

# Richmond: Sown Over and Abandoned

Richmond, Nemaha County, Kansas, 1855-1859  
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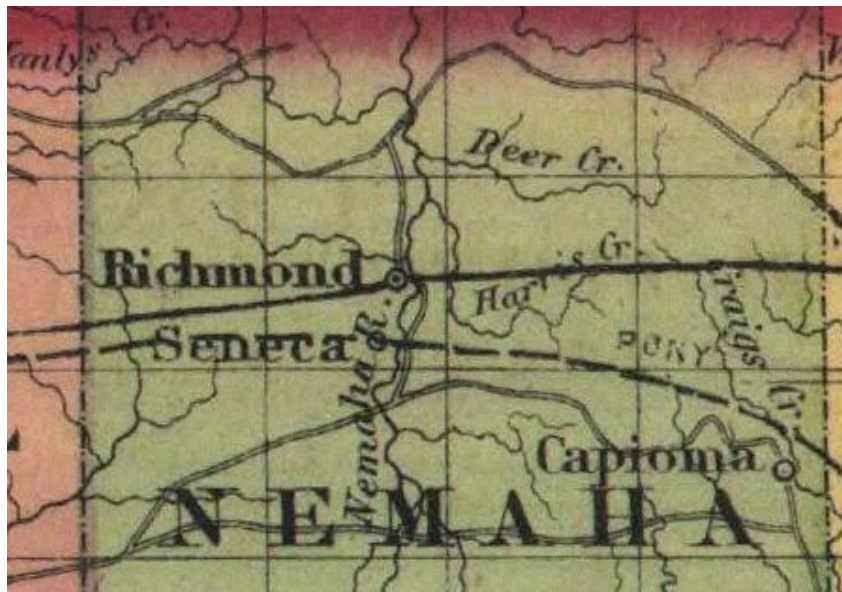


Figure 1: Portion of 1857 map showing location of Richmond. SOURCE: <http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/collections/maps>

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Richmond, settled by Upland Southerners, was the territorial county seat for Nemaha County. Competition with a twin town and differing opinions on slavery led to the Richmond's abandonment. This study includes early surveys of Richmond Township and photographs of early settlements.

## **Introduction**

Where did the American Civil War cross into Kansas? It might come as a surprise, but Nemaha County in 1855 was burning with the issue of slavery. The hotbed of this activity centered on the town of Richmond in Richmond Township, Nemaha County. It is true that William Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence in 1863 was one of the bloodiest confrontations over slavery in Kansas; however, the rise of Richmond had as much to do with its incorporator's pro-slavery stance as it did with its lush farm ground and location on trails heading west through Kansas. Richmond stood in the center of Nemaha County along the Fort Leavenworth Trail on the west bank of the Nemaha Creek, providing a crossing of the flowing northbound waters. When travelers headed west through Nemaha County the first relief from the rolling plains came at the arrival of Richmond. The town sat in fertile bottom ground with waters touching its outskirts during a flood of the Nemaha Creek. However, the town's location in extreme northeastern Kansas also enabled the settlement of Nebraskans who would travel nine miles along with Missourians who traveled sixty-five miles on the military trails. The settlement of these two groups caused distrust and conflict. Less than a decade after Richmond was incorporated, the town was abandoned by its founders. This leads to the puzzling question of how a town with so many important features becomes abandoned in such a short time. The answer is simple in that the abandonment of Richmond was a culmination of an intense rivalry fueled by differing values and twin town competition.

## **It's All About Location**

Understanding the history of Richmond cannot be done without first knowing its location. Finding the exact location of Richmond was the hardest fact to confirm in this research.

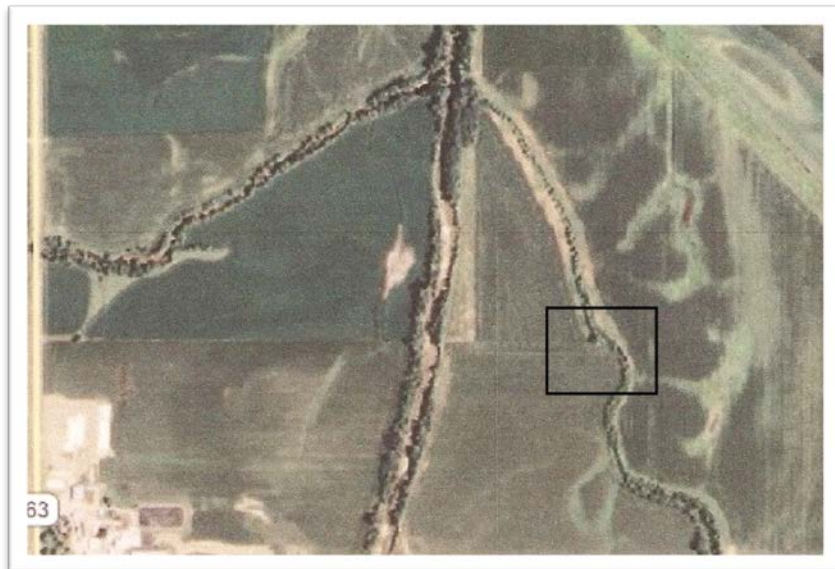


Figure 2: Aerial view of Richmond location, 2012  
Copy at [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)

Richmond's location is depicted on very few maps, most of which were crudely drawn in the late nineteenth century. As seen in Attachment 1, the 1855 survey of Richmond Township makes it appear that the town of Richmond is on a peninsula when the Nemaha Creek floods. This is possible given the low ground surrounding the area, but the map's credibility is questioned because at no time did the Nemaha Creek turn northeast as it appears on the map. Making matters worse in finding Richmond's location is that the Nemaha Creek, upon which Richmond sat, was moved in the early twentieth century. Where Richmond once sat on the west bank of the creek, its location is now east of the present Nemaha Creek. The old portion of the creek is only visible today by a shallow ditch lined by trees. Knowing roughly where Richmond was located, I used a set of preliminary blueprints from the engineering company that straightened the Nemaha

Creek to compare the survey's location with where the Nemaha originally ran.<sup>1</sup> With these I looked at a current image of the area and decided that Richmond was two miles north of Seneca and three quarters of a mile east. This location is marked in Fig. 1 on the previous page with the new Nemaha Creek running north and south and the old Nemaha Creek on its east running to the northwest.

### **Incorporation Comes to Nemaha**

After establishing the location of Richmond I began to understand its importance in early Nemaha County. Richmond was located on the Fort Leavenworth Trail where it crossed the Nemaha Creek. Cyrus Dolman, A.G. Woodward, James Thompson, and a group of men saw the potential and incorporated the town of Richmond in the summer of 1855.<sup>2</sup> They built a crossing over the Nemaha and thus created the revenue for the town as most who headed west through northern Kansas on the early carrying trade had to cross the Nemaha shortly into their journey. Francis Marshall and A.G. Woodward opened the crossing with Woodward taking over the trail store and hotel from James Thompson in the infant days of the town.<sup>3</sup> With a dozen "shacks" most of which were saloons, eating houses, and gambling establishments for the men traveling the trails, Richmond was elected as the temporary county seat in 1855.<sup>4,5</sup> This proved to be a boom for Richmond, as soon after gaining the county seat Cyrus Dolman and James Thompson

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<sup>1</sup> Topographic Map Showing Overflow Area of Nemaha River, Nemaha County, Kansas, Kansas Engineering Company, c. 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Melvin D. Bruntzel "Quick Reference to Kansas, Lost-Found-Missing Towns and Places with Selected Trivia and Truths," *Quick Reference to Kansas*, (Belleville, KS: The Print Shop, 2010) accessed December 11, 2012, <http://kansasquickref.omeka.net/items/show/1>

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> David Dary, *True Tales of Old-Time Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984) p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 49.

were appointed judge and sheriff, respectively, of the county.<sup>6</sup> The origins of these men who incorporated Richmond are of an interesting nature. Dolman, Marshall, and Woodward all came from Missouri, and probably gave the town its name based on the eventual Confederate capital.<sup>7</sup> They held a pro-slavery belief, and were given the county seat by a Territorial Legislature known as the Bogus Legislature in Kansas history.<sup>8</sup> The Bogus Legislature was established after many free state men boycotted the territorial election in 1855.<sup>9</sup> This boycott allowed pro-slave men, many of whom came from Missouri, to win the elections and create their own local and state governments. This blemish on Richmond's claim to county seat along with its temporary designation and founders' beliefs made it an outcast, creating many opponents.

### **Sandwiched by Rivalry**

Before Richmond was established, Nebraskans came down into Nemaha County to settle free towns in 1852.<sup>10</sup> One of these towns that stuck was Central City located five miles northeast of Seneca.<sup>11</sup> When Richmond was incorporated before Central City, the Bogus Kansas Legislature made the two towns into twin towns.<sup>12</sup> Due to the towns' proximity, difference in beliefs of slavery, and Richmond's status as county seat, it is a fair assumption that the Bogus Legislature wanted Richmond to thrive causing the free state Central City to disappear and make the county pro-slavery. This might have worked if not for another free state town established two miles upstream from Richmond. Seneca was founded in 1857 and one of its first residents, John

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> District 11, Kansas, Territorial Census, 1855. Copy available at <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/7272>

<sup>8</sup> "Histories of Nemaha County Spring From Common Source." *The Courier-Tribune*, Section 1, Anniversary Edition 1938

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 51

<sup>11</sup> "Histories of Nemaha County Spring From Common Source." *The Courier-Tribune*, Section 1, Anniversary Edition 1938

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 53

E. Smith built his own crossing over the Nemaha Creek when he arrived to the town.<sup>13</sup> Smith's crossing was further up the Leavenworth Trail, and to ensure that travelers were not confused on which trail to follow, he plowed and sowed millet in the Richmond trail with a sign stating that the new crossing was at Seneca.<sup>14</sup> When this occurred Richmond residents must have known that they were in trouble. Not only did the main source of revenue for the town disappear, but it had moved to a free state town that along with Central City surrounded their pocket of pro-slavery beliefs. Richmond's only hope was that it still maintained position in the county due to the distinction of being the county seat; however, the final blow to Richmond came in 1858, as Nemaha County first voted overwhelmingly against slavery in January and then in April voted for a permanent county seat.<sup>15</sup> After a preliminary vote four towns remained in the race for the county seat: Richmond, Central City, Wheatland, and Seneca.<sup>16</sup> Central City, seeing the benefit of having Richmond gone decided to drop out of the race and publicly supported Seneca to win the bid.<sup>17</sup> Once Seneca pledged to build a courthouse and donate its use for five years, the contest was over; Richmond lost the county seat.<sup>18</sup>

### **Abandonment, Factors, and Legacy**

After the loss of the 1858 election there is very little information on Richmond. Several of the town incorporators left Richmond and for the most part Nemaha County. Most went back to Missouri or another pro-slave state, but some such as Francis Marshall stayed in Kansas. Marshall continued west and after thirty miles he started the town of Marysville in Marshall

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<sup>13</sup> "John E. Smith Confirmed Story of Diverted Trail." *The Courier-Tribune*, Section 5, Anniversary Edition 1938

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 54

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 55

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Tennial, *History of Nemaha County Kansas* (Lawrence, KS: Standard Publishing Company, 1916) p. 54

County, named after his wife.<sup>19</sup> What remained of Richmond's buildings were eventually moved upstream like the military trail to Seneca, and in 1859 exactly four years after it began, the post office closed in Richmond.<sup>20</sup> The factors that led to Richmond's demise are evident when looking at its neighbors. Even though the town was the first county seat, it could never survive the founders' pro-slavery stance. Richmond remained through its existence as the minority in a vastly free state. The twin town phenomenon also hurt Richmond as this reason for its competition with Central City. Once Central City could find a way to eliminate Richmond, it put all of its backing into the plan. Richmond leadership was strong enough to build the town, but not to maintain its survival. Though the town is gone, Richmond left an impact on its rival Seneca and the surrounding area. A noted historical geographer, Terry Jordan-Bychkov, has identified populations from Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee that exhibit certain traits that he labels as the "Upland South". One of these traits is in the building of dogtrot houses by this population as seen on the next page in Fig. 2. This dogtrot house style is very similar to the first house built in Seneca in 1857, seen on the next page in Fig. 3. Along with the architecture the name Richmond is also prevalent today in Nemaha County, the town Richmond gave its name to Richmond Township. Coincidentally, Richmond Township includes Seneca on its southern border, and the location of Central City which disappeared long ago is also within Richmond Township. So even though Richmond is now an empty field and many Nemaha County residents have never heard of it, its impact has lasted and shaped the county.

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<sup>19</sup> "Histories of Nemaha County Spring From Common Source." *The Courier-Tribune*, Section 1, Anniversary Edition 1938

<sup>20</sup> Melvin D. Bruntzel "Quick Reference to Kansas, Lost-Found-Missing Towns and Places with Selected Trivia and Truths," *Quick Reference to Kansas*, (Belleville, KS: The Print Shop, 2010) accessed December 11, 2012, <http://kansasquickref.omeka.net/items/show/1>



Figure 3: Photograph of a dogtrot house in southern Illinois, 1989  
Source: Jordan-Bychkov, *The Upland South*, p. 41

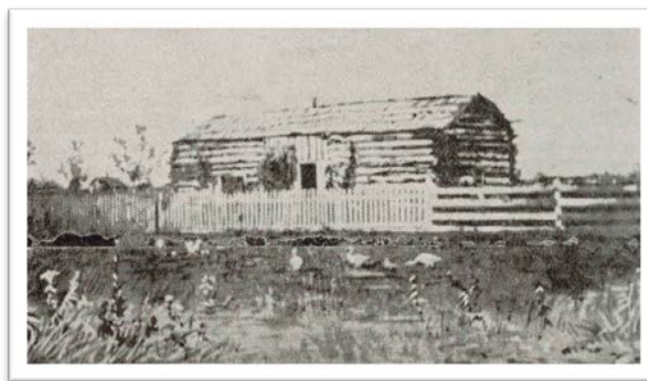
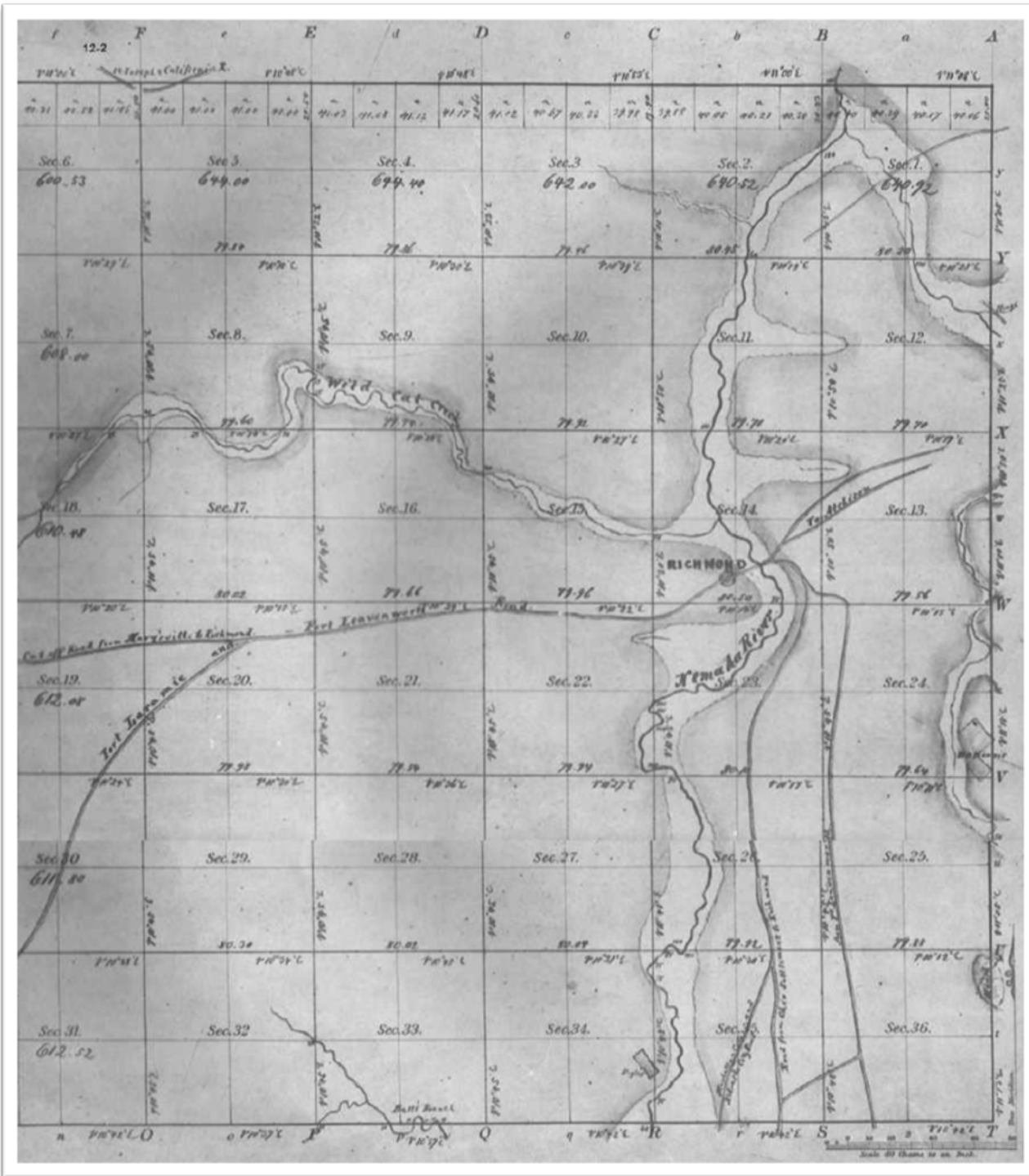


Figure 4: First house built in Seneca, Nemaha  
County, c. 1857  
Source: Tennal, *History of Nemaha County*  
p. 80





Attachment 1. Survey map of Richmond Township, Nemaha County, c. 1855

Copy at <http://seneca-ks.com/1857-1/12-2.htm>

## Bibliography

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