

# Lessons from Juniata: Lost and Long Forgotten

By Michael French

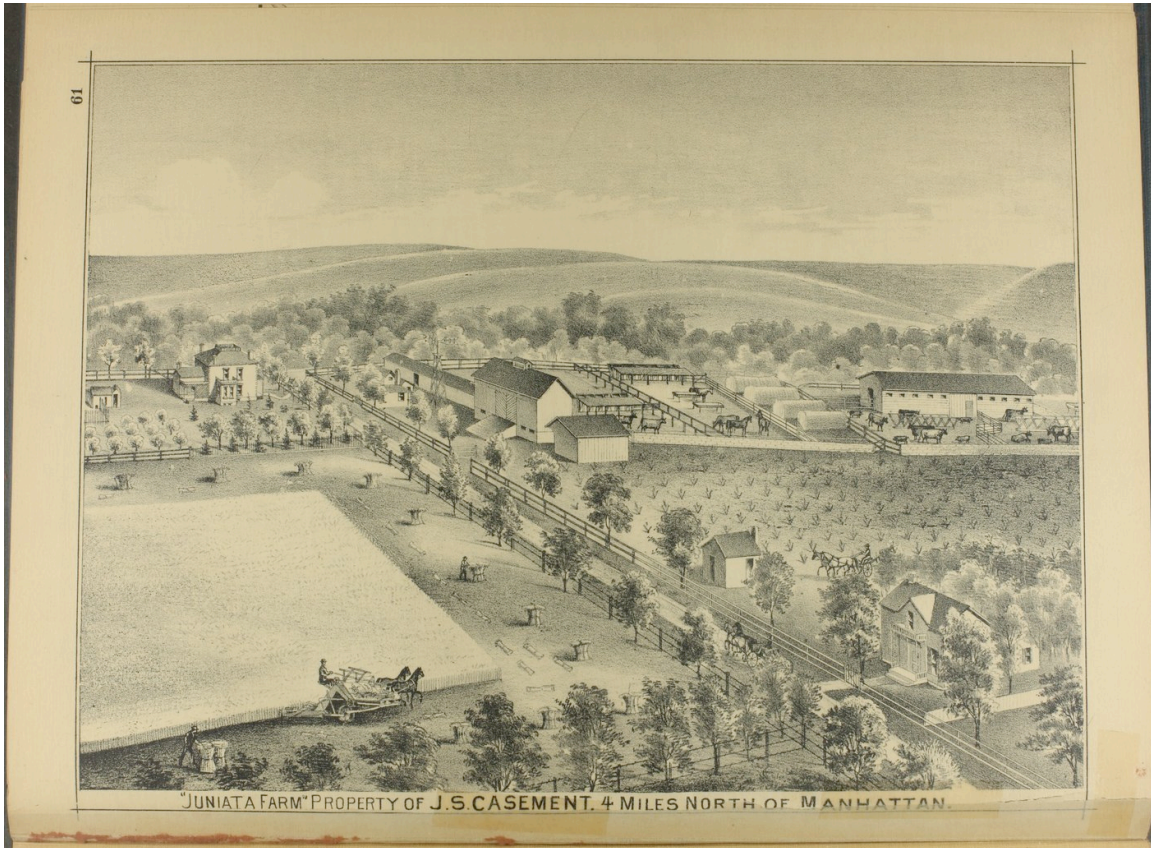


Figure 1: Drawing of the Casement farm taken from the 1881 Atlas of Riley County. Source: [www.kansasmemory.org](http://www.kansasmemory.org)

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## Chapman Center for Rural Studies

The need for land and the desire to set stake for property have driven Americans to spread across this country like hoards of locusts, devouring the resources and simply moving on. Juniata, Kansas, was no different, springing up in the early 1850s in the midst of booming numbers of small towns being conceived in Kansas Territory. Once a major point along the Ft. Leavenworth-Ft. Riley Military Road, Juniata was founded by Samuel D. Dyer, and often is referred to as Dyer's town. It also has been seen alternately spelled as Junietta. Juniata was once a tightly knit but diverse community showing signs of prospering, but with rapid political and economic change, it stands today only as a figment of the imagination through a view of dense brush and water. Juniata was a village located near what is now present-day Manhattan, Kansas, in Pottawatomie County. In fact, it lasted only five years.

Juniata had a location important in its own right, quickly reduced to nothing but dirt and debris through progress and the expansion of nearby Manhattan. Yet it was not just one factor that led to the demise of Juniata, rather an accumulation of recurring factors in our country's history. The town has been almost entirely lost, with only slim written accounts of a visit or a passerby stopping for a few moments and continuing through. It was really not considered a destination even in its most populated time. Juniata was short lived in duration, but proved to show signs of harmony before bigotry over slavery appeared. However limited the period was, Juniata should not be forgotten;

it should be remembered as a time of peace among men, where living the American dream briefly came into fruition.

This study will use original drawings and written accounts to take an in-depth look at the town of Juniata's founding and collapse. A lost town or ghost town is defined in *Webster's Dictionary* as, "a once-flourishing town wholly or nearly deserted usually as a result of the exhaustion of some natural resource."<sup>1</sup> This definition does justice in defining what a ghost town is but such towns should not be "ghosts" and lost forever. It is revealing that even today, almost 160 years later and long after the Blue River has ceased to flow through Manhattan, people in the area recall where Juniata lay.

The location of Juniata played an important role in its creation and demise. Juniata was originally one mile east of what is present day Manhattan, Kansas, in Pottawatomie County. The Blue River originally separated the two counties, with Juniata on one side and Manhattan on the other. Today, it is barely manageable to reach the old town site on foot because of the over-wooded and restricted area. The town was founded in 1853 with the earliest settlers being Samuel D. Dyer and family. Mr. Dyer ran a ferry on the Big Blue River; and in 1855, construction began on a government bridge reportedly costing \$10,000.<sup>2</sup> Beginning to grow fairly quickly after this, Juniata was even made into a Post Office stop with "Seth J. Childs" appointed the postmaster.<sup>3</sup> A quote from the *Kansas Historical Quarterly* shows one man describing the value of Juniata:

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<sup>1</sup> Webster Dictionary "New Edition," Co. 2004, Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd.,

<sup>2</sup> Geo. W. Martin, Secretary, "Collections," Kansas State Historical Society 1911-1912, Volume 12. pg 426, 427.

<sup>3</sup> Geo. W. Martin, Secretary, "Collections," Kansas State Historical Society 1911-1912, Volume 12. pg 426, 427.

“Often called Dyer’s town for its founder, Juniata was a settlement and crossing on the Blue River in Pottawatomie County and an important point on the Ft. Leavenworth-Ft. Riley Military Road.”<sup>4</sup>

Inhabitants of Juniata consisted of European and American families but also Indian families and a few African-Americans. Layout of the town was probably along a single main street, with small houses and shack like buildings dotting this main trail, and the Post Office and Mr. Dyer’s house being the highlights. The Dyer house functioned as the first store as well. Some evidence suggests a slightly curving road descending to the original ferry crossing and then the bridge. A reconstruction of the single street is shown below.

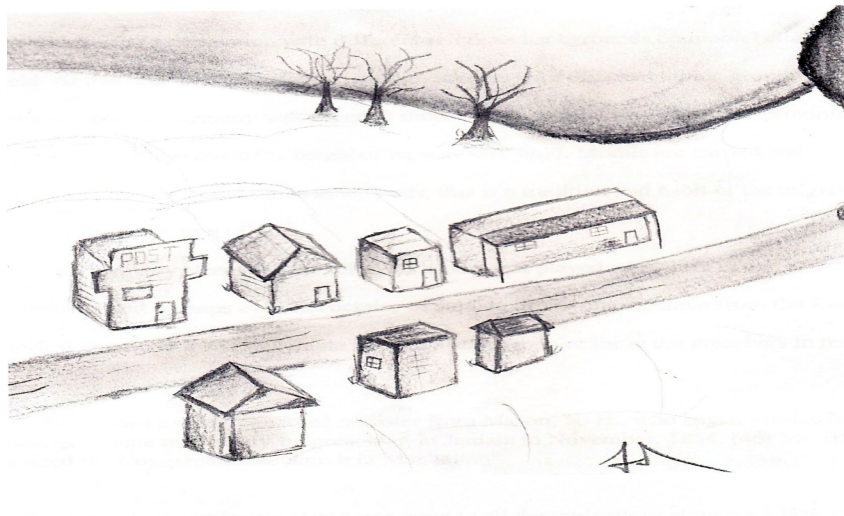


Figure 2: Reconstruction Drawing of Juniata Main Trail. C. 1854-1858, Juniata, Pottawatomie County, Kansas.

Juniata was a close-knit community with the founder Mr. Dyer being the face of

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<sup>4</sup> Carey, James C. “Juniata: Gateway to Mid-Kansas.” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 21 (Summer 1954): 87-94.

and soul of the community, as accounted in several written documents:

“His house served for several years as a voting precinct and also as a preaching place for ministers of all denominations. The first county jail was the cellar under a little store kept by him. He was noted for his generosity and his place was designated as a free hotel.”<sup>5</sup>

Even with a mixed population with different religious backgrounds, common beliefs were upheld. At this time in history, a frontier population of different ethnic groups did not always pan out, but harmony was found at times in this community. The close proximity of these early towns perhaps made “the neighboring way” take hold. People needed to depend on each other for survival. Morals and values are carried and stamped into an area based on its inhabitants; this is a tradition and habit of migrating people.<sup>6</sup>

This principle is shown very clearly with the religious aspect that played a key role in the development and perhaps even the demise of Juniata. One example from the *Kansas Historical Quarterly* shows Juniata as even a starting point for many preachers in the area:

“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. [46] Mr. Blood organized the Congregational church in Manhattan”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Geo. W. Martin, Secretary, “Collections,” Kansas State Historical Society 1911-1912, Volume 12. pg 426, 427.

<sup>6</sup> M.J. Morgan, class lecture, “Zelinsky’s Rule of First Effective Settlement,” Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, February, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> May 1936 “Letters of a Kansas Pioneer, 1”, *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Vol. 5, No. 2), pages 143 to 179 Transcribed by Marilyn Dell Brady, Don Dowdey, Dr. Lynn H. Nelson, and Dick Taylor.

The first church as previously stated was open to all denominations, showing a lack of bias and willingness to be open.<sup>8</sup> This openness was seen throughout the community for a brief but mosaic time. This should be noted in Juniata's history for a time of cooperation among men, no matter the race or religion, a respect for man as one kind. In our past it is easy to point out and locate the flawed areas where humans chose to fight and argue, so to truly find a place in time where men stood together for common goals and beliefs is rewarding. These early Kansas settlers brought the values of their ancestors to Juniata to share and to learn.

However, change does occur and new opinions form, going against the very morals town founders once believed in. A group of arriving settlers brought pro-slavery beliefs.. Slavery was a large issue and debate in our country during these years of "Bleeding Kansas," and people firmly planted on one side sometimes saw themselves shifting and to the other. Perhaps Mr. Dyer feared the loss of business if he did not embrace the new beliefs. In another excerpt from the letters of a Kansas Pioneer, change is obviously shown:

"Mr. Dyer has turned strong pro slavery and they have got a pro slavery minister there of the Methodist Church South, who says, "he would as leave sell a nigger as an ox." They have organized a church under pro slavery influence and intend to do all they can to bring slaves into Kansas and drive out the yankees "for," they say, "they do not want eastern men to rule the territory."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Geo. W. Martin, Secretary, "Collections," Kansas State Historical Society 1911-1912, Volume 12. pg 426, 427.

<sup>9</sup> May 1936 "Letters of a Kansas Pioneer, 1", *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Vol. 5, No. 2), pages 143 to 179 Transcribed by Marilyn Dell Brady, Don Dowdey, Dr. Lynn H. Nelson, and Dick Taylor.

Changing from an all denomination church to having a pro slave minister demonstrates the change of behavior and how quickly that may happen. At one time standing together, the population of Juniata soon divided along the slavery issue..

In 1856, ice along with floods on the Blue River destroyed the \$10,000 government bridge. Once treasured as a crossing point and military trail stopover, but perceived now as a pro-slave community across from Free-State Manhattan, Juniata began to lose any appeal at all as a town with an upside. The bridge was a main point in the town's landscape, and its washing away seemed to signify the washing away of Juniata. The neighboring town of Manhattan, arising in 1855, attracted many Free-State believers and threatened Juniata's livelihood. Gaining population and businesses faster than any other in the area at the time, Manhattan seemed to be a destination as opposed to Juniata, just a resting point. Another piece taken from the Letters of a Kansas Pioneer shows Manhattan on the rise:

“My new claim is situated about three miles west of, or rather south-west of, the ferry across the Big Blue at Juniata and about one or one and one half miles NN.W. of Manhattan which in all probability will be much the largest town any where in this vicinity. There are at present not more than twenty-five homes in Manhattan, including two stores, and one very good saw-mill with grist-mill attached which work very well. Quite a large number of houses are going up very soon, some of them will be built of stone, and another saw mill is going up within two miles of the "city". We expect that a Cong. Church will be built in Manhattan during the summer.”<sup>10</sup>

With such a rapidly growing town located near the dwindling village of Juniata, families began to move to Manhattan for a quicker and more direct line to the necessities of life.

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<sup>10</sup> May 1936 “Letters of a Kansas Pioneer, 1”, Kansas Historical Quarterly (Vol. 5, No. 2), pages 143 to 179 Transcribed by Marilyn Dell Brady, Don Dowdey, Dr. Lynn H. Nelson, and Dick Taylor.

By 1856 the Post Office that resided so proudly in Juniata was moved west of the Big Blue River, changing its name to Tauromee; but by March 26, 1858, even this was abolished completely.<sup>11</sup> In 1858, Juniata could officially be seen as dead; the movement of the main road closer to Manhattan left only a few residents living outside of Juniata's former town limits.<sup>12</sup> As seen frequently in Kansas history with Post Offices constantly being moved or shut down, the town soon follows suit. Juniata was no longer a haven of religious and ethnic diversity, and could not hold onto the bridge and trail that had supported it.

Whether it was the change in beliefs and values, floods and natural damage, or simply the competition with Manhattan, Juniata did not have the means to survive. In life we feel the need to expand and make strides towards progression; I feel that Juniata had its glory as a town united at one point in history, striving for the same goals. However, it was the progression and expansion of surrounding areas that ultimately lead to Juniata's demise. We as locusts had taken those early traveling and trade resources and now looked for more, across the river to Riley County.

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<sup>11</sup> Geo. W. Martin, Secretary, "Collections," Kansas State Historical Society 1911-1912, Volume 12. pg 426, 427.

<sup>12</sup> Geo. W. Martin, Secretary, "Collections," Kansas State Historical Society 1911-1912, Volume 12. pg 426, 427.



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