

THE MYSTERY BEHIND GEARY CITY, DONIPHAN COUNTY, KANSAS, 1857-1905

GEARY CITY.

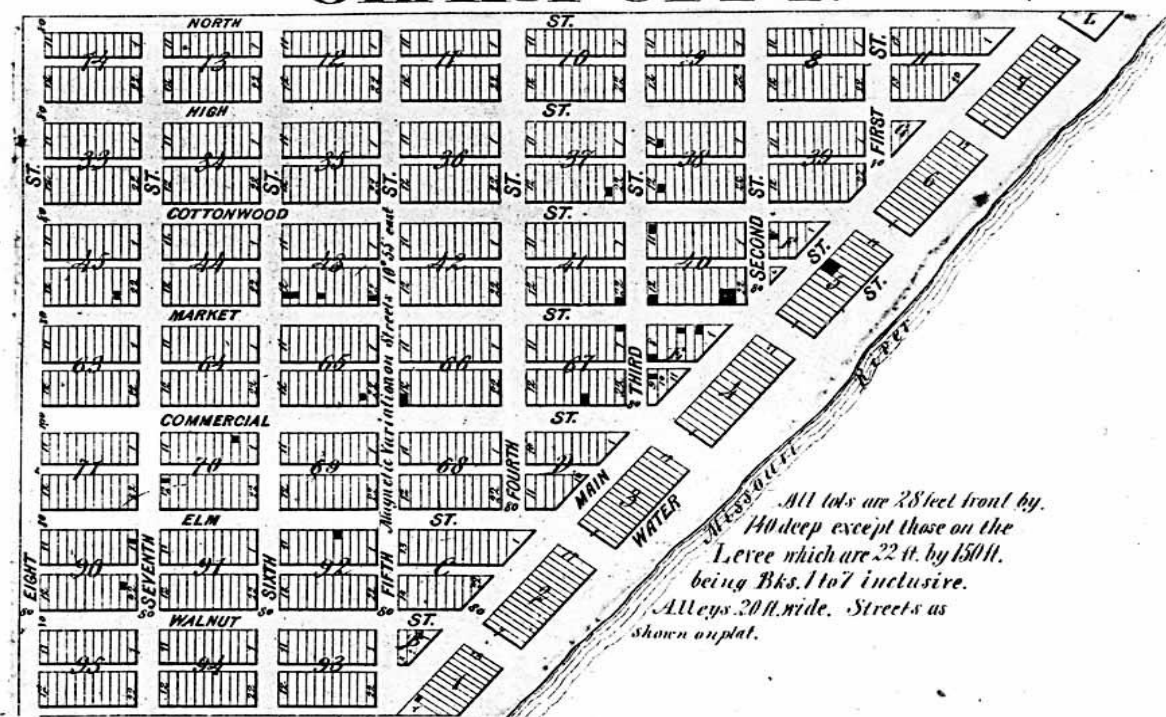


Figure 1. A plat map of Geary city, Wayne Township, Doniphan County, Kansas. Plat Book of Doniphan County 1882. Source: "Plat Map." <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com>. Accessed December 5, 2015.

http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pyle/Plat1882/DPC_Plat_Text_TOC.html.

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This project is over the river town of Geary City located in the Wayne Township of Doniphan County, Kansas. Geary City ultimately lost out because of a transportation issue resulting in the Palermo Railroad never being completed. Methods for the project include family accounts, early plat maps, photographs of Geary City town site, and newspaper articles.

Introduction: Geary City's Environment

Imagine leaving everything you know to come to the United States. At first you are unsure about traveling to the United States, but you know that it has to be better than where you are coming from. You travel along the Missouri River up to the small town of Geary City. The soil is black, you see bottom ground all around you, and as you look farther in you will see the bluffs surrounding the Missouri River; with Brush Creek running through the town. Across the river lies the town of St. Joseph, Missouri. The Civil War is about to start, causing conflict between Kansas and Missouri. Here in section 26, town 4, and range 21 in Wayne Township is where Geary City was located. This is where Geary City emerged because the people here were free-state people. At this point in time Kansas was going through the years known as Bleeding Kansas, from 1855-1861. This made it rough on the residents of Geary City because the neighboring towns of Doniphan, Kansas; and Atchison, Kansas were pro-slavery in 1857. In this study I will tell you about Geary City's early history, the rise of Geary City, and its demise.

“Human salt is as necessary to save communities as mineral salt is to save meat. The salt that has saved Wayne Township, in this County, is to be found at Geary City, where some of the truest men in the state reside. In the old days of Free States and Pro-Slavery, Geary City was the only bright spot in the Township. Still later, in the contests between Republicanism and Democracy, Geary City never faltered. And in this day of loyalty and treason, Geary City is found where she ought to be. We doubt not that Union will carry the in Wayne Township, but we fear that Wayne, like our own Township, is cursed with a large number of traitors. But Geary City is the Leaven that will Leaven the whole loaf.” *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, 24 October 1861.¹

¹*White Cloud Kansas Chief*, 24 October 1861.

Geary City's Early History

Geary City was created in the year 1857 by a group of Pennsylvanians who had been living in Leavenworth, Kansas at the time. The Pennsylvanians who settled here believed everybody was created equal and brought that ideology with them to Geary City. The man who purchased the land for Geary City was Edwin H. Grant. Dr. Grant had also helped create the towns of Hiawatha and Holton Kansas. When Dr. Grant purchased Geary City, he was carrying \$1,200 in gold to purchase the land from Calvin Lewis. In Dr. Grant's own words he said, "Prudence required that the whole trip be made in one day, for there was no tarrying place by the way, except at the border ruffian towns, Atchison and Doniphan, better known then as places where free-state men had been maltreated and robbed than for hospitality and courtesy to travelers."² Geary City was named this because at the time, Chas. T. Geary was the territorial governor of Kansas.

The town was quickly growing in 1857 and with the growth came the newspaper called *The Geary City Era*. The paper had three editors: Joseph Thompson, Earl Marble, and Dr. Grant, the man who purchased Geary City. Joseph Thompson was a Free State Democrat, Earl Marble was a Native American, and Dr. Grant was a Republican. As you can see the three men had different views on the matter. This made the paper have very different political views which sometimes caused problems among the three. *The Geary City Era* only lasted until the fall of 1858, and then Joseph Thompson moved the paper to Troy, Kansas. The paper was then named the *Troy Democrat* but again, only lasted a few weeks until Thompson moved to St. Joseph with Earl Marble to start the *Free Democrat*.

²*The Topeka Daily Capital*, 10, May 1890.

Newspapers of the day documented the violence around Geary City. “In May, 1860, at the time the news of the nomination of Lincoln was received, the Fire-Eating Democrats held a public meeting in St. Joseph.”³ The *Weekly Kansas Chief* wrote about this account happening some eighteen years after the incident. At that time, the Fire-Eating Democrats found Joseph Thompson and Earl Marble out in the street in St. Joseph, Missouri, during this public meeting and beat Mr. Thompson to death. Earl Marble had long locks that he was known for and prided himself by; the Fire-Eaters Democrats cut his locks off but let him go afterwards. This outraged the people of Geary City because these men stood for freedom of all men and that is ultimately what Geary City stood for.

Another man who helped to found Geary City was Jerimiah Roundy, living in Madison, Wisconsin before the founding. Jerimiah, his wife Mary Ann, and their two children Collis Boles and Minetta came to Kansas by the steamer “Polar Star.” The steamer traveled down the Mississippi River and then up the Missouri River to Leavenworth, Kansas. Here Dr. Grant, Jerimiah Roundy, and thirty- eight other people decided to found Geary City. When Jerimiah arrived in Geary City in 1857, he created a furniture store and later carried general merchandise in his store. Then as the next few years went by. Jerimiah became the post master of Geary City on July 22, 1857. Seven years after arriving in Kansas, Jerimiah Roundy died of pneumonia. Before he passed away, Jerimiah and Mary had another son named Ulysses Sidney Grant Roundy, born in Geary City in 1864. If you look at Figure 2 below, you will see Mary Roundy’s old house. Geary City was quickly growing into a sizable town in the early 1860’s. The population was increasing fast, but it brought into town during the Civil War men known as bushwhackers.

³The *Weekly Kansas Chief*, June 13, 1878.

The Roundy family history records events involving the Roundy family and bushwhackers. “Mary Ann after her husband passed away became almost legendary for her wit and expediency in emergencies.”⁴ In the year 1865 the bushwhackers in a drunken stumble rushed into Mary’s store and were trying to steal all the money out of it. Mary heard them shouting outside so she grabbed the heavy money-bag and put it under her oldest son Collis Boles’ armpit. After this, she whispered to her son to “act frightened.” Then the ruffians burst through the door and rushed past both of them to loot the store, but they never found the money. That day Collis became a hero to the town because the store was needed to survive.



Figure 2. A photograph of Mary Ann Roundy’s house. A fire destroyed it in 1884 and then it was rebuilt to what it now looks like. Located to the north side of Geary City. Source: Photo taken by the author, Dec. 15, 2015.

⁴ Everett Ellsworth Roundy, *The Roundy Family in America, from the Sixteen-hundreds*, 1942, pp. 318-321.

The Booming of Geary City, the Hey Day

As Geary City grew, the businesses followed behind the growth. Geary City quickly acquired a doctor by the name of Dr. Franklin Grube. Dr. Grube by this time had already traveled extensively in both Europe and Africa.⁵ Robert J. Porter was the sheriff, and he also was part of the convention that created the state constitution. George D. Johnson was the first blacksmith in Geary City. Another man that came here was James McCahon. McCahon was the first lawyer at Geary City, and later became the district judge at Leavenworth. James McCahon was considered one of the ablest lawyers in the whole state. Another business that helped to bring fame to Geary City was a flour mill. Jonothan A. Rigby established the flour mill in which he sold flour to the markets of St. Joseph, Missouri; and to Leavenworth and Atchison, Kansas. The flour mill was only opened for a year but in that year it had become locally famous making everyone want some of the flour that came from Geary City. Rigby hauled all of his flour to market by six yoke of oxen. After the death of Mary Ann's husband Jerimiah Roundy, Mary Ann became the post mistress at the post office and held the position for 37 years.⁶ Along with this, Mary Ann still ran Jerimiah's furniture store. Her son Collis B. Roundy taught at the Brush Creek School House later in his life, farmed, and owned a general store in Geary City. In Figure 3 below you will see a photograph of a general store Collis Roundy also owned and operated in Doniphan. The Brush Creek School House was built in 1871 at the cost \$2,350, had two rooms, an upper and a lower, and held as many as 150 pupils. The Brush Creek Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1871. The first pastor at this church was Rev. John Cook.

⁵ "Home – Kansas Historical Society." Home – Kansas Historical Society. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://www.kshs.org/>. Geary City history.

⁶ *The Weekly Kansas Chief*, Illustrated Doniphan County 1837-1916, 1917, pp. 125, 207; Roundy, *The Roundy Family in America*, 320-321.

Even a deal to build a railroad known as the Palermo Railroad was made in 1859 and started in 1870. The first task was to make a road for the tracks which were to run from Wathena to Doniphan. This was called the Bob-Tail Road. Then the track was laid down along the road. As you can imagine the town was flourishing or so it seemed to be for a short period of time.



Figure 3. A photograph of Collis B. Roundy's General Store in Doniphan. Source: The Weekly Kansas Chief. Illustrated Doniphan County 1837-1916 [1917].

The Demise of Geary City

If you looked at only the information above, what happened to Geary City would most likely come as a mystery to you. I'm now going to fill in the blanks that were left out so you could get a better feeling for the town. The factors that led to the demise of Geary City, Kansas included fate/timing, location, competition from other towns, transportation problems, and out migration. The first factor that caused the demise of Geary City was fate/timing. Geary City was founded in 1857 which just so happened to be the year of the Panic of 1857. The Panic of 1857

was the first worldwide economic crisis. The people who moved to Geary City that year went broke and couldn't afford to stay in the new town. Most of the first citizens had packed their belongings and moved by 1861. In an article titled, "Sheriff's sale," *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, March 1, 1866, the writer tells of not just one family but two who couldn't afford to pay taxes on their property. E. G. Crabb, the sheriff of Doniphan County, wrote in the paper that he would be selling their houses on the sixth day of March, 1866. Crabb also wrote it would be a public auction with cash in hand to buy said property.⁷ This showed that people just couldn't afford to live at Geary City at this point in time.

The second factor to affect Geary City was the location. The town was founded next to the Missouri river which was good for trade, but bad because it was next to Missouri. Border ruffians crossed over to steal from towns and kill people along the Missouri River on the Kansas side. This is also partly due to fate/timing, because at the time of Geary City's founding, Bleeding Kansas was happening. Then after Bleeding Kansas came the Civil War until 1865. Competition with neighboring towns of Doniphan and Atchison, Kansas, and St. Joseph, Missouri also played a role in the demise of Geary City. While Geary City was trying to grow, these towns were taking business away. Geary City was just starting and couldn't compete with the older towns nearby. However, the little town kept fighting an inevitable battle. Then the most important factor of them all affected Geary City: transportation. Geary City was holding on for the long awaited Palermo Railroad to be built through it. In 1874, the track being built was abandoned because of the investors quarrelling with each other. Shortly after, the track was removed from the Bob-Tail Road and the hopes and dreams of Geary City left with those tracks.

⁷*White Cloud Kansas Chief*, March 1, 1866.

The town survived until 1905, but almost everyone left when the tracks were lifted up and very few residents stuck around any longer. The last factor to play a role in Geary City was mass migration. This happened to Geary City in the beginning of 1857 and the town grew very fast, but in the end, out migration played a role. The people of Geary City moved farther west.

The Free-State town of Geary City that once looked as though it might be the next great town of Kansas ended up failing. Although Geary City ultimately died away, it was a savior to Kansas. Geary City stood its ground against the border ruffians of Missouri and helped turn the town of Atchison, Kansas into a free-state town. It could be speculated that without Geary City being the firm guard for Kansas that even the great state of Kansas may have fallen to the pro-slavery men of Missouri. Take a moment to let that sink in and think of the outcome that would have happened in the Civil War had these brave men at Geary City not held the Missourians off. Look at Figure 4 below and you will see what the old town of Geary City looks like today. The road at the bottom of the photo would have led into Commercial Street. Today, Geary City town site is on land still held by descendants of the Roundy family, who honor its history.



Figure 4. A photograph of the old town site of Geary City, as seen from a hill to the west looking down on the town. Geary City would have been located along the Missouri River in the bottoms as seen in the photo. Photo taken by the author, December 15, 2015.

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