

Hidden in Plain Sight:
Aubry, Johnson County, Kansas
1858-1888



Figure 1. A photograph of a Highway exit sign to Stilwell and Aubry townships in Johnson County Kansas, located on current day 69 Highway just north of the southbound exit to W 199 Street. March 21, 2015, Photograph by Author.

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While it may be overlooked today, Aubry, Kansas, played a key role in the Civil War and the history of the Kansas but was out-competed by the nearby town of Stilwell. This study includes newspaper articles, online sources, maps of Kansas and quotes from research done in the area.

On the surface, Aubry, Kansas, is just another lost town — another community that started in the mid to late 1800s but failed to become prosperous. Most people believe that these towns didn't contribute much to society and that nothing interesting happened. While this may be the stereotype for many small Kansas places, it's far from the truth for Aubry in southeastern Johnson County. Today, the old village of Aubry is located — actually buried — beneath the Overland Park city expansion between present day Metcalf Avenue and 69 Highway and W 199 Street and W 194 Street. While lying today beneath concrete streets and highways, Aubry has had an enormous historical impact through its connections to the Civil War, the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company, and Stilwell, Kansas. My goal in this research project is to preserve and further the knowledge of this town hiding in plain sight.

The first man to purchase land in Aubry, 1858, was a farmer named William H. Brady. Brady came to eastern Kansas from Kentucky and was extensively involved in the development of Aubry as a town. The new community quickly grew as settlers traveled along the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails through Kansas.¹ Aubry was named after F. X. Aubry, a famous Santa Fe trader who was known for riding his horse from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Independence, Missouri; upon his arrival, he fell off his horse and did not regain consciousness for three days. This event gave him fame, and places were named for him.² Within months of the eastern Kansas community being established, a school was built in the summer of 1858. Building a school was a top priority of the

¹ Anita Tebbe, *The Community of Aubry-Stilwell* (Overland Park, Kansas: Johnson County Community College, 1980) p. 17.

² Tebbe, p. 21.

settlers and the building served as the school, church, and social center until those buildings were built the following year.³



Figure 2. A photograph of a Historical Marker indicating that the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails both passed through this area in Johnson County Kansas, located on the southwest corner of present day 151 Street and Antioch Road at Blue Valley Baptist Church. Marker donated by the Optimist Club of Blue Valley in cooperation with Blue Valley Community Council and the Historical Society of Blue Valley. March 21, 2015, photograph by Author.

Aubry's first historical impact was in the relationship between Aubry and the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. Both trails passed through Kansas City, Missouri and once they cut across the border between Missouri and Kansas, they angled south in order to bring travelers and settlers to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The first county that these trails entered in Kansas was Johnson County, located directly south of Kansas City. The trails' routes wound through present day Overland Park, Kansas and eventually, Aubry, Kansas. The image of the historical sign above illustrates how the development and growth of the trails impacted Kansas.

Not only did the Santa Fe and Oregon trails go through Aubry and Johnson County, but a military road also passed through. What is now known as Metcalf Avenue

³ Tebbe, p. 23.

was in fact this military road connecting Fort Leavenworth (in northern Kansas) to Fort Scott (in southern Kansas).

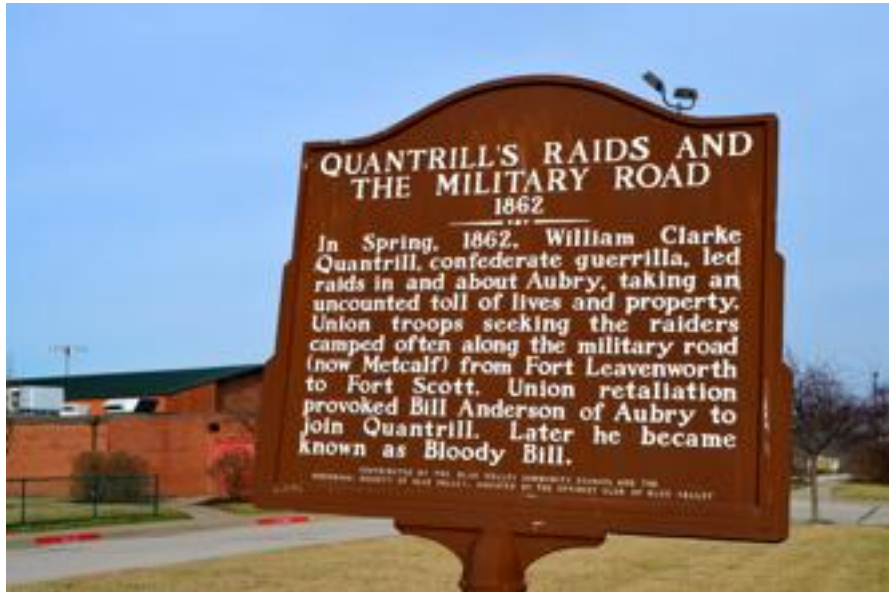


Figure 3. A photograph of a Historical Marker indicating that the William Quantrill raided Aubry in Johnson County Kansas, located on the north side of present day 199 Street and Lamar Avenue at Stilwell Elementary School. Marker donated by the Optimist Club of Blue Valley in cooperation with Blue Valley Community Council and the Historical Society of Blue Valley. March 21, 2015, photograph by Author.

The town of Aubry had a tough start that may have contributed in part to its short existence. Just three years after its official formation, the border war broke out and Aubry was the first town across the border.⁴ In the late 1850s pro-slavery fighters from Missouri would cross into Kansas to kill citizens and attack towns of anyone supporting freedom for slaves. As the sign above states, one of the most notorious Confederates was William Quantrill. He and his men traveled up the Military Road and raided Aubry and the surrounding towns multiple times throughout the 1860s. Although Aubry was originally

⁴ *Aubry Cemetery Union*. (Johnson County, Kansas: The Heritage Trust Fund, 2010).

regarded as a very peaceful town settled by “an excellent class of people,” the perception of the town quickly changed as the disputes began between the Border Ruffians and Free Soilers.⁵

As the map at right shows, Quantrill’s routes passed directly through Aubry, Kansas. And Quantrill did not just raid Aubry once; he repeatedly attacked it and terrorized the residents. Aubry was considered a “battle ground” by many of the people who called it home. It was also not safe for the residents to express their opinions as to whether Kansas should be a free state or a slave state.⁶ The two newspaper clippings below from the *Olathe Mirror* explain the raids.⁷



Figure 4. A map of William Quantrill’s routes during his raids on eastern Kansas throughout the 1860s indicating that Quantrill went through Aubry, Kansas. SOURCE: *Historical Atlas of Kansas* p. 28.

⁵ Ed Blair, *History of Johnson County, Kansas* (Lawrence, Kansas: Standard Publishing Company, 1915) p. 168.

⁶ Blair, p. 168.

⁷ *The Olathe Mirror*, March 20, 1862 and *The Olathe Mirror*, June 9, 1904.

THE BORDER COUNTIES.
 Quantrill's band murdered four men in Aubry, drove off horses and destroyed private property. A detachment of Captain Greelish's company was attacked by him, but finally defeated with the loss of two men killed. When Gardner was attacked and pillaged, the commander of the Department of Kansas, sent a company of men there to protect it; when Aubry was attacked by Quantrill, four of its citizens murdered and a large quantity of private property destroyed.

—Kansas has again been invaded by rebel vandals, and Johnson county made the scene of rebel barbarity. On Tuesday the 31st ult., a party of nine bushwhackers, under the notorious and blood-thirsty guerilla chief, Vaugn, entered the town of Aubry, in this county, assaulted the house of Dr. S. B. Bell, took him prisoner, robbed him, and after the most barbarous treatment of his person, set fire to his house and burned it to the ground. Mr. Lusher was also robbed, and his dwelling burned. Information was received

Figures 5 and 6. Newspaper clippings from the *Olathe Mirror* in regards to the raids on Kansas by Quantrill and his men. Figure 5 (Left) is from 1862 while Figure 6 (Right) is a June 9, 1904 reprint of an 1864 article.

The most well known attack on Kansas's soil occurred during the Civil War, when William Quantrill and his men crossed into Kansas from Missouri late at night and burned down Lawrence. However, what often goes unmentioned in history is the fact that this infamous event could have been prevented. The night of the attacks on Lawrence, August 21, 1863, Quantrill and his men stopped in Aubry. An Aubry resident, 80-year-old Mr. Treble saw them assembling on his farm and warned others of the impending raid. He even told people in command and of power in Aubry of the planned attack; however, the warning was ignored and Quantrill raided Lawrence, killing over 200 people. Some of Quantrill's men found out that Treble had warned people of the raid and they eventually killed him.⁸ Treble wasn't the only Aubry citizen to be killed or threatened by Quantrill and his men; Union sympathizer Dr. S. Bell had his house surrounded. Numerous fights occurred over the years between Quantrill's men and the people of Aubry, resulting in a lot of property damage.⁹ During one of his first raids on

⁸ Tebbe, p. 67.

⁹ Blair, p. 172.

Aubry, Quantrill and his men had a brief exchange of gunfire with some citizens of Aubry. In the end, three residents had been killed. The people of Aubry ended up burying the three men under three cedar trees located off of current day southwest corner of 191st street and Metcalf Avenue. Because the men were buried there, this area became the Aubry Cemetery. The ages of the people buried at Aubry Cemetery range from 3 to 100 years old and while many stones are old and show signs of neglect, the cemetery is maintained with great care today.¹⁰

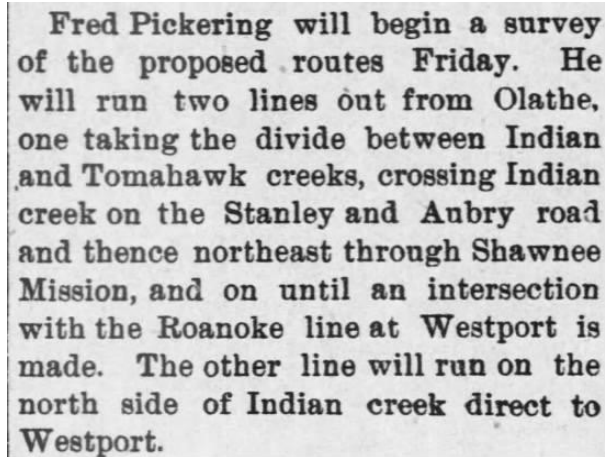


Figure 7. A photograph of the three cedar trees in Aubry Cemetery in southern Johnson County Kansas, located between current day 69 Highway and Metcalf Ave and South of W 191 Street. March 21, 2015, photograph by author.

After the Civil War, Aubry's expansion paralleled the expansion of railroads across the nation. One of the goals of the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company was to build a track from Kansas City to the South. The original plan was to build this track

¹⁰ *Aubry Cemetery Union*. (Johnson County, Kansas: The Heritage Trust Fund, 2010).

through Aubry, Kansas. Even the local newspaper, *The Olathe Mirror*, documented the proposed route!¹¹



Fred Pickering will begin a survey of the proposed routes Friday. He will run two lines out from Olathe, one taking the divide between Indian and Tomahawk creeks, crossing Indian creek on the Stanley and Aubry road and thence northeast through Shawnee Mission, and on until an intersection with the Roanoke line at Westport is made. The other line will run on the north side of Indian creek direct to Westport.

Figure 8. A newspaper clipping from *The Olathe Mirror* describing the intentions to build a railway line through Aubry, Kansas. Article from November 27, 1902.

As the article specifically stated, the route would travel through Aubry via Aubry Road. Having a railroad through the town would have cemented its future. However, the plan to build tracks through Aubry was halted when the surveyors ran into hills to the north of the town. Located along and to the west of present day Mission Road, these hills created a problem for the railroad company. In order to accomplish their goal of building railroad tracks that passed over land to the south of Kansas City, the Missouri Pacific Railroad company ended up building the tracks a half a mile east of Aubry in what would eventually become Stilwell, Kansas.¹²

¹¹ *The Olathe Mirror*, November 27, 1902.

¹²



Figures 9 and 10. Two photographs of hilly roads in Southeastern Johnson County, Kansas, These hills and roads are located northeast of Aubry, Kansas, off present day Mission Road and West 171st Street. March 21, 2015, photographs by Author.

With the arrival of the railroad in southeastern Johnson County came the birth of Aubry’s rival town, Stilwell. This town was built near the Missouri Pacific Railroad in Aubry Township about one half mile east of “Old Aubry,” and the plat for the town was filled on November 30th 1886.¹³ The establishment of Stilwell was not meant to take over Aubry; there were many factors that led to people choosing Stilwell over Aubry when deciding where to live. As stated earlier, there was a lot of violence in Aubry. After the war, being able to move to a new town and have a fresh start was appealing to many residents. With the platting of Stilwell, the owners of the Aubry general store moved it from Aubry to the new “downtown area” of Stilwell.¹⁴ Aubry and Stilwell were so close together that people found it easy to relocate just a half mile east.

¹³ Blair, p. 173

¹⁴ Tebbe, p. 75

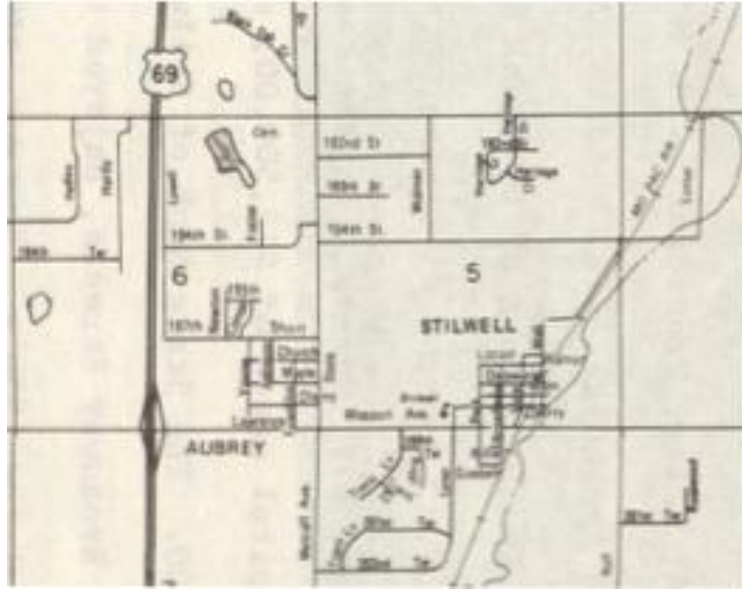


Figure 11. A map of Aubrey and Stilwell in Johnson County, Kansas when they were first being settled in the mid/late 1880s. They are located off of present day 69 highway and 199th Street. The two towns are less than a mile away from each other. The map includes the Missouri Pacific Railway going through Stilwell, Kansas. SOURCE: *The Historical Atlas of Kansas* p. 20.

On June 22, 1888, Stilwell, Kansas, officially established a post office. This was a sign that they were growing exponentially fast. Within two months, on August 20, 1888 the post office in Aubrey was officially abandoned.¹⁵

With the post office and general store relocated to Stilwell, in addition to the bloody history of Aubrey, it seemed natural for people to want to leave. Today Aubrey is considered an unincorporated town. It still exists and can be located on maps; however, it has essentially merged with Stilwell, Kansas, and much of old Aubrey is covered by the streets and highways of Overland Park, Kansas. Today there are few structures that remain from the late 1800s. There used to be a school located off 198th street and Floyd; however, currently the space is a private residence.

¹⁵ Andreas, A. T. *History of the State of Kansas*. (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883) p. 645.



Figure 12. A photograph of Aubry Rural School, the first schoolhouse in Aubry. Located off of present Floyd and 198th Street. SOURCE: *The Community of Aubry-Stilwell* by Anita Tebbe, p. 23



Figure 13. A photo of a house off the intersection of present day Floyd and 198th Street in Aubry, Kansas, where the Aubry Rural School used to be. March 21, 2015, photograph by author.

While driving through and around Aubry, I was able to find only three signs or references to “Aubry.” The first was the exit sign on 69 Highway (located on the title page). The second was the entrance sign at Aubry Cemetery (at right).

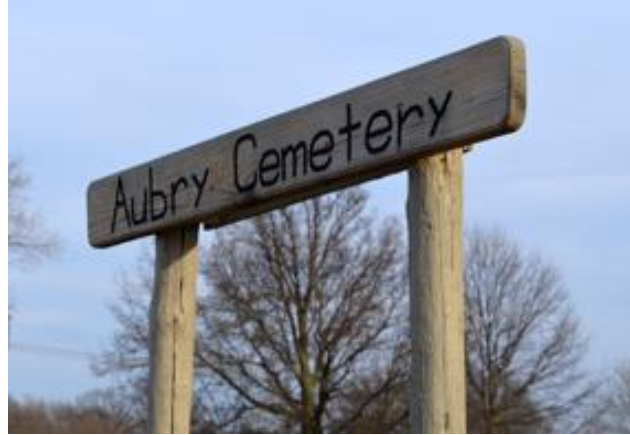


Figure 14. A photograph of the Aubry Cemetery sign in southern Johnson County Kansas, located between current day 69 Highway and Metcalf Ave and South of W 191 Street. March 21, 2015, photograph by Author.

The final reference to Aubry that I was able to locate is a middle school named Aubry Bend Middle School (below). A member of the Blue Valley School district and located next to Blue Valley Southwest High School off of Quivira Road and 179th Street, the school was named after Aubry Township and the bend in the road from 179 and 175 streets.



Figure 15. A photograph of Aubry Bend Middle School in southern Johnson County Kansas, located on the southwest corner of current day Quivira Road and W 175 Street. March 21, 2014, photograph by author.

The town of Aubry played a vital role in shaping the state's future. The battles and raids that occurred resulted in bloodshed and loss; however, they laid the foundation for Kansans' views and beliefs. Residents of Aubry and the surrounding area may continue to wonder, what could have been? If the raids and turmoil of the 1860s had never occurred, would Aubry be a thriving community today? While we may never know the answer to that question, we do know that Aubry is a Kansas treasure, hidden in plain sight.

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