or not Baptist missionaries should be allowed to own slaves in the 1840s.

As the conflict over slavery intensified, as a matter of policy, the Cumberland Presbyterians, like the mainline Presbyterians, tried to keep the issue of slavery out of the church.<sup>29</sup> A confrontational attitude toward slavery could potentially alienate the church

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<sup>27</sup> As quoted in Christopher Phillips, *Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Making of Southern Identity*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 185-186.

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 20-39.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Gore, “Reunion?” *The Cumberland Bibliophile*, (Cordova, TN: Cumberland Presbyterian Resources) No. 45, summer 2011, 1-2.

from some of its most charitable parishioners who owned slaves—men such as Archibald Ridings. The church tried to keep its ministers from speaking against slavery from the pulpit and expelled actively abolitionist ministers.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the other mainline protestant faiths, the Cumberland Presbyterians steadfastly refused to split over the issue of slavery even at the height of the bloody conflict.<sup>31</sup> Despite that fact, the church began in a slave state, it remained most popular in slave states, and wealthy slaveholders, such as Archibald Ridings, were the most esteemed and important benefactors of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church congregations.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was clearly at conflict with itself over the issue of slavery. As an example, Reverend Robert D. Morrow, headmaster at Chapel Hill when it was at its peak in 1852, was a slave owner and yet it is possible that he could have held gradualist, emancipationist, or even abolitionist personal views, such as those of the denomination's founder, Finis Ewing. Morrow may have tried to work for change

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<sup>30</sup> “Rev. Mr. McCormick Suspended,” *The Independent Press*, (Abbeville C.H., S.C.), Nov. 9, 1855, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, accessed at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. See also “...not expedient to discuss American slavery from the pulpit,” *Daily Evening Star*, (Washington D.C.), Sept. 15, 1854, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, accessed at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

<sup>31</sup> McDonnald, *A History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Kentucky to 1998*, 432-434. See also Gore, “Reunion?” From a reading of several church histories, it appears that during the war, the annual General Assembly of the church could not attract Southern church members if the meetings were held in the North and vice versa if the meetings were held in the South. Technically speaking, they could not divide North and South because there were no General Assembly meetings of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church during the war. Nonetheless, Cumberland Presbyterian Church historians pride themselves on the church not dividing itself during the war. To be sure though, there were plenty of Cumberland Presbyterians who fought both the North and the South.

within the framework of the small-slaveholding society in which he worked and lived, much like Finis Ewing.<sup>32</sup> On a personal level, Cumberland Presbyterian ministers who held antislavery views might have preached for colonization or subtly urged gradual emancipation.<sup>33</sup> While progressive attitudes and policies may have been tolerable and acceptable in more temperate political climates such as the 1830s, as American politics neared the mid-century mark the political atmosphere over the issue of slavery reached a flashpoint. The conflict between thought and action in the minds of men like Archibald Ridings is difficult to understand, but with the approach of the Civil War, religion combined with a belief in Natural Law became the rationalization for the South's moral and intellectual defense of slavery. The logical extension of their point of view of slavery as a positive good formed the basis of the argument to extend slavery into the territories.<sup>34</sup> It is possible that the Cumberland Presbyterians in charge of Chapel Hill College found themselves the moderates in the middle of two raging political extremes and as a result lost parishioners on both side of the issue. The historic record clearly

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<sup>32</sup> Nathan Woodward, "Baptists and Slavery in Frontier Missouri" (master's thesis, Colorado State University, 2010), 38-60. By using the *Westport Border Star* and *Liberty Tribune* as sources this author outlines the ambivalent attitudes toward slavery of the Baptists around Liberty, Missouri. His primary sources point to the popularity of the ideas of gradual emancipation and colonization among the Protestant clergy, Cumberland Presbyterians included. He traces how slaveholders in western Missouri "had to find a way to reconcile their growing antislavery thoughts with their largely proslavery surroundings."

<sup>33</sup> Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri" 1804-1865, 126. In several studies there is indication that Cumberland Presbyterian ministers supported colonization of free blacks in Liberia. See also Walter B. Posey, "The Slavery Question in the Presbyterian Church of the Old Southwest," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 15 no. 3 (August 1949): 311-324.

<sup>34</sup> James M. McPherson and James K. Hogue, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 51; and Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 285-288.



indicates that Chapel Hill College enrolled significantly fewer students around the time of Bleeding Kansas in 1854.

Religion was the glue that held many small frontier communities together during their early years, but in the end, it would become a wedge that drove many of these same communities apart. Even before the Civil War, there was a history of western Missourians using violence to ensure the preservation of their proslavery vision of their region. In all of American history, the migration of the Mormons, members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, to western Missouri stands as the prime example of the aforementioned social and religious phenomena that sparked and abetted western migration and the early cultural clashes on the American frontier.

The Mormon prophet Joseph Smith visited Jackson County in 1831. He took in the natural beauty, abundance of the land, and the Indian mounds and figured them into the evolving Mormon cosmology. Smith declared that through revelation, God had told him that areas of Jackson County north of the Sni Hills and Chapel Hill were the former site of the Garden of Eden and Independence was at its center. Smith also declared that a spot west of the Independence courthouse square would be the location of the temple of New Jerusalem and site of the return of their Savior. Smith returned to the east and gave instructions for his flock to gather at their New Zion and Mormons began arriving in Jackson County in large numbers shortly thereafter.

The Mormons' prophetic religious views were foreign and strange to their Protestant Missouri neighbors who eyed them with suspicion. The Mormons did not cooperate with other Protestants in interdenominational activities, such as Sunday schools and church building. The majority of Mormons were from northeastern states where

slavery had been prohibited and many of them believed that free blacks migrating into the area should at least be treated decently. Some were antislavery and only a few were abolitionists. The Mormons' increasing numbers may have worried some who thought that their way of doing things on the frontier might be over taken by these new settlers. The tension came to a head when the Mormons laid plans to build their temple in Independence. From their pulpits, in the newspapers, and in pamphlets, local ministers made a series of denouncements against the Mormons and fomented agitation among the mostly proslavery Missourians.<sup>35</sup> Chief among the protestant ministers railing against the Mormons was Cumberland Presbyterian Church founder, Finis Y. Ewing, who wrote, "The Mormons are the common enemies of mankind, and ought to be destroyed."<sup>36</sup> The Missourians smashed the Mormon press and drove them all out of Jackson County by threat of mob violence in the spring of 1833. The Mormons left for unsettled lands north of the Missouri River in Clay, Ray, and Davies Counties and built a settlement near Gallatin calling this new place Far West.

Mormons continued to pour into northwestern Missouri, but they did not find peace there for long. Joseph Smith returned to join his flock in 1838 and a series of violent conflicts with their neighbors once again raised the ire of several local protestant ministers who made pronouncements against the Mormons from their pulpits and published them in the newspapers. After being sufficiently incited to action, a militia

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions and Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011) 59-63.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Several other sources site Finis Ewing as the author of that quote which was published in the local newspapers.

made up of 2500 local men arrested Joseph Smith at Far West on the first of November 1838. A newcomer to western Missouri, Archibald Ridings was a member of that small army and among the group of men in the lead of the capture of Smith and his captains.<sup>37</sup> Smith was taken to the Liberty jail in Clay County and held four and half months awaiting charges. He later escaped custody and returned east to found a colony at Nauvoo, Illinois. The remaining Mormons, about 10,000 of them, were finally exiled from Missouri under a threat of extermination from Governor Boggs in 1838.<sup>38</sup>

It was within the year of Smith's capture that Archibald Ridings converted to the Cumberland Presbyterian faith.<sup>39</sup> He was perhaps led to the faith through his experiences in the Missouri Mormon Wars. He also may have been inspired by the sermons of his minister, Finis Ewing, founder of the Cumberland sect.<sup>40</sup> In 1841, Ewing lived in semi-retirement as postmaster in Greenton, the nearest town to the north of Chapel Hill on the road from Lexington. He was a well-known and popular minister who had traveled the preaching circuit for years. For a time he preached sermons at camp meetings in the woods near Lexington that are said to have attracted thousands who stayed in cabins for

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<sup>37</sup> *USDGP*, 885; This detail is also from a personal interview with Ridings Family descendant, Jack Landers Ph.D.

<sup>38</sup> William Worley, *Kansas City: Rise of a Regional Metropolis* (Dallas, TX: Heritage Media Group, 2002), 24-25.

<sup>39</sup> C. R. Barnes ed., *Commonwealth of Missouri; A Centennial Record, Part 6* (St. Louis: Bryan Brand & Co., 1877), 863-6. This book is available at the Missouri Valley Reading Room, See also *USDGP*, 885

<sup>40</sup> *The Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. IV*, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons 1931), 233. Finis Ewing was also land agent for Lafayette County. His lifetime friend, Andrew Jackson, appointed Ewing to that post.

the weekend. The community built a wood frame church in Lexington for Ewing to hold services. Because of their proximity to one another and common affiliation with the church, Ridings and Ewing were surely acquaintances. Ewing died in 1841, within a year of Ridings' conversion to the faith, but Ridings' dedication to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church would shape the future of Chapel Hill and remain with him for his entire life.

The Holy Spirit was not the only force on the frontier, the invisible hand of the free market made the early period of the settling of western Missouri marked by rampant land speculation that was finally cooled by the Panic of 1837.<sup>41</sup> Despite the depression that burdened the national economy for five years or more following the Panic, the local population boomed and the regional economy was buffered and sustained in part by gold and silver from the Santa Fe trade and in part through infusions of cash into the local economy in the form of allotments paid to the Indians by the federal government. Money flowed into the local economy through merchants along the state line who traded and sold goods to Indians on their reservations to the west in Indian Territory, in what would become the state of Kansas. The regional economy was also consistently boosted throughout the period by the opening of the far West to American settlement. The Oregon Trail opened in 1836, vastly increasing the flow of people through the region. Gold rushes in 1849 to California and in 1859 to Colorado brought money to local farmers and merchants as prospectors who were headed west outfitted and bought supplies. Federal money continued to flow through the local economy with the proximity of Fort Scott and

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<sup>41</sup> Worley, "History Timeline of the Kansas City Region" 8; and Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 27-37.

Fort Leavenworth in Indian Territory and Fort Union in New Mexico Territory.

Successive wars with Mexico from 1846 to 1848 and the Mormons from 1857 to 1858 continued to bolster the economy as the government paid cash to local farmers to supply the army with mules, horses, oxen and farm produce, as well as hired local skilled laborers as teamsters and for construction projects.<sup>42</sup>

Chapel Hill benefited economically from all of these developments. The area around the college in Sni-a-bar Township had many small market gardens that likely supplied and fed not only the people in Chapel Hill, but also resulted in a network of trade with the nearby towns of Lone Jack, Lexington, Mt. Hope, and Greenton.<sup>43</sup> The bounty of the local farms and gardens also likely stocked wagon trains in the early Santa Fe trade. Beginning with flat boats, and later steamboats, on the Missouri River, some local products, along with some of the enslaved people, reached their way by river to be sold or traded at markets in New Orleans.<sup>44</sup> The draw of a buoyant economy and

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<sup>42</sup> Tony O'Bryan, "John Calvin Iserman's Mean Neighbors: A Historic Look At Antebellum Jackson County, Missouri," (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011). John C. Iserman and his family were carpenters by trade and hired themselves out to work in local construction projects, such as building the barracks at Ft. Leavenworth.

<sup>43</sup> 1850 Missouri Federal Census, Table XI: Agriculture, farms and implements, stock, products and home manufactures, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Statistics of Missouri, 675-678, accessed at *The Internet Archive*, [http://archive.org/Seventh Census of the United States](http://archive.org/Seventh_Census_of_the_United_States). The U.S. Census uses the term "market gardens" but does not specify what crops were grown, but they were presumably perishable vegetables such as spinach, lettuce, potatoes, herbs and produce for the kitchen. These market gardens represent a fair amount of the regional wealth and property.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* From unmeasured surveys it appears Lafayette County was one of Missouri's top ten producers of corn, cattle, swine, wheat, oats, tobacco, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and wood. It also appears that Lafayette County's market gardens were more productive than those in Jackson, Cass, and Johnson Counties. See also Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 13-19. Hurt reports that as early as 1822 entrepreneurs such as Robert Aull were earning

opportunity to earn money was a significant attraction to the area for many families and by 1860 Jackson and Lafayette were two of Missouri's most populous counties.<sup>45</sup>

Lafayette County held the largest slave population in the state and Jackson County ranked eighth on that list.<sup>46</sup>

With the exception of their elite social status, the Ridings brothers are typical of the young white men between the ages of 15 and 29 years, who migrated to the area searching for economic and social opportunities.<sup>47</sup> Government contracts to haul the mail and supplies for the army were one way to get in on the booming freighting business and bring cash into the early, mostly barter, economy. Archibald Ridings was no exception to the lure of easy money and there is evidence he was involved in hauling freight by contract for the government at various time throughout his working life. The Ridings were among the newest and wealthiest class of Missouri citizens. Archibald's social

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money by traveling to New Orleans with tobacco, cotton, animal grease and slaves by the 1850s.

<sup>45</sup> In 1860, Jackson and Lafayette counties ranked second and third behind St. Louis County in total population. See <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

<sup>46</sup> 1860 Missouri Federal Census, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

<sup>47</sup> Tony O'Bryan, "Lone Jack from Ice Age to 1860" (University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2002). Research of the U.S. Census Data on the nearby town of Lone Jack, observed that in the years between 1830 and 1860, a veritable flood of white males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine years old poured into the region. In that span of time, Jackson County outpaced all other Missouri counties in the growth of that age, race, and gender demographic. By 1860, Jackson County had a population of white males between fifteen and twenty-nine-years of age. This was 55.31 percent higher than all other Missouri counties in aggregate. Western Missouri was a young man's country for certain. This is significant because many of these young men participated in the violence that occurred during the Border War and Civil War. See also <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>.

peers were businessmen such as James Kearney, John Wornall, William Waddell, William Russell, Alexander Majors, J. C. Chiles, George Bent, and Dr. David Waldo. All of these men were involved in the overland freighting and shipping business and the latter four men were all supporters of Chapel Hill College.

Although by 1850 slaves made up a declining percentage of Missouri's total population, slavery was not on the decline in western Missouri. The slave population increased dramatically in the decades between 1830 and 1850 in western Missouri and purchase price of enslaved people and the price of their labor was on the rise. In twenty years Lafayette County's white population increased by 93 percent, while the black population increased 364 percent becoming one of the largest in the state.<sup>48</sup> The slave population and proslavery settlers steadily increased their numbers in the counties along the state's western border as well.<sup>49</sup> These numbers hint at not only the slave trade and the tremendous amount of land speculation in the area, but also at the demand for labor, much of it involved with the western trade that buoyed the local economy. Census data from 1860 indicates that some of the wealthiest slaveholding men in the area around Chapel Hill and nearby Lone Jack listed their occupations as "Freighter" or "Teamster" and many of them owned slaves. This combined evidence points to slaves being used to meet the demand for labor, directly and indirectly, in the western trade. Whether employed as blacksmiths, wagon masters, muleskinners, leather workers, coopers, as

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<sup>48</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, tables 317.

<sup>49</sup> Neeley, Jeremy. *A Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006) 32-33.

gardeners in the area's abundant market gardens, or in working on the wagon trains on the actual trails—all participated in America's move west from Missouri.

Though a slave state, at least one free black Missourian found a place in the region's robust freighting industry. Hiram Young, a man who emancipated first his wife and then himself by buying his freedom from his owner, ran a successful wagon and yoke making business and hired slaves to work at his shop in Independence. He paid them and allowed them to purchase their own freedom. He eventually became one of the wealthiest men in the area before moving his shop to Leavenworth on the eve of the war. While his success points to the somewhat egalitarian nature of Missouri's frontier societies, it is also emblematic of the fact that in western Missouri, slaves were the source of wealth, power, and labor.<sup>50</sup>

This was an era marked not only by economic growth, and political and social change as Americans adapted to the new lands, but also by technological innovations. Improved steel plows and hand tools, superior lines of genetics in livestock animals, honed animal husbandry and agricultural knowledge, and better medicines—all made for brighter days in the lives of most Missourians. Between 1838 and 1848, over 10,000 new patents were issued in the United States.<sup>51</sup> Russell, Majors, and Waddell used one of the new inventions to ease travel across the prairies. It was a new type of wagon wheel with a wide steel rim that rolled across sod and mud more easily and was more durable. In the

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<sup>50</sup> William P. O'Brien, "Hiram Young: Black Entrepreneur on the Santa Fe Trail," *The Best of Wagon Tracks*, online journal of the Santa Fe Trail Association 1-4. Accessed at <http://www.santafetrail.org/>.

<sup>51</sup> James M. Volo and Dorothy Deenen Volo, *The Antebellum Period* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 43-45.



1840s, twenty-foot-long wagons, each laden with 3,500 pounds of freight, pulled by twelve oxen began to roll through the area that would become Chapel Hill. These wagon trains, which often included twenty-five wagons and twenty or thirty spare animals—all managed by fifty to sixty men, could stretch out in a line for three miles as they traveled from Lexington through Chapel Hill and on to cross the prairies. This technological and business innovation is an example of the way in which the American market system benefited the regional economy and forwarded the nation's move to the West.

Steam power first came to the Missouri frontier not only in the form of steamboats, which had delivered the Ridings family to Lexington in luxury and style in 1835, but also in the form of small engines for running mills and lathes. There were furniture manufactures, brick factories, and lumber mills that mixed slave labor with the latest industrial technologies. Joe Shelby used slave labor to run a steam-powered motor to twist hemp into long pieces of rope, for example. Many other similar small factories associated with processing and transporting the region's agricultural products flourished along the Missouri River Valley. Hiram Young had a four-horse power steam engine in his Independence yoke and wagon shop and near Lone Jack Noah Hunt operated a steam powered carding mill for wool. The emerging industrial society in western Missouri is best observed in the example of Walthus Watkins' woolen mill, north of the river in Clay County. On the eve of the Civil War, Watkins Mill used a sixty-five horsepower steam engine to spin raw wool into blankets, which were sold to the U.S. army.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Louis W. Potts and Ann M. Sligar, *Watkins Mill: Factory on the Farm* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2004) 64-74.

The Ridings family and their neighbors in the vicinity of Chapel Hill, like most slaveholders in Missouri during this period, grew not only hemp, but also profited by employing slave labor in small industries and in hiring out their bondspeople in the local labor market.<sup>53</sup> They raised a diversity of crops and livestock and successfully connected their farms to the national economy and regional trade with the Southwest and Indian Nations. Local farmers also earned money driving their cattle and swine to river markets and the Southwest trade brought gold and silver and mules into the economy.<sup>54</sup>

The wealth of the society that built the community of Chapel Hill, as well as many other fledgling Missouri hamlets of the antebellum period, had its economic and social underpinnings in capitalism based on small-scale slavery. Although corn was the chief crop, the region's primary export was dew-rotted hemp used for the production of a type of cheap rope used to bind bales of cotton. The profit margins were not high, but increasing demand for the product and the amount grown was compensated by the volume of sales. Hemp agriculture, like tobacco, is labor intensive and a year-round activity. Tobacco, and chiefly hemp, created the basis for regional wealth and neither would have been economically viable without slave labor. As a result, the area was increasingly tied to the Southern economy and committed to the political protection of slavery. Yet, hemp was protected by a series of federal tariffs between 1830 and 1842 that stimulated the hemp economy and helped small industries and manufacturers of hemp rope. These tariffs were supported by Northern and Whig politicians and

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<sup>53</sup> Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie*, 116-123.

increasingly tied Missouri's political and economic interests to the North and the Whig Party. This conflict of interests on the local level is a reflection of the growing sectionalism that permeated national politics as politicians struggled to find a way to accept into the Union new territories located in the original Louisiana Purchase and in lands wrested from Mexico. As well, the growing conflict would define Missouri's role as a border state during the Civil War.

Archibald Ridings was active in Whig politics and in every way typifies the men who were members of that political party. Whig party members viewed themselves as the true inheritors of the Revolution; they favored temperance, the law, and social order, and they attracted men with education and income to their party.<sup>55</sup> The Whigs were the liberals of their day—in the nineteenth century meaning of the word “liberal.” They looked to science, philosophy, and history for answers to solve economic, political, and social problems. They generally favored humanitarian reforms, labor, and education, and were opponents of strong executive powers and expansionism. The Whigs regularly advocated for public and private education. In some ways they were also the libertarians of their day and believed in the virtue of individual liberty and free markets. Their support of business and a strong central bank won them supporters in the North, while their support of high tariffs kept them in good standing with planters in the South. The Whig party platform favoring modernization suited the wants and needs of a frontier community such as Chapel Hill. Most appropriately, it suited the interests of Archibald Ridings, in regards to both his economic and educational priorities. Ridings' role in the

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<sup>55</sup> Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 580. Howe described Whigs as political post millennialists tidying up for Christ's return.

founding of Chapel Hill College is living testimony to his embrace of the Whig dedication to education as the way toward modernizing American society.

Archibald Ridings supported Kentucky Senator Henry Clay's 1844 campaign for the presidency. Like Ridings, the popular Kentuckian was both a Whig and a Westerner. Despite Clay's stature, the party suffered factionalism over the issues of slavery and expansion. The North and the South had temporarily resolved the conflict over the expansion of slavery in new states by operating under the precedent set forth by the 1820 Missouri Compromise. The orderly simultaneous admittance of free and slave states halted during the fight over Texas and the territory acquired in the Mexican War. The 1844 Missouri Whig Party convention held at Lexington, which Ridings attended, and the following National Whig Convention, which expelled President Tyler from the party and nominated Clay, were some of the most contentious and bitter in American history. In 1852, the Whig party finally collapsed over the Mexican territories. At the same time there were Democrats who felt disenfranchised by antislavery elements in the party represented by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who although a slave owner, had begin making pronouncements against the expansion of slavery into new territories. Benton was almost shot by a fellow senator from Mississippi when the floor when the debate broiled over. Archibald Ridings, along with many other former Missouri Whigs, joined together with these proslavery Democrats and found common political, economic, and social themes. They united with nativists and a handful of political misfits and shifted their support to the platform of the American Party, or as it was popularly known,

the Know Nothing Party. In Missouri, their primary objective was to fight against the state's powerful Democratic Party.<sup>56</sup>

The Know Nothing Party was organized around the fear and resentment of native-born Americans against recent waves of the mostly Catholic German and Irish immigrants. The party was popular among former Southern Whigs, such as Archibald Ridings.<sup>57</sup> This was especially the case in Missouri where the number of German communities had grown steadily after 1830. Inspired by the romantic and somewhat exaggerated descriptions of the Missouri River Valley by Gottfried Duden and a series of other German writers, an avalanche of new German immigrants began arriving in Missouri. The Germans were particularly prominent around St. Louis, one of America's fastest growing cities during this period. By 1850, 43 percent of the population of St. Louis had been born in Germany or Ireland. Some of this foreign-born population migrated into western Missouri and by the 1860s even Lexington had a German language newspaper. The Germans, mostly Lutherans and Catholics, often established and lived in secluded communities. They kept their native language and many of them supported the concepts of free soil, free labor, and sometimes even abolition. Their Missouri proslavery neighbors, such as the devout Cumberland Presbyterian Archibald Ridings, increasingly viewed them with suspicion. Some Missourians grew to hate the so-called

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<sup>56</sup> Barnes, *Commonwealth of Missouri; a Centennial Record*, 863-866; and *USDGP*, 885.

<sup>57</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 231; and Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 827.

“Dutch” and their fear of the Other easily turned into violent action with the approach of war.

Western Missouri’s economy continued to grow in the decade before the coming of the war, attracting people who were seeking the opportunity to better their circumstances. The region continued to draw families from the Upper South, but many of the newcomers did not hail from the South. They instead were a mix of people from the Northeast and Old Northwest, where slavery was prohibited. Some, especially the “Butternuts” who hailed from the Ohio River Valley, harbored racial prejudices that reflected the Southern heritage of their ancestors, but others came with antislavery sentiments.<sup>58</sup> Many were free laborers who found jobs in the booming economy and held free-soil opinions about the new territory in Kansas. As a group, this population of Yankees, Butternuts, Northerners, and foreign-born migrants held views that tended to be nationalistic, free labor, free soil and antislavery, and they often moved into the same communities as the original stock of proslavery settlers from the Upper South.

The tension that existed between the newcomers and the original settlers was palpable in John Calvin Iserman’s letter to his family in New York. His letters from Independence, Missouri paint an uncharitable portrait of western Missouri slaveholders, such as Archibald Ridings. In 1858 he wrote, “A person is counted as nobody at all here, unless he owns a lot of niggers... in their hearts they hate a free-state man worse than they do the Devil and do not scruple a bit in taking the last cent from a white man.”

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<sup>58</sup> Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Harrold’s central thesis is a focus on the cultural divides that coincided with the growth of American sectionalism.

Iserman concluded, “ I think there [sic] is some of the meanest people to ever trod the earth.” Dating to the first Mormon war in 1833, western Missourians had long resented anyone holding even moderate opinions on slavery. Even the majority of the state’s residents who did not own slaves had proslavery leanings. People holding antislavery opinions quickly learned that their feelings were best kept a private matter.<sup>59</sup> Alternative voices were not welcomed in western Missouri and as a result over time the region became oriented away from the West toward the South.

The communities around Chapel Hill were surely excited when gold was discovered in California in 1849, but had they realized the chain of events unleashed by that discovery they might not have been quite as enthusiastic. Western Missourians had long benefited from the southwest trade and travel; California gold would be a welcome bonus for the local economy. The 1850 Federal Census reveals that a handful of young men in the neighborhoods of Chapel Hill and Lone Jack listed their occupations as “Gold Prospector” and they may have gone to California to see the elephant.<sup>60</sup> However, when the California Territory sought admission to the Union, the national debate over slavery once again became heated. The political result was the Compromise of 1850, which admitted California as a free state and strengthened fugitive slave laws that protected slaveholders’ rights to the return of slaves who escaped into the surrounding free states and territories. However, the Compromise of 1850 created tensions in national party

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<sup>59</sup> John Calvin Iserman to his brother William, Independence, MO, September 5, 1858, Iserman Family Letters, 1858-1863, Jackson County Historical Society Archives, Independence, MO, (ID11F10).

<sup>60</sup> The 1850 U.S. Federal Census Population Schedules for Jackson and Lafayette County, MO, Ancestry.com.

politics that led to some of the bitterest and most violent elections in American history and proslavery farmers around Chapel Hill were at the center of it all. Foremost among these tensions was the Compromise's endorsement of the concept of popular sovereignty, which was offered as the solution to settle the issue of how new territories would be accepted as states. Popular sovereignty overturned the provisions of the Missouri Compromise that banned slavery north of 36° 30', allowing the new residents to decide the status of slavery in their territory. The idea was extremely popular among western Missourians. When the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act opened up the Indian Territory to settlement, emigrants to the newly created territories were charged with determining the future of slavery there. Initially the plan for popular elections in Kansas Territory appealed to Missourians' frontier sense of democracy and many believe they possessed at least geographic advantage to the lands just west of their border, a place they had traveled through to the Southwest for decades.<sup>61</sup> Kansas's four-year struggle to create a state constitution changed Missourians' ideas about the efficacy of popular sovereignty. It also led to the eventual division of the Whig Party and the birth of the antislavery Kansas Republican Party in the border town of Osawatimie, Kansas—just seventy miles away from Chapel Hill and the largest slave population in the state of Missouri. It was a recipe for war.

When Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, tensions rose along the Kansas-Missouri border as the divergent cultures mixed as the free-soil emigrants passed

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<sup>61</sup> Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War* (Lawrence Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 15.



through on their way to Kansas.<sup>62</sup> The opening of Kansas Territory flooded the area with strangers with unknown motives. Popular sovereignty led to a period of lawlessness in Kansas and along the border as both sides fought for control of the new territory.

Eventually, the U.S. army was charged with keeping the peace.<sup>63</sup> The stakes were high to win Kansas and Missourians would risk their way of life in the gamble. Over the next eleven years, the area around Chapel Hill witnessed some of the worst crimes and acts of terrorism in American history. The Chapel Hill's citizens, as well as some of the students and teachers of the college, were swept up in the violence and by the end of the war much of the community laid in ruins.

In the first two Kansas territorial elections, one in November 1854 and the second in March 1855, thousands of citizens along Missouri's western border flooded across the state line into Kansas to throw the popular vote into the hands of the proslavery Kansans. By intimidating and harassing Free-State settlers at the polling places, they suppressed the Free-State vote. Some counties recorded more proslavery votes than the total number of residents. A territorial census taken at the beginning of March 1855, for example, counted 2,905 voters, and yet the election 30 days later tallied over 6,000 votes. The proslavery faction won the territorial elections by overwhelming majorities, and the abolitionists and antislavery partisans were incensed by the election's irregularities.

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<sup>62</sup> O'Bryan, "John Calvin Iserman's Mean Neighbors" From reading the letters of John Calvin Iserman, as well as other primary sources, such as the writings of Elijah Lovejoy, Frederick Starr and Frederick Law Olmstead, it is apparent that Northerners who moved to the state did not hold high opinions of slave owning Missourians.

<sup>63</sup> Tony R. Mullis, *Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004). Mullis outlines the role of the army in simultaneously dealing with the Indians and the opposing sides in the war for Kansas.

Infuriated by the tactics of violence, coercion, and fraud used by the proslavery side to win the first Kansas Territorial elections, abolitionists and New England newspaper editors clamored for new elections. Writers, such as newspaper editor Horace Greeley, Congressman Thaddeus Stevens, and Senator Charles Sumner, used the power of the press and skilled oratory to create a narrative of “Bleeding Kansas.” A portion of this narrative dehumanized western Missourians in the eyes of the nation by labeling them as “slaveocrats” (an elite ruling class of slaveholders), “pukes” (poor, uneducated, subsistence farmers who were the minions of the slaveocrats), and the freshly coined term, border ruffians.

With no voice equal to that of the Eastern press and the growing antislavery sentiment of the nation, proslavery Missourians along the border could do little but seethe with anger and increasingly attack and harass the growing number of Free-State settlers moving through and settling in the border region. To defend against attacks, thefts, and harassment on Free-State settlers, men such as James Henry Lane, James Montgomery, and Charles R. Jennison organized forces that struck back at proslavery families and communities. These armed groups called themselves “jayhawkers.”<sup>64</sup>

With the approval of President Franklin Pierce, proslavery forces initially gained control of the territorial government and established a proslavery legislature. Once ensconced in office that legislature, led by proslavery lawyer and politician, Benjamin F. Stringfellow, tried to drive free-soil settlers out of the territory by enacting slave codes that were repressive and hostile not only to abolitionists, but also anyone even mildly

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<sup>64</sup> Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War*, 227.

unsupportive of slavery. Slave code laws were passed that forbade men known to hold antislavery opinions from serving on juries. Further, it was a felony to deny someone the right to hold slaves and circulating published materials that encouraged slave insurrection was punishable by death.<sup>65</sup>

During the summer of 1855, in Lawrence, Kansas, free-soil advocates such as James H. Lane and abolitionist Charles Robinson expressed daring opinions against the proslavery legislature and its oppressive slave codes. Although free-state men varied in their political opinions of slavery, some believing liberty for all, others in liberty only for white men, they coalesced a political party around the desire to make Kansas a free state. They looked to precedent of California statehood, which emerged after a popular convention drafted a constitution and the territory was accepted into the Union as a part of the Compromise of 1850. The Free-State Party moved in a similar direction on September 5, 1855 when it met at a convention in Big Springs, Kansas declared the federally recognized proslavery legislature “bogus” and elected its own legislature and delegates to Congress, and called for a state constitutional convention in Topeka to begin in October.<sup>66</sup>

With Jim Lane serving as president, the Free-State convention met from October 23 to November 11, 1855 in Topeka, Kansas. They drafted constitution that prohibited slavery, granted citizens the rights to “life, liberty, and property and the free pursuits of happiness,” and extended suffrage to white men and “every civilized male Indian who has adopted the ways of the white man.” For reasons founded on racist attitudes and a

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 69-73.

desire to avoid economic competition, some Free-Staters believed Kansas should be open to settlement for whites only, and on a separate ballot Lane forced the issue of banning free blacks from entering Kansas Territory. The Topeka Constitution and Lane's attached ballot were put to a territory-wide popular vote on January 15, 1856. In a landslide election, boycotted in protest by proslavery settlers and this time ignored by the border ruffians, the voters adopted the Topeka Constitution and chose Charles L. Robinson for governor. Voters also approved the ban on free black settlers. Kansas Territory now had two competing legislative bodies, one proslavery and the other Free State. The Topeka Constitution was forwarded to Washington, D.C. for approval, where President Franklin Pierce delivered a message to Congress that condemned the actions of the Free-State Kansans as, "of a revolutionary character," and committed military force in support of the proslavery Kansans. The House of Representatives, however, accepted the Topeka Constitution and voted to accept Kansas's statehood. Meanwhile, the Senate blocked the process by suggesting that Free-State Kansans reframe their constitution and sent the measure back to the House, which refused to consent.<sup>67</sup>

When the elected Free-State legislature attempted to convene at Topeka on July 4, 1856, Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, under authority of President Pierce, dispersed the meeting with a threat of force from two companies of the U.S. First Cavalry and a cannon. Embittered Free-State Kansans, radicalized at each step of this process toward statehood, finally took their fight directly to the proslavery side in a series of attacks on

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 118-120.

the proslavery settlements of Franklin, Fort Saunders, and Hickory Point, contributing to the territory's reputation as "Bleeding Kansas."<sup>68</sup>

In the late summer of 1856, a handbill entitled "War in Kansas" was widely circulated in the local communities. It announced a meeting in Lexington and contained two printed columns detailing the alleged crimes committed by abolitionists in Kansas and called for volunteers to bring their horses, guns, and clothes to New Santa Fe<sup>69</sup> on the Kansas border to prepare for an invasion of Kansas. "Now, men of Lafayette, what will you do? Will you stand still and see the enemy approach, step-by-step, until he stands upon your door-sill and finds you unarmed? We must have men go to the territory or all will be lost. The intention of the abolitionist is to drive us from the territory and carry the next election...this we must not submit to. Come, then to the rescue! Up, men of Lafayette!"<sup>70</sup> Inflammatory rhetoric such as this urged Missourians along the border to organize, interfere with Kansas Territorial elections, and intimidate free-state settlers.

The proslavery Lecompton legislature followed the example of the Free-Soil Party when it organized at Lecompton and drafted a proslavery constitution and called for a territorial vote on December 21, 1857. Free state men boycotted the elections and Missourians once again crossed the border to vote in large numbers. The proslavery vote

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>69</sup> New Santa Fe was near present day Minor Park at 119<sup>th</sup> and Red Bridge in south Kansas City, Missouri. There were whiskey shops there and for a time in 1840s to early 1850s. It was the last stop where wagon trains could obtain whiskey before heading into Kansas Territory along the Santa Fe Trail. The town was destroyed during the war.

<sup>70</sup> Most of the text of the handbill is reprinted in, *History of Lafayette County, Missouri* (Missouri Historical Company, St. Louis 1881), 285.

won the election and the Kansas Territory now had two competing state constitutions, one for each legislative body.

In January 1857, the Kansas Free-State legislature met again and resubmitted the constitution to Washington, where President James Buchanan, who supported the competing proslavery Lecompton Constitution, condemned the petition and stalled its adoption after his inauguration in March. Although the Topeka Constitution failed to gain statehood for Kansas, it drew the attention of the nation to the free-state cause, stimulated heated national debate over the issue of slavery, and became a central campaign issue of the 1856 presidential election. The struggle over the Topeka Constitution fostered the fledgling Republican Party and inspired waves of Free-State immigrants to Kansas—along with the associated guns and money—which would finally settle the issue of popular sovereignty in Kansas.

When the ballot box failed to solve the dispute and the settlers turned to bullets to settle their differences the violence over slavery in the territory brought “Bleeding Kansas” to national attention. The heated debate broiled on the Senate floor and led to the caning of Charles Sumner. The Wakarusa War that erupted in Kansas and presaged the violence of the Civil War. Proslavery forces burned the Free State Hotel in Lawrence, Kansas—a community that was a growing hotbed of abolitionism. John Brown was thrust into the national spotlight when he murdered five of his proslavery neighbors in partial retaliation for the sack of Lawrence. The violence and intimidation

went both ways across the border. Popular sovereignty, which was supposed to solve the issue of slavery in the territories, had nearly turned to mob rule.<sup>71</sup>

By 1859, things settled down for a time along the border. Proslavery forces had near exhausted themselves and some Missourians seemed resolved to let Kansas settle its own affairs. This allowed a handful of free-state, antislavery Kansans to craft the Wyandotte Constitution. The bill was wrangled over in Congress before finally being passed because of the thinned ranks of the opposing Southern congressmen who left their seats when Lincoln was elected. On January 21, 1861, President Buchanan, who had opposed the free-state legislatures, signed the bill admitting Kansas into the Union as a free state.<sup>72</sup>

During the following four years, crimes and acts of violence became commonplace along the border. The deeds planned and committed in the hills around Chapel Hill have filled volumes of history books and created legends, yet most of these accounts have overlooked the fate of Chapel Hill, a community that was once an earthly vision of heaven that turned to a real version of hell.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-83.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-206.

## CHAPTER 5

### “THIS UNHAPPY STRUGGLE”: THE FATE OF CHAPEL HILL

Archibald Ridings listed his occupation as “Merchant” on the 1860 Federal Census Schedule. He lived in a home in a wealthy Lexington neighborhood at the start of the war and likely remained there during the conflict as well. As was the case for many western Missourians, the violence that first spread over the border during the fight for Kansas turned Ridings’ life on end. The countryside around Ridings’ farm and school became increasingly unsafe as men organized into groups in Kansas and began raiding local farms. Some of these bands were led by abolitionists seeking to free slaves, some sought retaliation against Missourians for their raids into Kansas, and others were outright bandits and murderers from the East who came to take advantage of the chaos and lawlessness. In spite of the two battles fought over the town of Lexington during the war, it was likely a safer location than his farm at Chapel Hill as the violence became even more sporadic and vengeful. Ridings would have risked his life had he remained in the community that he had worked so hard to build in the years before the war.

When the war began, Missouri Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson organized a pro-secession state militia, which rendezvoused west of St. Louis at a military encampment dubbed Camp Jackson. Fearing an attack on the federal arsenal in St. Louis, Union General Nathaniel Lyon captured Jackson’s militia with the aid of a pro-Union Home Guard force. Jackson himself managed to escape the fate of his troops and with Missouri’s Confederate government in tow fled to Jefferson City. In the meantime, Lyon



gathered Jackson's captured troops and paraded them through the streets of St. Louis. An angry mob of civilians gathered and began to harass the soldiers as they escorted the captured prisoners. Lyon's soldiers, many of them German immigrants, became unnerved in the tense situation and fired on the crowd, killing 28 and injuring 100 more. Many Missourians were outraged by what they saw as an abuse of power by the federal government. Jackson, who had been secretly working to align the state with the Confederacy, used the growing anti-government sentiment to muster support for his call for troops to Boonville, in central Missouri, to defend the state. Lyon's troops decisively swept out of St. Louis to secure Missouri for the Union. Battles at Boonville, Carthage, and a rearguard action in Lone Jack marked the chase across the state as Missouri's Confederate government and secessionist forces fled toward Springfield in the southern part of the state.<sup>1</sup>

The rest of the year was marked by battles as each side struggled for control of the state. In the late summer of 1861, the two armies searched for each other in the rugged Ozark terrain in southwestern Missouri. They finally engaged each other at Wilson's Creek near Springfield. In the ensuing six hour battle the Confederates suffered 1,200 casualties, the Federals 1,300, including Lyon who was fatally shot while leading a charge. In late September, Confederate General Sterling Price's army headed back north toward the Missouri River to gather recruits and chase Kansas soldiers who were looting and encouraging thousands of slaves to follow them back to Kansas. Jackson's move north culminated in the first Battle of Lexington in September. The so-called Battle of

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Gerties, *The Civil War in Missouri: A Military History* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 29-32.

the Hemp Bales was a Confederate victory, however, Price could not train, feed, and equip the men who had joined him in central Missouri so he fled back to the southwest corner of the state. By early 1862, Price's army and the pro-Confederate government was forced into northwest Arkansas, near Pea Ridge. Price would return to raid and recruit in Missouri, but the Confederate politicians spent the rest of the war exiled in Arkansas.<sup>2</sup>

For the duration of the war, there was a Union presence in the Missouri countryside as the Union army and pro-Union home guard units attempted to maintain the military gains that they made in late 1861. Chapel Hill College first became a training ground for troops organizing for the Missouri State Guard. Many of these men later joined the main body of General Price's Confederate Army in Arkansas, and some would stay near their homes to defend their families and property. During the first ten months of the war, several regular and irregular paramilitary forces calling themselves "Jayhawkers" raided Missouri's border counties. They pillaged and burned the towns of Osceola, Harrisonville, Dayton, Butler, and Papinsville, along with around a thousand homes and slave cabins. They gathered the prominent citizens of Independence at bayonet point and forced them to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union. The names of Doc Jennison, James Lane, and James Montgomery became infamous among Missourians living along the border.<sup>3</sup>

As soon as federal troops moved into the area to secure Missouri and the railroad lines for the Union, a guerrilla insurgency arose in western Missouri. In the counties

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 32-38.

<sup>3</sup> Richard S. Brownlee, *Grey Ghosts of the Confederacy: Guerrilla Warfare in the West 1861-1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954), 47.

surrounding Chapel Hill, the Union Army, the Missouri Enrolled Militia, and the Missouri State Guard all battled against irregular Confederate forces, derisively called “Bushwhackers” by Unionists.<sup>4</sup> The Union army was stationed in posts in Independence, Pleasant Hill, Kingsville, and Blue Springs, but the rebels controlled the countryside and by and large received the support of the local population. The opposing forces rarely clashed in open battle, but rather fought in a series of countless skirmishes and small engagements in remote areas. Occasional Jayhawker raids and roving bands of guerrilla raiders terrorized the civilian population. Chapel Hill was a crossroads that saw the passing of countless soldiers—both Union and Confederate—during the war. The college became a rendezvous point and its strategic view did not go unnoticed by either army. At various times raiding parties from either side occupied the town and used the stone school’s first floor as a stable for horses and the second floor as barracks for soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

In early 1862, Union commanders at posts in Pleasant Hill and Independence counted growing numbers of soldiers who were shot out of their saddles, were wounded, or who disappeared while on patrol. In April, the local insurrection so disrupted federal

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,79. In April 1862, the Confederate Congress passed the Partisan Ranger Act, which allowed any group of ten or more men to organize, elect officers, and initiate operations against the enemy. Their countless raids on settlements along the border and attacks on Union troops is an indication that the population had been practicing these tactics since 1854. For a detailed analysis of the causes of the violence see also, Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the Civil War* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 38-52.

<sup>5</sup> Nellie McCoy Harris, “Chapel Hill, Alma Mater of Missouri Pioneers,” *Kansas City Star*, Nov. 1, 1908. Found in “Chapel Hill” Vertical File, Missouri Valley Room. This article indicates that the first floor classrooms were used to stable horses and the second floor chapel became a barracks for troops during the war.

mail, communications, and travel that the Union command in Jackson County was effectively isolated from the rest of the state. The Sni Hills were a particularly troublesome area for Union troops. On August 11, 1862, the bushwhackers shocked the Union command with a successful attack on the Union garrison at the First Battle of Independence. Now, painfully aware of the growing strength of the bushwhackers and the presence of several Confederate officers including Francis M. Cockerell, former student and teacher of languages at Chapel Hill, and his brother Jeremiah, who were recruiting for Price's army in Arkansas.

The Union commanders at Fort Union in Kansas City made plans for a counterattack to remove the bushwhacker menace from the border region once and for all. A force of nearly 800 under Major Emory Foster from Lexington was to converge at Lone Jack with 500 troops under General Fitz Henry Warren from Clinton, Missouri. From Lone Jack, the united 1,300 troops under Warren and Foster would attempt to squeeze the guerrillas between the Missouri River and a 2,500-man army under General James Gillpatrick Blunt, who was pressing north from Fort Scott, Kansas.

Major Foster, who had lost a brother to secessionists and been wounded in an earlier skirmish with bushwhackers, was chosen for the expedition to Lone Jack due to his experience and reputation as a fighter. On the evening of Friday, August 15, 1862, Major Emory Foster, leading 800 Union soldiers armed with two cannons, rolled through Chapel Hill on the way to the town of Lone Jack. He and his troops, likely eager to settle the score with the bushwhackers, were the first to arrive in Lone Jack. Unfortunately for Foster and his men, they were alone and deep in hostile territory with Warren's column from Clinton lost and Blunt's Fort Scott troops still days away.

As Foster's column rolled into town at around 10 p.m., reports of rebels camped south of town prompted the saddle-weary troops to unlimber their two cannons and fire a few rounds at the assumed enemy force at their front. An ensuing firefight in the darkness south of town left a few of Foster's men dead or wounded by friendly fire. The cannon fire also alerted bushwhackers across the countryside of Foster's presence at Lone Jack.

The rest of the night passed without incident with Foster's troops bivouacked in the town with cannons in the middle of the street. Meanwhile, from farms and small campsites across the countryside, the bushwhackers and hundreds of raw recruits for the Confederate army gathered and planned for a dawn attack on the isolated Union force in Lone Jack. As the sun rose on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, an estimated force of 1,600 rebels descended on the Union troops in Lone Jack. Missouri State Guard colonel and former Chapel Hill student, Jeremiah Vard Cockerell, organized the Confederate assault. Assisting him were former Santa Fe trader Upton Hays, and colonels S. D. Jackman, D. C. Hunter, and other officers from the Confederate army in Arkansas.

Foster's men, believing they were battling bushwhackers who had publicly avowed to give no quarter to captured Union troops, fought as if a brave death in combat was the preferred option to surrender and execution. The battle raged into the late afternoon with each side at various times claiming the field. The possession of the cannons was lost and regained and lost again. At times the combat was hand-to-hand. By many accounts the battle fought that day was one of the fiercest of the Civil War, regardless of the small number of soldiers engaged. Foster's troops gave the undisciplined guerrillas and raw Confederate recruits a bloody lesson, but of the nearly

800 soldiers that left for Lone Jack with Major Foster, only about 400 returned to Lexington. Confederate forces were left in charge of the battlefield on Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup>, but the town of Lone Jack had been virtually destroyed and never again would the proslavery forces of northwestern Missouri have the strategic upper hand over the Union military that they held in the summer of 1862. The Union Army would struggle for tactical control of the Sni Hills for the rest of the war, however.<sup>6</sup>

The old growth forest along the streamways and the rocky hills provided a place that could shelter irregular paramilitary forces as they roamed the countryside, committing crimes with impunity. In deadly games of cat and mouse, young men fought running gun battles that frequently lasted all day, covered miles of rugged terrain, and claimed the lives of hundreds of soldiers and local citizens.<sup>7</sup> Many of the young men who rode with the bushwhackers came from the wealthiest families in the region. The Youngers were successful cattle ranchers living near present day Lee's Summit before the war. Four of the Hill brothers, who lived on a farm just north of Chapel Hill, rode with Quantrill. Dick Yeager, one of Quantrill's closest friends was the son of Judge Yeager, a member of the Chapel Hill Board of Trustees.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Matt Matthews and Kip Lindberg, "Shot All to Pieces: The Battle of Lone Jack August 16, 1862," *North and South*, vol.7 no. 1 (January 2007), 56-72.

<sup>7</sup> *The War of Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, accessed at Cornell Digital Library, Cornell University, <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/>. A keyword search on the term "Sni Hills", "Sni-a-bar" and "Sni" reveals hundreds of accounts of the Union Army's actions in the area of Chapel Hill and Lone Jack.

<sup>8</sup> Don R. Bowen, "Guerrilla War in Western Missouri, 1862-1865: Historical Extensions of the Relative Deprivation Hypothesis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.19 (January 1977): 30-51. See also Mark Geiger, "Indebtedness and the Origins of

The Federal forces that routinely patrolled the countryside faced a civilian population that was a confusing blend of proslavery Conditional Unionists, Unconditional Unionists, and rabid secessionists. Mixed among these were families that preferred to stay out of the fighting and live in peace. It was, however, a time of bitter partisan warfare and none could remain neutral. The bushwhackers regularly donned the clothes of Union soldiers and preyed upon pro-Union citizens and surprised Union patrols with sneak attacks. A federal officer who questioned a local farmer about the whereabouts of bushwhackers had no idea if the man he was talking to supported his cause, or if he were the same man that had caught one of his soldiers the day before, murdered him execution style, mutilated the corpse, and left it lying in the brush for the wild animals. Likewise, the farmer had no way of knowing if the man on the horse was a genuine Union officer or a bushwhacker in disguise seeking counterintelligence. There was hardly a way to tell friend from foe and as a consequence, everyone suffered in one of the bloodiest civilian insurrections in American history.

At the start of the conflict over Kansas, countless slaves from the area began to escape and make their way into Kansas. In 1862, Jim Lane organized some of these men as a military force and began making forays into Missouri. Although it did not apply to Missouri, with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1, 1863, black

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Guerrilla Violence in Civil War Missouri,” *The Journal of Southern History* no.75 (February 2009), 1-34.

enlistments became federally sanctioned and the following spring a surge of violence swept through Jackson and southwest Lafayette County.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly before the war, Joseph Johnson, the constable of Chapel Hill, arrested two slave men for stealing horses. A local judge sentenced them to be whipped. Joseph Johnson executed the judge's sentence. Early in 1863, the former slaves, returned to the area with a patrol of Kansas Redlegs, arrested Johnson one mile east of Chapel Hill, took him to the barn of James Harris, and left him hanging by his neck.<sup>10</sup> On March 26, 1863, George Henry Hoyt's "Red Legs," men led by the tobacco-chewing abolitionist Methodist minister Parson Hugh Fisher, and troops who were likely from the First Kansas Colored Volunteers marched toward Chapel Hill and left a swath of destruction that burned 150 homes and emancipated approximately 400 slaves. That night they raided the town and killed several men who had previously sworn an oath to the Union. By some accounts, seven men were murdered that night. They lit the college ablaze with

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<sup>9</sup> "Bad News from Lafayette County," *St. Louis Republican*, April 5, 1863. The newspaper article specifies these troops accompanying Hoyt's Kansas Redlegs as "colored" and does not call them the First Kansas Colored Infantry. However, Bruce Nichols reports that the spring 1863 operations by Union forces in Jackson and Lafayette Counties included the support of the First Kansas Colored who served alongside the Redlegs in segregated units. See, Bruce Nichols, *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri, Volume 2, 1863*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Publishers: 2012), 105-110.

<sup>10</sup> There are two versions of this story in each of these books on early county history William Young, *Young's History of Lafayette County* (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen and Co., 1910), 377-388; *History of Lafayette County, Missouri* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Company 1881), 404. See also, Bruce Nichols, *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri, Volume 2, 1863* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Publishers: 2012), 105-110.



all of its contents and furnishings along with about half of the town's 30 homes. By the next morning, Riding's college town on the frontier was a smoldering ruin.<sup>11</sup>

A squad of a dozen guerrillas struck back two nights later and captured the steamboat *Sam Gaty* at nearby Sibley on the Missouri River. They were looking for the contraband slaves accompanying Hoyt's Red Legs and Hugh Fisher's men. They captured a few soldiers on leave and led them with about 70 slaves off of the boat and onto shore. As if to send a message, by the light of a lantern and in full view of the ship's passengers, these men executed nine of the slave men, as well as several Missouri State Militiamen and Union soldiers. Another seventy terrified escaped slaves managed to slip away into the darkness, as the small band of bandits found it could not control the large crowd. Although no connection has yet to be proven, it is interesting to note that these incidents occurred three months after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. It is possible that the emancipating army from Kansas may have contained escaped slaves from Jackson and Lafayette counties who came back to the area to retrieve their families and bring them to freedom in Kansas. The guerrillas clamped down on the escaping slaves and those who helped them with a fierce display of violence. This act supports the

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<sup>11</sup> Nichols, *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri, Volume 2, 1863*, 105-110. Information about spring 1863 military operations in Jackson and Lafayette counties can be found in Nichol's book. Hugh Fisher's name was at the top of the list of names of men slated for execution when Bushwhackers led by William Quantrill raided Lawrence three months later. He miraculously escaped by hiding in a rolled up rug that the bushwhackers, unknowingly, helped his wife carry out of his burning house. Information about Fisher can be found in Burton J. Williams, "Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence: A Question of Complicity," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 32 (summer 1968): 143-149.

arguments from historians, such as Diane Mutti Burke, who claim that one of the objectives behind the fury of the guerillas was to protect slavery.

In its frustration to quell the guerrilla insurgency, the Union army targeted the area's small-slaveholding society for annihilation. In the months after the *Sam Gaty* incident, Hoyt's Redlegs rampaged through Jackson and western Lafayette counties searching for the bushwhackers responsible for the crime. Jayhawkers and regular Union soldiers summarily executed men in front of their families—murder, arson, theft, and legal confiscation of private property were the rules of the day. The region, once proud, progressive, and Protestant, slid into anarchy.<sup>12</sup>

The guerrillas were supported with food, clothing, ammunition, horses, and information about Union troop movements by a network of neighbors and friends. In order to destroy the infrastructure that supported the insurrection, the Union Army made a strategic move and targeted the families who lent support to the men who lived in the brush during the summer of 1863. Union General Thomas Ewing, through a series of three orders from his headquarters in Kansas City, attempted to systematically destroy local civilian support for the war. First came Order No. 9 that confiscated any arms, materials, and livestock deemed of value to the rebels. That which could not be carried away was ordered destroyed. Second was Order No. 10 that made out warrants of arrest of the known female relatives of the guerrillas living in the brush. Union patrols arrested

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<sup>12</sup> For a complete history of western Missouri during the Border War and Civil War see Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). See also O. S. Barton, *Three Years with Quantrill* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992 reprint); Wiley Britton, *Civil War on the Border, Vols. I and II*, (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1899); and Richard Brownlee, *Gray Ghosts of the Confederacy: Guerrilla Warfare in the West*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954).

women, young girls, and sometimes even the children in their care, in their homes and on local roads. The women, girls, and children were then taken to Kansas City and warehoused in buildings to await transport for trial in St. Louis. When one of these makeshift prisons collapsed and killed or maimed several female relatives of the guerrillas, the Bushwhackers struck back on August 21 in one the bloodiest acts of terror in American history. They raided Lawrence, Kansas and in the process burned the town and killed around 180 unarmed men and boys.<sup>13</sup> After the Lawrence Raid, one of the first places Union troops came to look for the culprits was in the Sni Hills north and west of Chapel Hill.<sup>14</sup>

After loyalty oaths, cash bonds, and imprisonment of guerrillas' families had failed to arrest the activities of the guerrillas and secure the good behavior of the local citizens, Ewing issued Order No. 11. He was additionally concerned that the Redlegs would follow through with their promises to strike back against the Missourians in retaliation for Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence. The Order was aimed at the four Missouri border counties south of the Missouri River and attempted to halt the insurrection by destroying the local infrastructure. The Union army burned homes, barns and confiscated livestock, food, and fodder. All families were forced out of the area unless they could

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<sup>13</sup> Brownlee, *Grey Ghosts of the Confederacy: Guerrilla Warfare in the West 1861-1865*, 110, 121, 125-126, 142. See also, Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War*, 235-240.

<sup>14</sup> Colonel Lazaer was in charge of chasing the guerrillas in Jackson and Lafayette Counties after the Lawrence Raid. His reports of actions and guerrillas killed there are online at, *Official Records of the War of Rebellion*. Cornell University Digital Library <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/>.

prove their loyalty to the Union, in which case they could relocate within the Union garrison towns.<sup>15</sup>

As a result, the area looked as sparsely populated as it did before it was settled. Even the draconian measures of Order No. 11 failed to halt the violence on either side. On September 6, 1863 a Union patrol in Lone Jack rounded up six men—the oldest was seventy-five, the youngest was seventeen. They were taken to a nearby secluded wood and executed, allegedly for not having loyalty papers, but more likely in retaliation for the Lawrence Raid. Actions such as this characterize the bitterness that Union troops held toward Missourians. As the war progressed, the animosity deepened. The following account was typical of the engagements between forces in the areas around Chapel Hill. One April night in 1864, a band of about 100 guerrillas dressed in federal uniforms slipped through a net of Union patrols in Cass and Jackson counties and pounced on a detachment of the First Missouri State Militia Cavalry stationed near Chapel Hill. In a nighttime surprise attack, the Bushwhackers killed two soldiers and their commanding officer. The Union army thereafter changed their scouting tactics by only sending troops out after dark. They had learned that their movements by day were watched by the locals and were reported to the guerrilla bands that roamed the area. The *Official Records of the War of Rebellion* indicates the frequency of the Union Army's activities in the Sni Hills and around Chapel Hill. Their reports sometimes suggest a tone of glee as if they were reporting a foxhunt. Scouting parties and patrols in the area typically generated reports

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<sup>15</sup> Brownlee, *Grey Ghosts of the Confederacy: Guerrilla Warfare in the West 1861-1865*, 110, 125-126, 181.

of killed and wounded on both sides of the fight. Neither side was known for taking prisoners.<sup>16</sup>

On the eve of the war Lizzie Brannock was a teacher with the Methodist Episcopal Church South and taught music at Chapel Hill. She was from a family of Kentucky Methodists and married to John Brannock who was among those who would have rather stayed out of the war. He was away attending college in Fayette, Missouri and when the war began he returned to Chapel Hill to tend his farm and watch out for his family. For a while he farmed a piece of land in Cass County, but was harassed by both the Jayhawkers led by Jennison because he was a Missourian and the bushwhackers for not joining the Confederate army or the guerrillas. Like many other local men who could not stay out of the war, he finally left with the Confederate recruits headed south to join Price after the Battle of Lone Jack in August 1862. By 1864, Lizzie was one of the few people left in Chapel Hill. In her January 13, 1864 letter to her brother she outlines a few of her experiences over the last three years. Unlike the residents in neighboring counties affected by Order No. 11, she was not forced to leave her home. However, she had witnessed the same depredations and shared in the miseries of all Missourians caught between raiding Jayhawkers, guerrillas, and Union troops. She had seen “helpless women and young children sick [that] were taken out in the snow and left standing in the

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 86-87. Fellman writes of what he calls the Union Army’s “non policy” of executing guerrillas on the spot. The guerrillas had little means to keep prisoners and, according to Fellman, the war took on overtones of a religious crusade. See also *The War of Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, accessed at Cornell Digital Library, Cornell University, <http://digital.library.cornell.edu/>

snow while all they owned on earth save the land was destroyed before their eyes.” Her home and the school were burned to the ground and she was living with her father-in-law. Like many women around Chapel Hill, Lizzie was left alone to care for her children and the farm. John and his brother had recently passed through Chapel Hill on their way to Lexington as part of Price’s fall of 1864 invasion of the state. It was probably the first time she had seen her husband in two years. The men were now among the captured and wounded Confederates on their way to Gatriot Street Prison in St. Louis. She had been allowed to visit her brother-in-law who was in a hospital in Marshall, wounded with a bullet lodged in his jaw. She calls her husband, “an honest Christian soldier from principle and conscious battling for the right.” Both men had likely been taken prisoner during the three-day Battle of Westport that was the high water mark of the Confederate’s failed bid to capture the state.

In the winter of that year Lizzie wrote to her brother in Kentucky, Reverend Edwin White, about the “most horrible reign of terror” that had forsaken “our once happy land.” She described her world as “[a] country [that] is desolate, indeed almost entirely a wilderness, robbery was an everyday affair so long as their [sic] was anything to take our farms are all burned up, fences gone, crops destroyed no one escapes the ravages of one party or the other.” After years of conflict, her world had been turned on its end.

Lizzies’s worn physical body and will to survive are the few things she has left on earth.

In the letter she wrote:

“I call an Abolitionist a rebel would to God brother we could have the dear old government with all its rights and privileges heaven smiled upon us then, all I ask or wish is for the constitution to be held as it was given and the good laws of a good administration to be carried out to the letter. But I thought when two parties

could not live in peace and happiness together it was best to separate, tho it not the best. I know in our case and did think it might have been arranged peaceably. There are gross and fearful faults on both sides and I hate war, could not believe it possible we would come to arms, and if we did I thought in this enlightened 19<sup>th</sup> century war would be concluded upon honorable principles but it seems no age of barbarism can show us such scenes of cruelty and plunder and God only knows where it will all end. I think everyman is entitled to his honest opinion and no one has a right to disturb him for his sentiments. It is wicked in the extreme and if I am rebel... ”

Lizzie Brannock’s letter concluded with a long run-on sentence that was fraught with tension. She explained to her brother that it is “against conscious” and “guilt before God and man” to swear an oath to the Union or support the “north” over the “South in this unhappy struggle.” “Three times we have been threatened to be burned out and five time plundered,” she wrote. She told him that she now must gather firewood for herself, a task that was formerly done by slaves or the men folk. Lizzie Brannock’s delicate feminine hands, once trained for piano or guitar were now used for “grappling wood from under a deep snow and cut[ting] it up as best” she could. In one comment to her brother, Lizzie E. Brannock distilled her experiences and the history of the last decade of Chapel Hill into ten simple words, “it would take a book to tell of all troubles...”<sup>17</sup>

Lizzie Brannock was utterly dismayed to find herself, her family, and her community in the position of “Rebel”, yet she was defiant in the face of defeat. The government that had written slavery into the Constitution, removed the Indians from the frontier, helped to clear the rivers, built roads and schools, protected wagon trains, and

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<sup>17</sup> Lizzie E. Brannock letter to her brother Edwin, Chapel Hill, Missouri, January 13, 1864, Lizzie E. Brannock Letter, 1864 (CO224), State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, Missouri Digital Heritage Hosted Collections, accessed at <http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/>.

returned runaway slaves—the same government they had fought for against the Indians, Mexicans and Mormons—now freed their slaves, pillaged the lands they had settled, and sought them out in the woods around Chapel Hill to murder as if they were wild animals. Surely, Archibald Ridings felt similarly as dismayed and defiant as Lizzie Brannock.



Fig. 10. Archibald Wellington Ridings circa 1875. From *United States Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Missouri, Vol.2* (Ancestry.com)



## CONCLUSION

There is no existing record of Ridings's views on secession or his actions during the Civil War. One clue suggests that he and his brother Thomas were both leaders in the early political battles, but the source does not indicate the sway of their partisanship.<sup>1</sup> He served neither army and there is nothing in the Union Provost Marshal Records that implicate him as a rebel. He had neither sons to serve in either army nor daughters to conceal war contraband in their skirts as his grandmother once did during the American Revolution. Unlike those who had served in the Confederate army or committed open acts of rebellion against the Union army, he signed no loyalty oaths and asked for no pardons after the war. This dilemma reflects the complicated political nature of slavery and secession in Missouri. Ridings could have been a secessionist and supported the Confederacy or a conditional Unionist who was only willing to stay in the Union if he could keep his slaves. Conversely, he could have remained devoutly pro-Union throughout the war hoping for the best outcome, perhaps counting on compensation for the emancipation and enlistment of his slaves, who may have run away to join the Union army.<sup>2</sup> Like Ridings' attitudes about slavery, his attitudes about secession may have changed over time as well. One clue points at least to Ridings attitudes after the war, even if it is not possible to know of his actions. The minutes of a meeting published in the June 13, 1866 *Weekly Caucasian* detail the gathering of the Friends of President

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Lafayette County, Missouri* (St. Louis, MO: Missouri Historical Company, 1881), 377.

<sup>2</sup> Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households 1815-1865* (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2010), 292-298.

Johnson Club. The meeting elected officers and lists that Archibald Riding was a member of the finance committee of that organization. Ridings association in such a club and the mention of his name in this Redemptionist newspaper that fought against the Missouri Radicals who now controlled the State government point to his attitudes as an unrepentant rebel and his previous involvement with elite groups of Missourians who had quietly fought the war with their bank accounts instead of bullets.<sup>3</sup>

Ridings had reasons to be bitter. He and his neighbors, who were once among the wealthiest in the state, lost all of their property in slaves during the war. According to the Missouri State Census of 1860, Jackson County's slave population was 3,440 people with another 6,985 slaves resided in Lafayette County. By the time of the 1864 Missouri State Census, Jackson County's slave population was reduced to 132 and Lafayette County filed no data whatsoever.<sup>4</sup> The town he had help to establish went up in flames and along with it the homes, barns, fences, and slave cabins of all of his family and neighbors. If he had money in the bank in Lexington at the beginning of the war, he likely lost every penny of it when federal troops confiscated \$900,000 from the Lexington Bank on the eve of the first battle there. Sni-a-bar Township eventually sent 125 men to join the Price's Confederate army; all but two of them were married and only 77 returned at the

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<sup>3</sup> "Johnson Club," *The Weekly Caucasian*, (Lexington, MO), June 13, 1866, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, accessed at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Also historian Mark Geiger outlines the details of a banking scandal involving pro Confederate bankers in western Missouri that included slave owners and merchants such as Ridings. See, Mark Geiger, *Indebtedness and the Origins of Guerrilla Violence in Civil War Missouri 1861-1865* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

<sup>4</sup> Missouri State Census of 1860 and 1864, Missouri State Archives, <http://www.sos.mo.gov/mdh/CivilWar/Resources>.

war's end.<sup>5</sup> If Ridings thought his slaves were loyal to him, he likely found he was sadly mistaken during the war when some of them may have returned with the First Kansas Colored Volunteers and started enforcing civil law and arresting local judges 1864.<sup>6</sup> After the war he may have paid his former slaves to entice them to return to their jobs. The formerly enslaved laborers who built much of the local infrastructure would now require pay and could walk away if the price was not fair. The Ridings's properties near Chapel Hill were surely among the thousands of homes ransacked and destroyed during the war. Although Chapel Hill never earned the distinction of the postwar name of those areas affected by Order No. 11, "The Burnt District," the town was equally destroyed by war.

Despite his many losses, Ridings managed to survive the war with his health and wealth somewhat intact. His biography indicates that for a time after the war he entered the contract freighting business again. In contrast, little was left of the once prospering college town. Local farmers switched from tobacco and hemp to wheat and corn and started farming the prairies they once thought infertile with improved plows. As the region switched to less labor-intensive crops, the labor of the African Americans who once made up a quarter to a third of the population was needed less. Many moved to build communities in Kansas or to find work in one of the region's growing cities. The state line which once marked a bitter cultural and political divide became nearly invisible,

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<sup>5</sup> *History of Lafayette County, Missouri*, (St. Louis, MO: Missouri Historical Company, 1881), 470.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

as if hidden by the fields of corn and wheat sameness.<sup>7</sup> In the end, the region's social transformation would prove more difficult than the economic. For a while Ridings hauled freight to Colorado for the federal government. He knew it was a sure way to earn money. He eventually moved to Warrensburg. The railroad tracks were laid through that town at the end of the war. If the railroad would not come to his college, he would move his college to the railroad. He founded a bank and was instrumental in founding the Warrensburg Normal School. As a member of the board of regents, for a reasonable sum he offered land that he owned near the town to use as the site to build the college. The school was successful from the start. However, sketchy details in the Warrensburg newspaper of the time suggest that Ridings did not approve of the Dean of the School who was hired by the other members of the Board of Regents. The new man was from the Northeast and taught a curriculum that was a bit too modern, progressive, and secular. It was said about Ridings that his life's ambition was to build a Cumberland Presbyterian college. Using tactics familiar to western Missourians from earlier times, Ridings was allegedly behind a series of denunciations of the new Dean that poured forth from some of the local pulpits. This led to the Dean resigning from the college amidst a swirl of controversy and the eventual bankruptcy of the Normal school.<sup>8</sup> In spite of this tumultuous start, the school survived and is now the University of Central Missouri.

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<sup>7</sup> Historian Jeremy Neely deserves the credit for this phrase. I have heard him say this phrase in papers he has delivered at conferences over the last few years. See also Jeremy Neely, *The Border Between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Effie Bass, "Notes on Central Missouri State Teachers College" Vertical File, Library Archives, Central Missouri University at Warrensburg, MO.

According to the January 16, 1875 *Weekly Caucasian*, Ridings advised the people who were to try to attract the state penitentiary to locate in Warrensburg that the five acres of the local limestone bedrock was enough to “employ 500 men for 500 years.” This suggests that Archibald Ridings had a reputation on such matters and knew about using labor to carve up limestone from his personal experience building the stone college at Chapel Hill. Two letters to Missouri Judge Governor Henry Hardin reveal that Ridings still wielded some influence in political matters after war. One is a letter of recommendation to appointment to the post of Tobacco Inspector for an old acquaintance of Ridings. The other is correspondence from Francis Cockerell and Ridings to Hardin suggesting a bounty be paid by the bushel on the grasshopper swarms devouring local farmer crops.<sup>9</sup> The social circle of friends he established at Chapel Hill supported him throughout his lifetime.

In 1877, not long after the scandal surrounding the resignation of the new Dean, Ridings was involved in some loans and investments that went sour and was sued by a handful of creditors. In order to recoup his losses and repay his debts, he left his wife Mary behind in Warrensburg and moved to Leadville, Colorado to try his hand at mining. He became involved with some former students of Chapel Hill College in the O. Z. Cattle Ranch and started to regain his fortune. He hoped to repay his debts to the creditors in Warrensburg; however, his age and health eventually caught up with him. He died in 1878 in the care of Dr. Ragsdale, his old student from Chapel Hill College, and is buried

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<sup>9</sup> A. W. Ridings to Charles Henry Hardin, Warrensburg, Missouri, November 17, 1874 and Francis Marion Cockerell et al. to Charles Henry Hardin May 27, Charles Henry Hardin Papers, 1875-1877 (RG3.22), State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, Missouri Digital Heritage Hosted Collections, accessed at <http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/>.

in an unmarked grave in Leadville. All of the land he still held in Lafayette County was auctioned off on the steps of the Lafayette County Courthouse in 1879 to pay his creditors.<sup>10</sup>

The crumbling remains of the stone building stood for a time after the war until local farmers hauled away many of the stones for their own building projects. Most Missourians seemed eager to put the war in the past and move on with their lives. Considering Ridings' association with the nativist Know-Nothing Party it is ironic that a farmer of German heritage now inhabits the site of the college. Adding injury to the irony, the remaining stone blocks of the school were pushed over the bluff with a bulldozer when Leon's father, Max, built a farmhouse in 1949—exactly 100 years after the construction of the school began.

In addition to the notable students it matriculated, Chapel Hill College left a legacy of descendant colleges. As mentioned, Ridings went on to start the Normal School in Warrensburg that became the University of Central Missouri. In 1852, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church founded McGee College in Macon in north central Missouri. Like Chapel Hill, McGee College closed during the war, but it reopened afterwards. Some of the teachers who taught at Chapel Hill moved to McGee College and the school survived until it was closed due to an economic depression in 1873. In 1890, Missouri Valley College opened as the successor to McGee College. Dr. William Black, McGee College's first president, kept a piece of the old bronze school bell from

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<sup>10</sup> "Administrators Sale of Real Estate," *Lexington Weekly Intelligencer*, (Lexington, MO), Oct. 4, 1879, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, accessed at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

Chapel Hill College on his desk as a paperweight and as an homage to the old school that began in Archibald Ridings' house and grew into what its alumni called the best college in the west.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after the war, reunions of bushwhackers, Confederate veterans and their families began having annual reunion picnics at the cemetery of those fallen in the battle of Lone Jack. Union veterans were welcomed too and stories were shared about the battle and the heroes of the late war. The first large cemetery marker was placed by a farmer from Kansas on the grave of his brother who fought for the Union. Not to be outdone, the locals collected money and raised a larger and more ornate monument. The Daughters of the Confederacy tried to raise enough funds to place a bronze plaque at the site of the old college. For a time, the reunions grew quite large and every mid-August thousands of farmers from the surrounding counties flocked to the small town of Lone Jack to socialize and see the men who once rode with Quantrill. One of the young farmer's sons at these large picnics turned festival was Harry S Truman who lived on his father's farm near Grandview. After his presidency, Truman led the local fund drive to build a memorial at Lone Jack. The success of the project led to the construction of the museum that stands at the soldiers' cemetery and battlefield there today. Truman cut the ribbon when the museum opened its doors in 1963, 100 years after the battle.

For a time it looked like the railroads might finally make it to Chapel Hill. In the 1870s there was an explosion of small rails and connecting lines that were built across

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<sup>11</sup> Nellie F. Parsons, "The History of Missouri Valley College" (master's thesis, University of Missouri, 1940). Parsons wrote her Master's thesis on the history of Missouri Valley College and covered a bit of Chapel Hill College's past in the process.

the state. The Lexington, Lake and Gulf route was proposed to run from Lexington, to the bluffs at Chapel Hill, to Lone Jack, Harrisonville, and on to the Gulf of Mexico. Bonds were sold, right of ways purchased, and beds were dug right up to the outskirts of Chapel Hill. At Lone Jack, a pond was built to hold water for the steam engines that were expected to stop and refuel on their way through. Unfortunately, the railroad company went bust and the Lexington, Gulf and Lake Railroad never laid a rail.<sup>12</sup> In Lone Jack, the local farmers who bought bonds in the collapsed company built a bonfire that was lit with the now useless scraps of paper. According to local lore, one man walked up to the fire and tossed in a fistful of the railroad bonds, followed by his coat and hat. He walked away and muttered, “They damn well took everything else, they might as well have that too.” When the railroads finally came to the area, Pleasant Hill, formerly a Union garrison town, was the first town to secure a line. Farmers living north of Big Creek and on the prairies east of the Sni Hills platted the town of Lee’s Summit when the Missouri-Pacific proposed a route through the area. It has grown into one of the largest cities in Missouri in population and size. Kansas City, which was just getting started on the banks of the Missouri River when the stone building at Chapel Hill was complete, is now the regional metropolis.

In the 1930s the state highways came through following parts of the old wagon trails, but the railroads never came to Chapel Hill or Lone Jack and the population is about the same there in 2014 as it was 150 years ago. All of the local citizens know

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<sup>12</sup> Craig Bryan, “They Never Laid a Rail: The History of the Lexington, Chillicothe, and Gulf Railroad” (Kansas City, MO: self published manuscript, 2003), available at Missouri Valley Reading Room.



about the Battle of Lone Jack. The town holds a celebration every year. The sesquicentennial of the event attracted thousands who witnessed a reenactment of the battle. Most residents know of the place called Chapel Hill just north of present day Powell Botanical Gardens near 50 Highway, but very few know about the Cumberland Presbyterian college that once stood on the vanguard of the American empire, the Santa Fe Trade that flowed through the area, or the slaves who were once a fourth of the population.

Today, at Chapel Hill there is little to see at the site where instructors once taught Cicero, Ovid, Latin, Natural Philosophy, and Algebra to Missouri's frontier generation. Cows graze where the students once chatted on the front porches of the dormitories and federals chased bushwhackers through the hillsides. Feral hemp still grows in between the rocks and boulders where slaves shaped rocks into blocks to build the school. Wild turkeys still quietly strut in the shade of the trees of the Sni Hills, but the town and the school are only a memory. Their past still lies scattered in archives, attics, photographs, and memoirs. Some of it still lies buried beneath Leon Bottomueller's lawn.

When the young Archibald Ridings stepped off of the boat in Lexington in 1835, building a fine stone college on the frontier that matriculated governors, general, doctors, lawyers, bankers, and ministers of his faith—as well as their brides and mothers—was beyond his wildest dreams. But he accomplished those dreams and more. Over his lifetime he saw his fortunes rise and fall, rise and then fall again. It seems remarkable that a person of person of his accomplishments and history of public service did not leave behind personal papers, died in debt to his creditors, and lays buried in and unmarked grave in Leadville, Colorado. Ridings left behind instead a quiet legacy of Missouri

colleges and a somewhat mysterious and pleasant surprise for historians of antebellum Missouri history.

There is a great deal that can be learned from the history that has been explored in these pages. The story of Chapel Hill recounted here is but a small facet of American history, and yet it has illuminated much greater themes. A host of arguments has been presented and in process the story of Chapel Hill has been revealed as part of the process of empire and nation building where the converging forces of history, technology, and religion melded together to create a driving force that pushed the nation into the frontier. It has demonstrated how the Indians first formed the landscape and made an easy way for the settlers who followed. The evidence presented has made the case that government encouraged and aided western migration by facilitating travel, commerce, and answering the will of the people. It has made a similar case with the railroads and their importance to state and local history. The complicated and formative forces of religion on the frontier have been exposed through personal biography, and a following of state and denominational church history. It has brushed upon themes of paternalism, patriarchy, heritage, and social class in shaping Missourians' identity while revealing the forgotten aspect of multiculturalism as a feature of Missouri's frontier communities. The prior histories of the school have been checked for accuracy, weighed, and balanced to place the institution in its proper historic perspective. In this process, this research has filled a gap missing from history of the Santa Fe Trail and discovered that the West was settled with the power of ox drawn wagons, books, and schools as much it was won with a six-gun. Religion and education on the frontier are important and often overlooked forces of the growing antebellum American empire. As well, this research has uncovered areas

that need further exploration, such as the role of early churches in forming Missouri communities, and how seminaries, and schools forwarded westward expansion. It has raised questions about the significance slave labor on public construction projects such as schools, roads, and bridges, and the complex and evolving attributes of education in antebellum America.

This report has not only revealed the complicated and unique nature of Missouri small-scale slavery and its integral role in western migration, but also as the foundation of the economic system and the basis of the personal wealth. If it is possible to objectively exclude the immorality of chattel slavery, then Chapel Hill and Archibald Ridings should be remembered because his efforts to instruct young minds were noble and his efforts to build his version of a city upon a hill are worthy. It is likewise possible to objectively include the labors of the slaves who built the college, tended the fields, cooked the meals, and pushed the wagons west as equally noble and worthy. The story of Chapel Hill is also therefore a part of African American history as slaves were the cornerstones of the labor system. African Americans proactively participated in gaining their own freedom when they left their toils behind and risked their lives by escaping to Kansas. Once free, they immediately grabbed the reigns of their destiny and formed armed regiments, returned to Missouri and destroyed the system that had oppressed them for generations. Although it is not possible to know their names, they too are an important part of the heritage of Missouri's past.

This thesis restored at least a part of the lost visions of America's vanguard on the western frontier. Like a spring rain on the Bottomueller's lawn, it has replenished a part of the past and reminded us of Chapel Hill's promise and potential. The success of

Chapel Hill is evidence of why Missourians along the border were willing to risk it all in their efforts to win Kansas and perhaps explains their motives for rising to extreme levels of violence. It has explored how it was possible for a society to build such an emporium of education on the western frontier of America and then destroy it, leaving its remains in the ground as if it were some sort of forgotten Greek temple. This study makes it possible to better understand the complex reasons why government sometimes fails to end moral evils and solve society's problems. It is a lesson that democracy sometimes is a wedge that can drive societies apart as well as join them together for the common good. And it is an example of what can happen when governments attempt to make societal changes by force. It is further an expose of the magnanimity of human nature as well as a reminder of the depths of its depravity. It is from these lessons that we should care about the history of Chapel Hill. The lessons of its past may enable us to continue to prosper as a people in pursuit of happiness.



Fig. 6. Artifacts from the school. Piece of the bronze bell that once topped the school and a bullet found in the 1980s by artifact hunters.

## APPENDIX A

All photographs used by permission of Chris Cooper and Craig Bryan except the image of Archibald Ridings on page 29 which is available at *United States Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Missouri, Vol.2* (Ancestry.com), and the 1852 photograph of the school, which is used with permission of the Johnson County (Missouri) Historical Society.

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## **Interviews**

Ridings family descendant, Jack Landers, Ph.D., interview conducted by Tony O'Bryan,

October 14, 2013.

Local Historian, Chris Cooper, interview conducted by Tony O'Bryan, July7, 2014

## VITA

Robert Anthony “Tony” O’Bryan-Lawson was born Robert Anthony Allgeier II on March 21, 1962 in Louisville, Kentucky. He was the only son of his parent’s long courtship and brief marriage. Tony’s last name was changed to Lawson when his second stepfather legally adopted him and the family moved to Lenexa, Kansas in 1975. He attended Shawnee Mission Northwest High School, graduated in 1980, and spent a semester at Kansas State University as a Theatre major. His parent’s divorce and a sense of wanderlust led him to leave academia to earn a living in the construction trades and try his hand at singing and playing guitar in rock n’ roll and blues bands. At age 21, he adopted his mother’s maiden name, O’Bryan, as a stage name and has used it ever since.

Tony married his wife Sara in 1991 and shortly thereafter began attending part-time classes at Longview Community College. After years of night classes, he returned full-time to complete an A. A. degree in 2000, followed by a B.A. in American History in 2002 and a B.A. in Secondary Education in 2004. He is a member of Phi Theta Kappa, Alpha Sigma Lambda, and Omicron Delta Kappa scholastic honor societies. In the fall of 2011, he began work toward a Master’s in History at University of Missouri-Kansas City. At the same time, he and Sara opened their own small restaurant café near Blue Springs, Missouri called the Bean Counter Café’. The business is thriving and Tony has published articles for the Kansas City Public Library and continues his role as front man in his rock n’ roll trio, The Cowtown Playboys. Upon completion of his degree requirements, Tony intends to pursue a career in teaching, researching, and writing about local and regional history while supporting the family business and continuing to play music in the many venues of Kansas City’s vibrant nightlife.