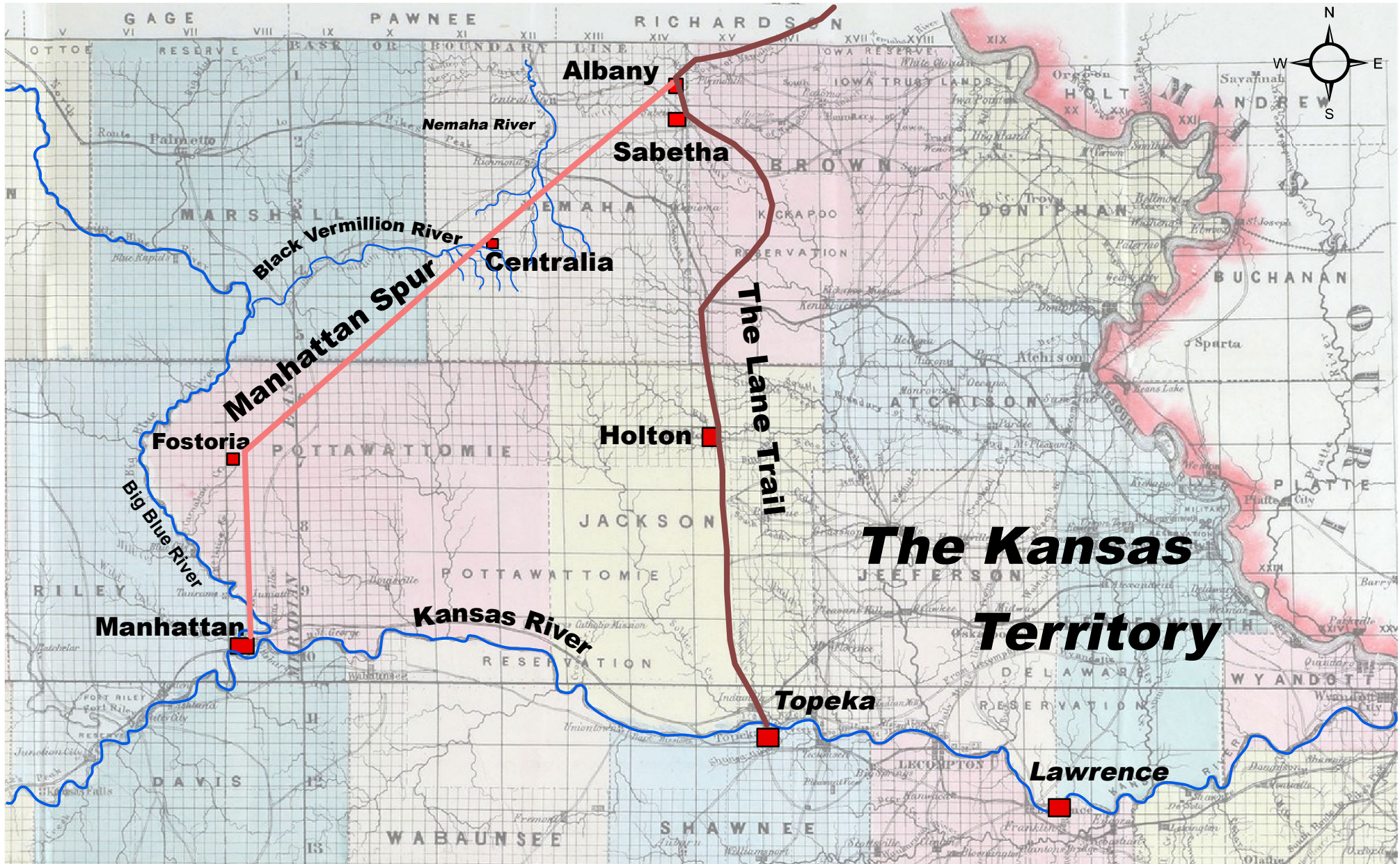


The Manhattan Spur: Tracking the Far West Route of the Underground Railroad



Points of Interest

- Towns and Cities
- Manhattan Spur
- ~ Rivers
- Lane Trail

0 Miles 30

Sources: Mitchell, David T. Mitchell's Sectional Map of Kansas [map]. 1859. 1:570,240. Kansas Memory.
 Lane Trail Brochure: National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. Prelude to the Civil War
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 Creator: Tyler Link Department of Geography

The Manhattan Spur: Tracking the Far West Route of the Underground Railroad

Overview and Research Methods of Project: Throughout the fall semester of 2014, Chapman Center intern, Jessica Hermes, compiled information regarding the Underground Railroad through Pottawatomie County and Nemaha County, Kansas. Using copies of newspaper articles, online plat maps, research at the Onaga Historical Society (Pottawatomie County), interviews with local historians, and a wide variety of online and printed essays, an estimated route of travelers heading north from the far west point of the Underground Railroad (Manhattan, Kansas) was constructed. Multiple names and locations in Manhattan and the surrounding area have been confirmed as having been involved with the Underground Railroad. Names like Captain William Mitchell, the Beecher Bible and Rifle Company, Reverend Charles Emerson Blood, and Mount Mitchell are synonymous with this branch of the Lane Trail, the basis of Underground Railroad traffic through Kansas. Because specific names and locations like these have been confirmed in Manhattan, the main goal for this project was to focus on where people went between there and the town of Albany, in Nemaha County, Kansas. Albany was recorded as the most common last stop of Underground Railroad travelers before they left the state, but not much research had been conducted on how travelers of the Manhattan Spur got to the town.

Limitations and Findings: Due to the secretive nature of the Underground Railroad, it was too risky to ever write down names, locations, times, or dates directly. This has led to generations of challenges to try and reconstruct where the passengers and conductors may have traveled on their way north. Family stories and town myths have become the basis of quite a few “facts,” which has made uncovering information both confusing and hard to accept as legitimate. In addition, the absence of any “set” course resulted in countless variations of routes, which makes confirming any one, singular route, virtually impossible due to the possibility of information overlapping. William E. Connelley, former Secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, appeared as a credible resource based on his primary research, and a map that he drew from his findings is apparently the basis of much of the information found today on the Lane Trail and its various spurs.

In the end, a 1940 newspaper clipping became the basis of this route’s formation. In the article, a story from former Vice President of Kansas State University, Julius T. Willard was referenced. The story was about a time when he accompanied his father, Julius F. Willard, as a child on a journey to bring escaped slaves from the Manhattan area to the next station, which he estimated was around Centralia, Kansas (Nemaha County). By looking at a plat map from the general time period, a route from Manhattan to Albany that reached very near Centralia is logical. From there, the following map was created to show the approximate route: heading northeast from Manhattan and ending at Albany/Sabetha, while curving very near Centralia’s original town site.

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