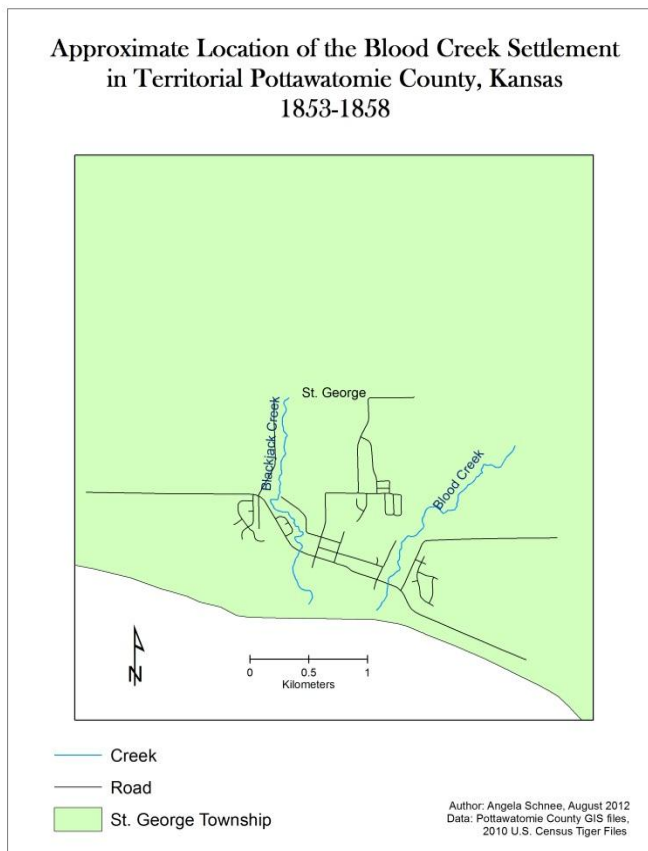


# Tracing the Blood Creek Community: Early St. George, Pottawatomie County, Kansas



by

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From the Kansas River floodplain in southeastern Pottawatomie County, bluffs rise steeply toward a rolling high ground. Nestled at the bottom of these bluffs is the territorial town of St. George, founded in 1855.<sup>1</sup> Near the river, several hundred yards from giant octagonal corn silos and the boarded up Union Pacific Depot, stand two immense trees: a venerable cottonwood and a burr oak, both record-setting champions. Both were growing as seedlings when the first Euro-American farmers of the Kaw floodplain arrived in the late 1850s; and both reached for the sky even earlier, when an odd, interesting community arose on the upland. This long-vanished cluster of saloons, shanty homes, and perhaps the first informal church of the St. George area, is still known locally as “the community along Blood Creek.”

How do we verify the existence of a place that never had a post office, appeared on no map, and moved from its location within one year? Territorial Blood Creek settlement exists only in hazy recollections of the oldest area residents: anecdotal evidence and gossipy tales of “perhaps 10 to 30 saloons.”<sup>2</sup> The repeated references to saloons and the whiskey trade on the uplands near the military trail indicate a shared cultural memory that has basis in fact. Through fieldwork to scout location, genealogical inquiry, and some suggestive evidence from neighboring communities, it is possible to construct a scenario of probable first settlement on the river bluffs and then a rapid move down to the Kaw River floodplain. With the move came a name change: the eerie “Blood Creek” became the much more respectable St. George.

By at least 1853, a frontier military trail ran along the top of the river bluffs, connecting Fort Riley in Riley County to points east – namely, Fort Leavenworth on the Missouri River. This trail was known locally and in eastern Kansas as the fort-to-fort road. Fort Riley was constructed

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<sup>1</sup> *St. George, Kansas, Bicentennial Publication* ( St. George: 2005), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Anecdotal evidence taken from oral accounts by the oldest surviving members of St. George, Kansas, May, 2012.

in May of 1853, so the trail was bringing men and supplies west at least by that date.<sup>3</sup> A

description of this trail as it passed near St. George is found in an early recollection by a soldier at Fort Riley:

Near the center of the section 23 it left the Oregon Trail; thence west and a little south across sections 22, 21, 20, through the town site of Louisville. Leaving Louisville, it crossed Rock creek just below the dam; thence crossed Louisville Springs park; thence it ran south and west, crossing the corner of section 29, across the northeast quarter and northwest quarter of section 30. It entered St. George township, and crossing the southeast quarter of section 25, a portion of sections 34, 3, 4, 5, 6, entered Blue township near the northeast corner of section 1....<sup>4</sup>

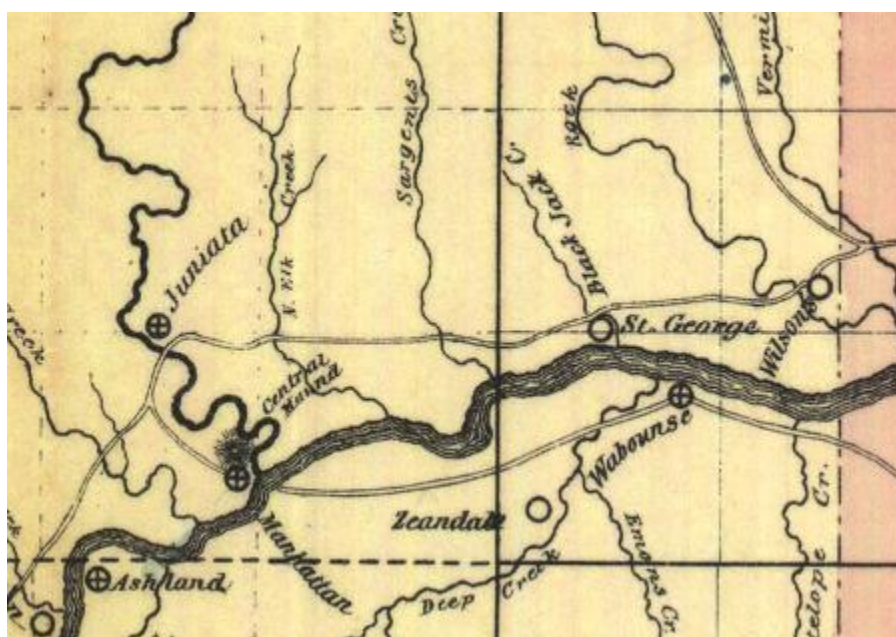


Figure 1: Portion of 1856 map of Eastern Kansas. The Fort to Fort trail crosses Pottawatomie County north of St. George and then on to Juniata to the west. SOURCE: Wichita State University, Special Collections.

<http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/collections/maps/detailsframes.asp?offset=10&var=1856-0014>

<sup>3</sup>George E. Omer, Jr., "An Army Hospital: From Dragoons to Rough Riders – Fort Riley, 1853 – 1903," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXIII (4), Winter, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> See Percival G. Lowe, "Recollections," in *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XII.

Military trails attracted the carrying trade business. Watering places for horses, camping sites, harness repair and blacksmith shops, natural springs, inns, rough eating places, stores, hotels, and saloons – all dotted the early trails crossing Kansas. For most of these small, entrepreneurial businesses, there are no records. Establishments opened and closed quickly, following customers and settlers. For instance, in Nemaha County, in the area of the Pony Express route, one N.H. Rising opened and operated an Express station, a store, and a hotel in three different places within a four-year period.<sup>5</sup> Early store owners in Manhattan and St. George moved their businesses as often.<sup>6</sup> Today, residents of St. George believe that a natural terrace north of Blood Creek was the site of a considerable saloon business.<sup>7</sup> The original Blood Creek tumbled down from a modest bluff talus into the Kansas River; and still today, despite a reduced water level and flow, the creek is visible under a stone bridge within the town of St. George. Up on the terrace, stone foundational remains suggest the location of an early saloon trade, at least two miles northwest of the town and closer to the 1853 military trail. These remains are today on private property. However, it is possible to photograph the terrain itself, showing clearly the tableland where a string of stone and wooden buildings may have stood. The fresh running water of Blood Creek nearby makes this site even more likely. Shown below are two photographs of the probable site of the Blood Creek settlement. At the time, this would have been wide open prairie, devoid of trees except for a timber fringe along the creek, used up quickly for fuel by settlers. The collection of shanties and saloons would have been clearly visible from the passing military trail.

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<sup>5</sup> See Morris W. Werner, "Ghost Towns of Nemaha County," in *Pioneer Trails From Land Office Surveys*, <http://kansasheritage.org/werner/>. Last accessed March 25, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See Frank Gent, "A Handed-Down Mercantile: The St. George, Pottawatomie County, Kansas, Grocery Store: 1871-Present." in *Filling the Larder, Feeding our Families: The First 100 Years. Food Institutions of the Flint Hills* (Manhattan: Chapman Center for Rural Studies, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Communication to authors from Frank Gent and Dale Schurr, lifelong St. George residents, March 21, 2012.

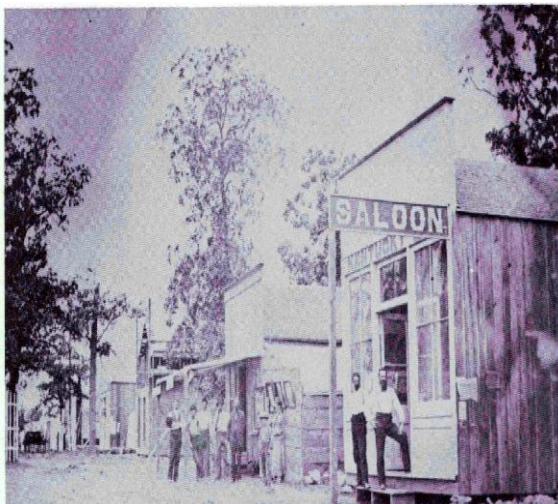


Figure 2 and Figure 3: These are examples of the types of structures that likely housed the saloons at Blood Creek. They would have likely been very rough structures made of wood or rough stone, not the type of saloon thought of in popular culture. SOURCE: Figure 2. *Kansas: A Pictorial History*. Page 93. Available at The Kansas State Historical Society and The Chapman Center for Rural Studies. SOURCE: Figure 3. Ruins of Eudora, Kansas Brewery circa 1872. Kansas Memory. <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/209348/page/33>



Figure 4: Likely area once inhabited by owners and operators of saloons, campsites, and small boarding rooms. These conclusions were drawn by observing the terrain, as this is the flattest land where a semi-permanent structure could be built. Source: photo taken by Angela Schnee June/2012

Figure 5: Another view of table land area. Above this area are steep bluffs and below this flatland is Blood Creek. Source: Angela Schnee June/2012

The timber margin along the creek would have provided rough logs for cabins as well. Freight wagons carrying supplies as well as whiskey, rum, and corn liquor left Atchison on the Salt Lake Freighting Trail, conceived as a branch trail that would intersect the Leavenworth military road

by turning south to meet it. By 1859, in fact, Leavenworth “laid out a new road west, over which it was planned to run the Pike’s Peak Express stages....”<sup>8</sup>

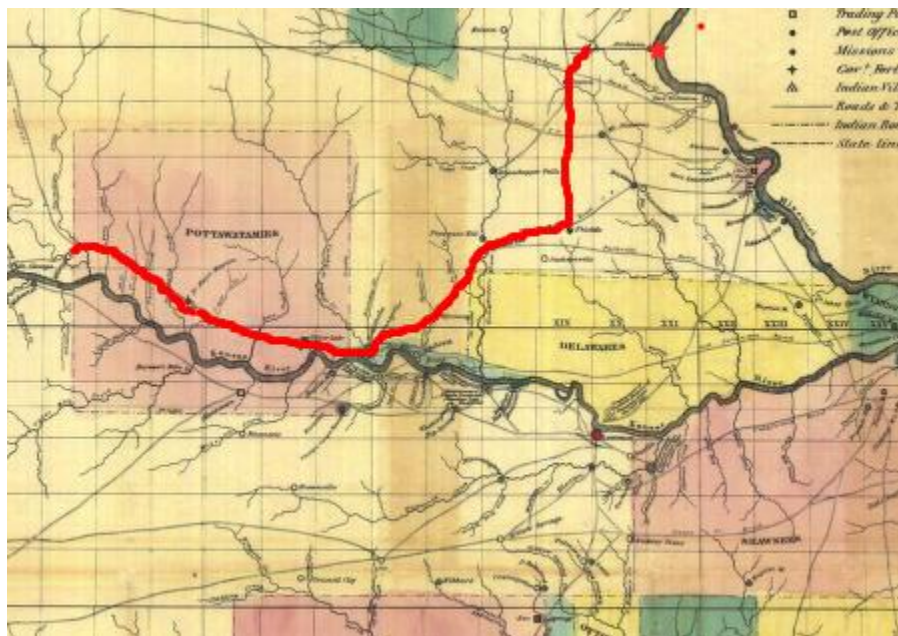


Figure 6: 1856 Map of Eastern Kansas edited by Angela Schnee to show where the Salt Lake Freighting Trail met the Leavenworth Trail. SOURCE: Wichita State University, Special Collections. <http://specialcollections.wichita.edu/collections/maps/detailsframes.asp?offset=10&var=1856-0014>

Thus, freighting traffic, stage coaches, soldiers using the military trail, and military suppliers would have passed quite close to the Blood Creek terrace location.

The origin of the name Blood Creek has nothing to do with a massacre, conflict with Indians, or even the color of creek water or iron-rich sediments in the banks. Like many topographical features in the expanding western territory, this creek’s name is a toponym, named for a family. First traces of the Blood family line connect a C.E. Blood to the early and vanished Juniata (also spelled Junietta) community to the west of St. George:

<sup>8</sup> Sheffield Ingalls, *History of Atchison County, Kansas* (Lawrence, Kansas: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), p. 158.

C. E. Blood was a Congregational minister from Mason, N. H., who began service in Kansas as a home missionary by preaching in Juniata in November, 1854. Mr. Blood organized the Congregational church in Manhattan.<sup>9</sup>

Juniata began as a ferry crossing on the Blue River, at the point where the military trail crossed the river (county line) into Riley County.<sup>10</sup> C.E. Blood preached in Juniata, Manhattan, and probably, to the east, in the fledgling saloon community of Blood Creek. Although the early Congregational church in Kansas generally discouraged “itinerant preaching,” it also had a very aggressive stance toward alcohol consumption. The state temperance society was not chartered until 1861, but “it was [drawn] along lines laid down by the general association of the Congregational church.”<sup>11</sup> The earliest Congregational preachers along the Blue and Kansas Rivers were speaking out against saloons, bars, and alcohol; it is more than probable that the Rev. C.E. Blood attempted to dissolve the Blood Creek saloon business.

### **The Genealogy of the Blood Family**

Several members of the Blood family played an essential role in the early settlement of Kansas. The first record of a Blood family member is found in correspondence from the National Kansas Committee of the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company (also New England Emigrant Aid Company) and the writings of Joseph Savage, a member of the second immigrant party to come to Kansas. The sole purpose of the company was to provide support to people willing to come settle in Kansas, in hopes that they could influence the admittance of Kansas to the Union as a “free state”.<sup>12</sup> According to Savage, Colonel James Blood was a member of the party that

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<sup>9</sup> See “Letters of a Kansas Pioneer,1,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. V(2), May, 1936.

<sup>10</sup> For a good sketch of Juniata, see Michael French, “Juniata: Lost and Long Forgotten,” Chapman Center for Rural Studies, Kansas State University, May, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See Russell K. Hickmann, “Lewis Bodwell, Frontier Preacher, 1” in *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, August 1943, Vol. XII (3), pp. 269 – 299.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Savage. Kansas State Historical Society/Kansas Memory, “Recollections of 1854.” Accessed August 12, 2012. <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/90813>.

found the location for the town of Lawrence, and he was in Kansas prior to the arrival of the second party (summer, 1854).<sup>13</sup> Later, James Blood acted as an agent for the company and was entrusted with the duties of distributing aid and funds to the company settlers.<sup>14</sup> Colonel Blood eventually made a career in Kansas politics and resided in Lawrence until his death in 1891.

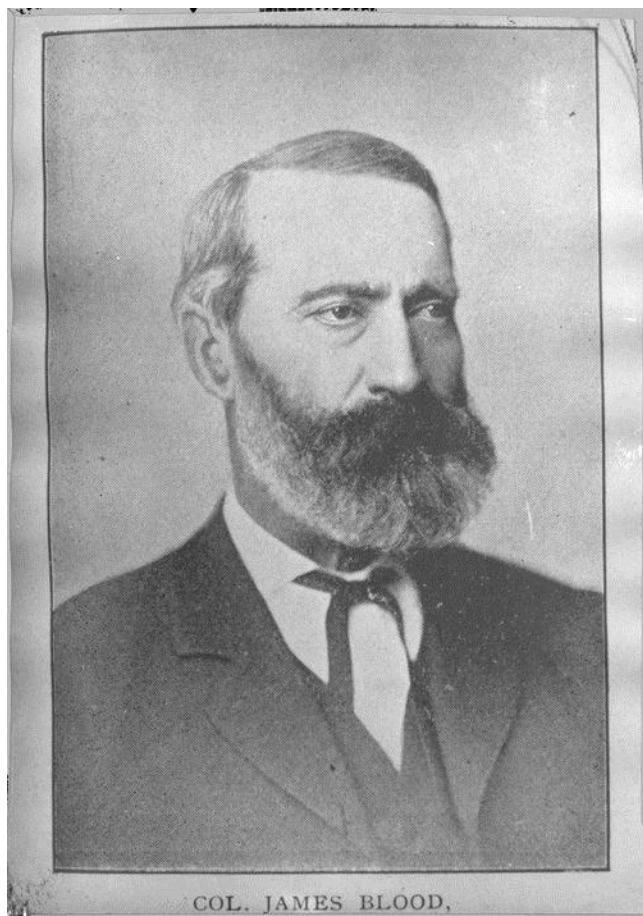


Figure 7: Picture of Col. James Blood who became a prominent member of the Lawrence community and the town's first mayor. He also was a key leader for the New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Territory. Source: Kansas State Historical Society. <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/217225>

James Blood's arrival triggered a series of migrations of other Blood family members to the Kansas Territory.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> J.D. Webster. Kansas State Historical Society/Kansas Memory, "J.D. Webster to James Blood." Accessed August 12, 2012. <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/90518>.



This pattern is known as chain migration and is a common settlement pattern, especially on the Kansas frontier.<sup>15</sup> John Blood and his son Charles L. Blood both appear in the 1859 Kansas Territorial Census. The records show that John arrived in Kansas in 1857; his son Charles L. settled in 1858. Both are shown to be residing in Pottawatomie County near St. George.<sup>16</sup> The 1868 tax records indicate that John Blood and his wife Nancy were running a hotel in St. George. The Eagle Hotel was supported by the carrying trade, booming on the trails passing through the southern portion of Pottawatomie County during this period.<sup>17</sup> Marriage records show that Charles L. was married to Anna Halstead on March 1, 1860, by their relative Rev. C. E. Blood.<sup>18</sup> John and Nancy had a second son Martin V. Blood, who doesn't show up in historic records until 1861, when he enlisted to fight in the Civil War with his brother Charles L. in Pottawatomie County, Kansas.<sup>19</sup>

By 1880, the trails that once brought a flush of business to the east-central territorial landscape had been surpassed by a new means of transportation, the railroad. John Blood and his son Charles took advantage of the new prosperity the railroads brought to the state. In 1880, state census records reveal John working for the Union Pacific Railroad, as a land agent in Junction City, Kansas, while his wife Nancy was still in Pottawatomie County, running the hotel. Their son Charles was living in Louisville, Pottawatomie County, and was also working for the Union

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<sup>15</sup> National Geographic, "Human Migration Guide." Last modified 2005. Accessed August 12, 2012. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/09/g68/migrationguidestudent.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Ancestry.com, "Kansas State Census Collection, 1855-1925 record for John Blood." Last modified 2009. Accessed August 12, 2012. <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?h=2793166&recoff=67&db=KSstatecen&indiv=try>.

<sup>17</sup> "St. George Items." *The Manhattan Standard*, April 23, 1870.

<sup>18</sup> Ancestry.com, "Kansas Vital Record Abstracts, 1854-2009." Accessed August 12, 2012. <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?h=91642&db=KSVitalRecsAbstracts&indiv=try>.

<sup>19</sup> National Park Service. *U.S. Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007.

Original data: National Park Service, Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, online <<http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/>>, acquired 2007.

Pacific Railroad as a fireman.<sup>20</sup> Their other son Martin V. had married and was running a hotel in Manhattan, Kansas.<sup>21</sup> So the Blood family appears to have stayed in Pottawatomie, Riley, and Geary Counties. Yet despite these early employment successes, by 1910, all members of the Blood family who settled near St. George were no longer in Kansas.

The third member of the Blood family to come to Kansas was the Reverend Charles Emerson Blood. He initially settled in Leavenworth but soon ended up in the Manhattan area. The account of his call to Juniata, Kansas, is found in Winifred Slagg's *Riley County, Kansas*:

“Marsh Garrett...was going to Leavenworth to buy a stock of goods and said to my father, ‘Hadn’t I better get some whiskey? It would sell well to the teamsters.’ My father said ‘If you see any preacher that will come and preach to us bring him instead of the whiskey.’ He (Garrett) met the Rev. Blood and brought him and Mrs. Blood back with him. Rev. Blood preached and Mrs. Blood taught school.”<sup>22</sup>

Rev. Blood settled at Juniata in 1854 but was also a trustee of the town company that formed the town of Manhattan, Kansas.<sup>23</sup> Because he was preaching in Juniata, the inference is strong that he may also have made circuits to the Blood Creek area roughly five miles to the east, perhaps holding Sunday services in one of the shanty homes along the trail. As stated earlier, ministers were drawn to settlements that seemed unchurched and known locally as “dens of iniquity.” The saloons at Blood Creek may have had quite a reputation in both Juniata and Manhattan. In 1855, St. George itself was founded on the floodplain of the Kaw River below the bluffs; residents today believe the settlement of Blood Creek dispersed to the floodplain precisely because of C.E. Blood’s preaching and his intention to possibly found a Congregational Church.

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<sup>20</sup> Year: 1880; Census Place: *Junction, Davis, Kansas*; Roll: 379; Family History Film: 1254379; Page: 237B; Enumeration District: 054; Image: 0035., Year: 1880; Census Place: *Saint George, Pottawatomie, Kansas*; Roll: 393; Family History Film: 1254393; Page: 263C; Enumeration District: 243; Image: 0367.

<sup>21</sup> Year: 1880; Census Place: *Manhattan, Riley, Kansas*; Roll: 394; Family History Film: 1254394; Page: 284C; Enumeration District: 254; Image: 0786.

<sup>22</sup> Winifred Slagg, *Riley County, Kansas*, (Manhattan: 1968), 26.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

By 1862, Rev. Blood had moved back to Illinois to help care for his elderly parents.<sup>24</sup> It is likely that he had been acting as a minister to the Blood Creek and St. George settlements in Pottawatomie County as well as in Juniata and Manhattan. This is especially suggested by his performing the marriage ceremony for his relative Charles L. Blood in Pottawatomie County.

The fourth Blood found in the area is one Reuban Blood, who lived in Manhattan in 1881. In the 1881 Riley County Plat Book, he is listed as the proprietor of the Cottage Hotel. This is also the hotel that Martin Blood was working at in 1900. Like many emigrant families, the Bloods used family connections to find employment and obtain services.



Figure 8: Sketch of the Cottage Hotel operated by the Blood family. Source: *Historical Plat Book of Riley County, Kansas-1881*. [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)

<sup>24</sup> *Historical Plat Book of Riley County, Kansas*, (Chicago: Bird & Mickle Map Company, 1881).

The Blood families who came to Kansas during the Territorial Period cannot be proven to be immediately related (brothers, uncles, first cousins, etc.); however, all of these men show up on the Blood family trees found on Ancestry.com. This indicates that they are further removed relatives and most likely knew one another. They played different important roles in forming our young state, whether it was in politics, organizing emigrant parties, soldiering, preaching, opening businesses based first on the carrying trade and then on the railroads. The Blood family name was known in Riley and Pottawatomie Counties. There are Blood family gravestones in the St. George Cemetery.

Yet the little settlement nucleus of Blood Creek is all but a vague remembrance today. The settlers for whom it was named had left the area completely by the turn of the twentieth century. All that remains of their impact today – in terms of a specific place --are handed down tales of an encampment that housed a handful of saloons and provided a resting place to thirsty soldiers and weary travelers. Places such as this haunt the history of our state; often there aren't enough documental remnants to piece together even a brief history. By using oral history, field work and cartography, as well as genealogical records of the Blood family's presence in Riley and Pottawatomie Counties, we are able to construct a likely location and history for the Blood Creek saloon settlement in Territorial Kansas.

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