

A FLASH IN THE PAN WITH A LASTING LEGACY

BEREA, KANSAS



HISTORY 586: HISTORY SEMINAR
PROFESSOR: BONNIE LYNN-SHEROW

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Just three miles east of Richmond, Kansas, in the southwest corner of Franklin County, lies a cemetery, a cemetery containing weathered tombstones barely legible as recently as a few years ago. This cemetery is almost all that remains of a short lived town called Berea.

Geographically, Berea was located at Latitude: N 38° 23' 56.8463" and Longitude: W 95° 10' 51.2833. Although the life of Berea as a town was short lived, the people and institutions established in the community over the years have made the legacy of Berea continue.

Sometime in 1855, a man named Reverend James N. Smith, a Presbyterian pastor from Portersville, Pennsylvania, arrived in the Kansas Territory with the idea of establishing a Presbyterian colony. In an article entitled "Berean Colony" that appeared in the *Herald of*



Figure 1 Map of Franklin County, with Berea outlined. Unknown Date. SOURCE: Franklin County Historical Society.

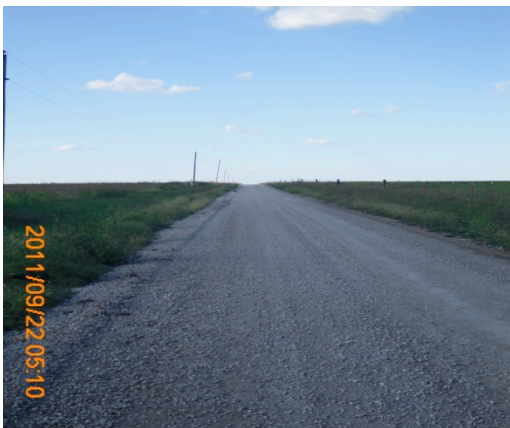
Freedom, a newspaper out of Lawrence,, the mission statement colony was laid out: "The undersigned, desirous of moving west, that they may enjoy some of the advantages afforded by cheap land and rich soil, and at the same time desiring to enjoy religious privileges, and good society- and believing that these may be better served by a colonial system, do agree to the following rules and regulations, for the forming of a colony to emigrate to the Territory of

Kansas to be known by the name of the Berean Colony."¹ In that same article a list of rules was given for the basic nuts and bolts to the colony. Rule one stated that, "This company shall consist of members of the Associate, Associate Reformed, and Reformed Presbyterian churches,

¹ "Berean Colony " 1855

and their families and such others as will fall in with, and support reformation principles.”² Rule seven gave insight on how, financially, their church would get up and running: “A village shall be laid out at the center of the plot, upon the 40 acres lots, bought as church property. The proceeds of the lots, when sold, are to be applied to the building of a church, as the congregation shall direct, the balance of the land to remain in the hands of the congregation as church property.”³ The final rule established who was to be the religious leader of the colony: “Each member binds himself or herself to support the gospel, in the colony, and do hereby call James N. Smith, V.D.M. to accompany the colony, and take charge of the congregation as pastor.”⁴

In 1857 Rev. J.N. Smith arrived in Berea with his family from Portersville, Pennsylvania, and established residency. In 1858, the town was laid out. According to Dennis Peters, historian at the Richmond Museum, “The town was one half mile wide (east to west) and three quarters of a mile long (north to south). From the intersection of Butler Road and Ohio Terrace the town



went one quarter mile east and one quarter mile west and one quarter mile north and one half mile south. What is now known as Ohio Terrace was the main street of Berea. The Berea Cemetery was on the southwest edge of town.”⁵ In February of 1858, a church was organized under the name of “Berea” and the congregation’s first house of worship was in

Figure 2 View of Main Street of Berea, taken from south edge of town by the cemetery entrance. Modern day road name, Ohio Terrace. SOURCE: Photo taken by author.

³ "Berean Colony " 1855

⁴ "Berean Colony " 1855

⁵ Dennis Peters, (Topic of Berea, KS), interview by Laine Raitinger, Richmond Museum, Richmond Kansas Record, September 22, 2011.

a log cabin at the center of town, constructed from native lumber.⁶ A larger and better framed building took its place in 1870 with lumber that was bought in Lawrence at a cost of \$1400 dollars.⁷ In May of 1858, the United Presbyterian Church of North America was established with the merger of the Associate Presbyterian and Associate Presbyterian Churches of North America, making the Berean congregation the first United Presbyterian congregation west of the Mississippi.⁸

In 1861, the congregation wanted a church building built. In the summer of 1861, there was a devastating drought that led to crop failures. An editorial was written for the *Ottawa Herald* on March 2, 1933 by T.B. Kelsey, who in lived in Berea at the time of the crop failure. It was the time of the Great Depression, and the editor of the *Ottawa Herald* asked Kelsey to write a piece, “Real Hard Times”. Kelsey wrote how the Rev.

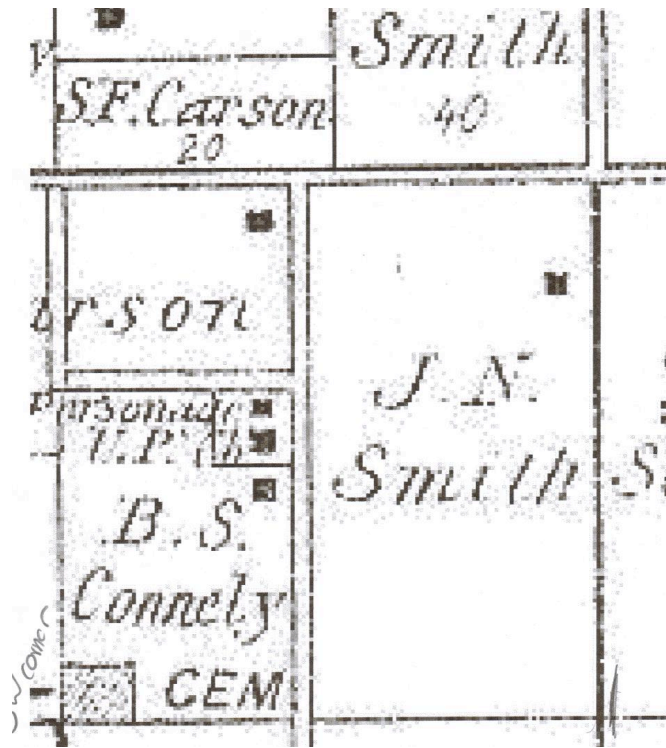


Figure 3 Basic Outline of Berea. The Main Street ran north to south, what is now Ohio Terrace. The road running east to west is today's Butler Road. The SW corner of the town was marked by the cemetery. SOURCE: Dennis Peters/

J.N. Smith used the drought to the advantage of the church project: “Early in that summer before the crop failure was in sight, and Berea United Presbyterian Church had decided to erect a

⁶ Rebstock, History of Richmond and Richmond Township, 1937

⁷ Rebstock, History of Richmond and Richmond Township, 1937

⁸ Dennis Peters, (Topic of Berea, KS), interview by Laine Raitinger, Richmond Museum, Richmond Kansas Record, September 22, 2011.

church building of stone depending principally on the labor of the members and friends of the cause. When the famine became evident most of the single men of the community went elsewhere in search of jobs. Instead of getting scared and backing down, as most men would have done, the pastor, Rev. J.N. Smith determined to use the calamity in helping to build the church. Advertising the plans to the church and making a personal tour of churches in other states, he asked for donations of food and clothing to be sent to supply the needy of the community, most of whom were members of the church, to be paid for in labor on the church building.”⁹ They were successful.

By now Berea was starting to look like a small town. A school house was built in 1861. Berea was on the stage coach route between Garnett and Kansas City. “In 1863, a post office was built on the south side of the Carson farm. . . ., the mail was carried by horseback to Berea from Scipio by Frank Carson, Boss Kelsey, and others.”¹⁰ Berea was also a help to runaway slaves during the Civil War, serving as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Elsie Gault recalls a story where a Mr. Frank Carson told her on a visit that he had helped hide slaves. She writes, “Mr. Frank Carson, with his parents and brothers and sisters arrived in Kansas September 22, 1857. On his eighteenth birthday my daughters and I went to his home to call on him and his daughter Jessie. Mr. Carson had served in the War between the States and was glad to tell us some of his experiences and show us some of his mementos of the war. Such as the buttons from his uniform, his G.A.R. badge, etc. One of the stories he told concerned the Underground Railway. The family had settled in the Berea neighborhood, their house being on the road

⁹ Kelsey, 1933

¹⁰ The History of Richmond, KS, (Richmond, Ks 66080: The Richmond Library, 2003), p.18.

running north from the Berea school house about a mile beyond what we know as the Ed Perkins farm but on the east side of the road. Before the churches were built, Sabbath services were held in the homes. Saturday night—when the Carsons were preparing to have church service at their home the next day, some were bringing two Negro slaves to their home, which was one of the underground railway stations. It may have been cold weather so they couldn't put these men out in the barn loft, as Mr. Carson had done before when twelve slaves were brought to them just the night before the Carsons were to have a big butchering at their farm. The (twelve) men were exhausted and in need of rest, so they were put in the barn loft where they slept and rested all the next day while the butchering went on and no one was the wiser. Mrs. Carson was a resourceful person. In those days it was common to have a curtain or flounce around a bed which reached to the floors, so Mrs. Carson decided she could hide these two new slaves under the bed before the church people arrived and that they could slip plates of food under the curtain to them. This they did and Mr. Carson finished his story by saying, "If those darkies never heard another sermon they sure heard a good one that day. I [Frank Carson] was about nine years old and when darkness came I was sent to take these two slaves on to the station."¹¹

After the Civil War, Berea came to the aid of former slaves through the establishment of another church. According to Philip R. Beard, author of an article entitled, "The Kansas Colored Literary and Business Academy", which appeared in the *Kansas History Journal of the Central Plains*, "The Associate Presbyterian Church had originated in 1733 in Scotland, amid bitter religious and political strife. At the time the Scottish government exercised control of one national church through the practice of patronage, which gave large landowners the right to

¹¹ Gault, Notes by, around 1930

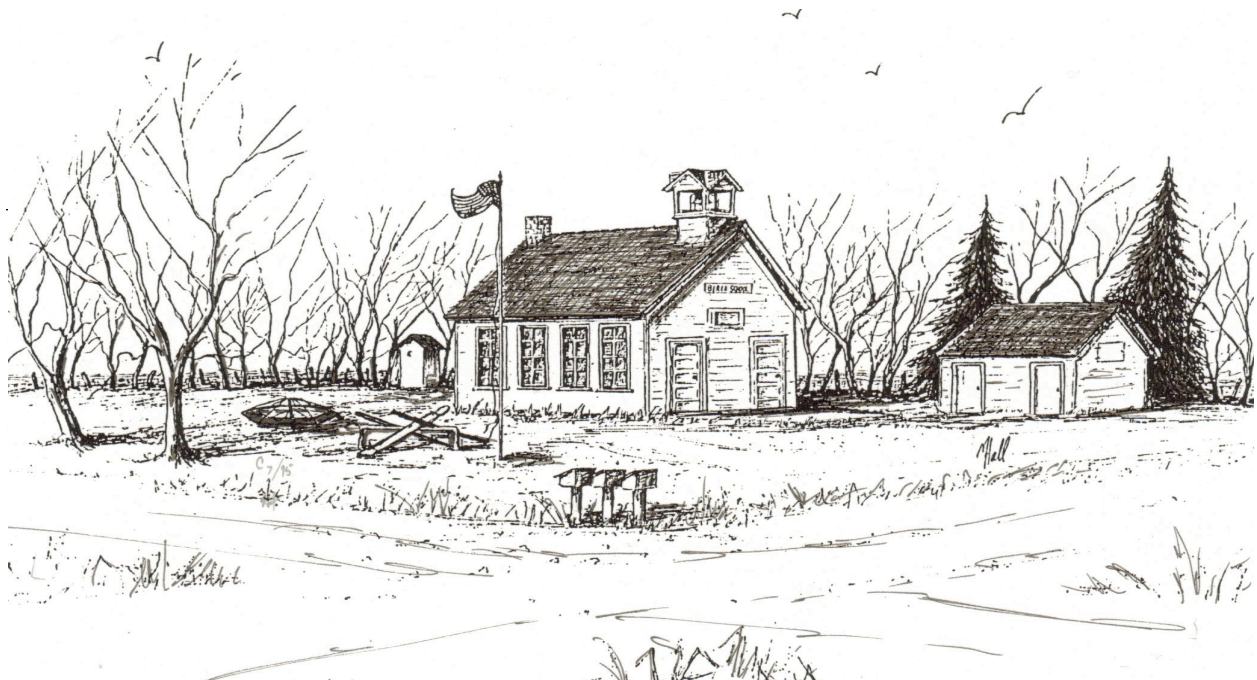
appoint pastors to congregations. When one pastor spoke out against this practice, he was dismissed from his position. He and several other pastors then withdrew from the church. Henceforth they were named "Seceders."¹² The Associate Presbyterians or Seceders established the Associate Presbyterian Church of Berea in 1867. The congregation took the name of "Bethel" and a church was built in 1871. Berea's way of aiding former slaves was through their connection to the Dunlap Academy and Mission school. This was a school for the education of African Americans in Dunlap, Kansas. Beard writes in his article that, "The first congregation of the continuing Associate Presbyterian Church to be established in Kansas after 1858 was the Bethel congregation, organized in 1867 near Richmond in Franklin County. In early 1880, the pastor of Bethel, Rev. Robert Boyd, visited two small groups of Associate Presbyterians who had settled in north-central Kansas. Accompanied by Andrew Atchison, a member of the congregation of Bethel, Boyd also visited a colony of about 125 Exodusters who had been settled in Wabaunsee County."¹³ After graduation from the state university in Lawrence, Atchison taught in Berea before moving to Dunlap. While there, Atchison taught, became principle, and was the main fundraiser/developmental leader of the Dunlap Academy and Mission school. The congregation of Bethel had a handful of pastors from 1867 to 1877, and then Rev. Boyd became pastor for 22 years, resigning in 1900. In 1930 the church disbanded and in 1944, the building was sold and moved to the United Brethren Church, later to become the United Methodist Church in Greeley, Kansas. Today it still stands and is used as their church hall.

¹² Philip Beard, "The Kansas Colored Literary and Business Academy: A White Effort at African American Education in Late-Nineteenth-Century Kansas," *Kansas History Journal of the central Plains*, 24, no. 3 (2001): pp. 202-203.

¹³ Philip Beard, "The Kansas Colored Literary and Business Academy: A White Effort at African American Education in Late-Nineteenth-Century Kansas," *Kansas History Journal of the central Plains*, 24, no. 3 (2001): pp. 202-203.

Around 1870, Berea consisted of two churches, a store built by the town company, a school house and a half dozen scattered houses. In 1870, when the Santa Fe Railroad came through three miles to the west of Berea, a town was established there called Richmond. That same year the post office was moved to Richmond, ending Berea's hopes, but the church community still remained.¹⁴ In 1866 Rev. J.N. Smith became a halftime minister serving Berea and the Garnett United Presbyterian congregations. In Oct 1869, after 11 years of service, he resigned from Berea and became the full time pastor at Garnett.¹⁵ In 1888, after thirty years of existence, the United Presbyterian Church of Berea disbanded and most of its members joined the United Presbyterian church of Richmond.¹⁶

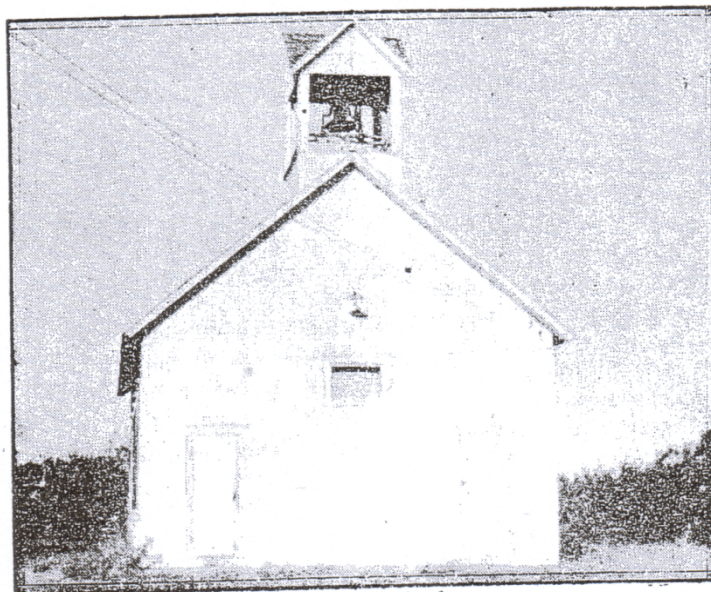
While the town and churches of Berea faded away, Berea lived on through School District no. 22 and then eventually the local 4-H club. The school itself had jumped around the Berea area for several decades, until 1909 when the last school house was built on the Northwest intersection of Butler and Ohio Rd. On Friday, January 6, 1922, Berea school district celebrated its 60th anniversary. Patrons of the school gathered for the event and T.B. Kelsey, the first hired



teacher for the school, presided and told the history of the district.¹⁷ Three of the last handful who attended Berea school, before it was shutdown, was Robert, who graduated from the school,

Figure 4 Inking print of Berea School house at the Intersection of Butler Road and Ohio Road.
SOURCE: Inking done by Mary Hall, artist in Richmond Kansas, obtained from Joan Rockers

Coleen, who completed grades 1-7, and Joan Lickteig, who completed grades 1-4. Recalling her time there, Joan Lickteig describes what it was like attending Berea school: “We walked to school. Back then there was a country school every two miles. We only lived about a mile and a quarter away. It was a one room school house, with a cloak room, and a library of story books. There were black boards and a picture of George Washington. There was a big yard that we played in, softball, baseball, fox and geese, really whatever. When I was in first grade, that teacher was so grouchy and she had a paddle that was I bet 18 to 20 inches long and had holes drilled in it and she paddled a boy, who no more than looked around. As she was paddling him, I



was so scared that I sat there and cried and then I was scared I was going to get paddled for crying. Her name was Astrid Seiler. Her husband ran the milk route and he was the nicest guy, but boy was she a grouch! For 3rd and 4th grade I had Pearl Welsh as a teacher. Once a month they would have evening community meetings and it

was a potluck supper and we kids would put on a skit to entertain. In the spring and summer

¹⁷ "Berea Reunion" 1922

they would make homemade ice cream at the meetings -- my mom wasn't so happy because she had to cook."¹⁸ In 1946 Berea school was closed with the last teacher being Pearl Welsh. In 1950, the school board voted to dissolve the school district and hand it over to community organizations like the 4-H Club. In an excerpt from their first meetings minutes, we see how the name of Berea lived on: "A group of children and their parents met at the Berea schoolhouse March 8, 1944, to organize a 4-H club. It was voted to name the club "Berea Boosters" 4-H club. It was voted to hold meetings the first Wednesday of each month at the Berea schoolhouse."¹⁹ The Berea Boosters 4-H club still exists today, representing Richmond in the list of 4-H clubs in Franklin County. While the town may have been here one minute and gone the next, its legacy continues.

¹⁸ Joan Rockers, (Time attending Berea School), interview by Laine Raitinger, Richmond, Ks Record, September 21, 2011

¹⁹ The History of Richmond, KS, (Richmond, Ks 66080: The Richmond Library, 2003), p.32

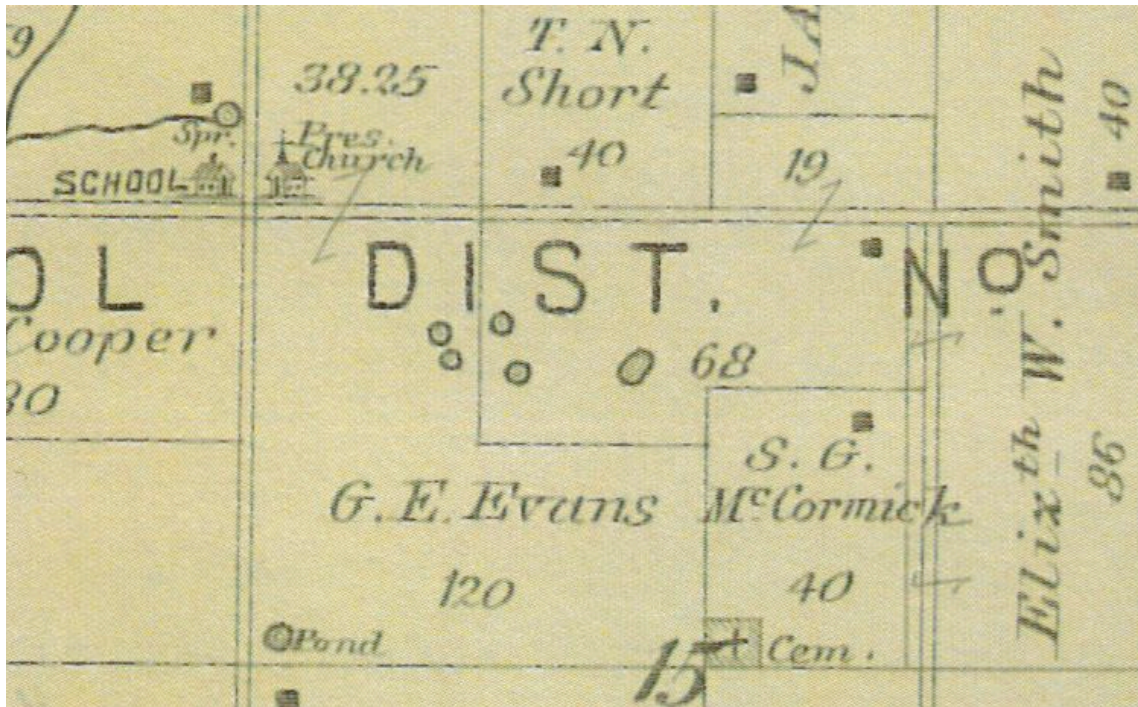


Figure 6 Plat book image from early 1900s. Upper left corner of image shows the School house right across from the Associate Pres. Church that was later moved to Greeley, KS.



Figure 7 Berea Cemetery SOURCE: Photo taken by Author.



Figure 8 Intersection of Butler and Ohio Road, location of Associate Pres. Church before it was moved.



A special Thanks is extended to Joan Rockers and the Franklin Country Historical Society for all of their help. A very Special Thanks is extended towards Dennis Peters of Richmond, Kansas,

who has done more extensive and in-depth research on the town of Berea. For more information, records, and a more detailed story of Berea, I highly recommend contacting him.

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