

Warriors at White Rock:

White Rock Township and White Rock City, Republic County, Kansas, 1862-1926

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History 533: Lost Kansas Communities

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The piercing sound of a warning rifle shot blasting through the air, settlers footsteps and horses hooves pounding back towards the Lovewell-Davis cabin or towards Fort Holmwood <sup>1</sup> was not an uncommon scene during the 1860's and 1870's in the White Rock Valley. Indian raids were very common throughout this time at the White Rock because of its location west of the Republican River. This was one of the first places that new settlers began to claim land west of the Republican River, the boundary that our government and the Indians had declared as the line for settlement. But why would someone want to settle in such a dangerous area? Many people came to settle in the White Rock area because of its rich, black dirt. This was a land that contained miles and miles of tall switch, Indian, and Bluestem grasses along with a vast supply of lumber. White Rock Creek also ran directly through this area, where you could see catfish, bass and other fish playfully jumping through out the clear waters of the creek. If you were not sold by the natural resources that White Rock had to offer, the physically beautiful landscape (such as the White Rock Bluffs) convinced many others to settle here. White Rock City was once one of the most prosperous towns in all of Republic County, with a population of nearly 200 people in the town, and 651 people within the Township, in 1880.<sup>2</sup> During this time White Rock Township was one of the most densely populated and productive areas in Republic County, with White Rock City looking to become the leading town in the county as well. But after all of its hardships that the settlers fought through and the seemingly never ending battle with Indian warriors, who would believe

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<sup>1</sup> Alleman, Roy V, *The Bloody Saga of White Rock* (Topeka KS: Capper Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Cutler, William G. *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago, IL: A. T. Andreas, 1883).

that a vote deciding not to pass railroad bonds would ultimately deter a line from coming to White Rock City and would be the biggest factor in the death of town and a fierce wound upon the whole township. Today White Rock Township has a meager population of 88 people<sup>3</sup> within it, while White Rock City has become nothing more than a memorial marker and a dot on the map of a place that used to be.

## SETTLING OF WHITE ROCK

White Rock Valley was first settled in the spring of 1862<sup>4</sup> by Mr. and Mrs. William Harsberger, Mr. and Mrs. Asbury Clark and child, and John Furrows- all from Knox County, Illinois. These pioneers' settlement soon went sour after the families witnessed the Indian Wars of 1864<sup>5</sup>. Not long after the Harsbergers, Clarks, and Furrows moved away from White Rock Valley, a new settler moved in. Thomas Lovewell came to the area with his family as shown in below in Figure 1. In 1865 Lovewell went to Manhattan, KS and filed for a homestead, via the Homestead Act of 1865, making the Lovewells one of the first settlers of White Rock Valley.<sup>6</sup> Lovewell's original homestead is still with his family, owned by his granddaughter, Pansy Lovewell Sharkey.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "White Rock, Kansas Township Information." 2007. <http://www.epodunk.com/cgi-bin/genInfo.php?locIndex=267063> (accessed May 4).

<sup>4</sup> "1878 History of Jewell County, Kansas."

2001. <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/jewell/history/1878/index.html> (accessed May 4 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Alleman, Roy V. *The Bloody Saga of White Rock*. Topeka KS: Capper Press, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> The Republic County Bicentennial Historical Committee, *Homeland Horizons*. Belleville KS: The Belleville Telescope, 1975.

<sup>7</sup>The Republic County Historical Society, *The Republic County History*. Belleville KS: The Belleville Telescope, 1964.



Figure 1: Thomas Lovewell Family.

SOURCE: Republic County Historical Society, *The Republic County History*.

NOTE: Figure 1 shows Thomas Lovewell and his family. Thomas is the man sitting on the left side of the picture. He has long white hair and beard.

Our first view of the White Rock Township begins to form on August 20, 1870, when the boundaries were defined. These boundaries covered an area of twelve miles north and south, by six miles east and west<sup>8</sup>, making White Rock Township the largest in Republic County at this time. White Rock Township is the second Township south of the Nebraska line, below Big Bend Township. The western edge of the Township is part of the Republic and Jewell County Line as shown in figure 2 on page 9.

With more and more people pouring into White Rock Township, a central meeting place such as a town was a dire need. A town company which consisted of the Morlan Brothers, Tom Lovewell, Ed Laney, Chester Babcock, and G. W. Reynolds was

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<sup>8</sup> Savage, I.O., *History of Republic County, Kansas*. (Beloit KS: Jones and Chubbic, Art Printers, 1901).

soon put together. Lovewell and Babcock graciously gave up parts of their land to build a town.<sup>9</sup> The company initially wanted to call the town “Pinhook” but decided that “White Rock” was more appropriate in respect to the nearby White Rock Bluffs and White Rock Creek.<sup>10</sup> In order to reach more people and to try to increase its population, the town published an ad that ran in the *Homesteaders Guide* in 1869. The ad read:

“White Rock City is located in the noted White Rock Valley in a well timbered portion of the homestead county in the midst of broad bottom lands and fertile uplands with good building rock and timber in abundance. Good opportunities are offered for farms and establishing all branches of trade and Manufacturing.”<sup>11</sup>

The town was plotted out, as shown in figure 3 on page 10, in the spring of 1871.

White Rock City was located on the S.W. ¼ of section 7-2-5, as seen in figure 2 on page

9. At this point the town site contained nothing more than John Galbraith’s General Store.<sup>12</sup>

#### INDIAN RAIDS AND MASSACRES IN WHITE ROCK

“Early in April, 1867, a small band of Cheyenne’s found their way into the settlements on White Rock creek, and under the guise of being friendly Otoes, were admitted into the home of a settler named Ward and given food. One of the savages noticed a rifle belonging to the host and, taking it down, shot him as he unsuspectingly smoked his pipe. The two Ward boys made a dash for their lives, the Indians firing at and wounding one of them fatally. Mrs. Ward barricaded herself in the house and waited the next move of the savages, who procured an ax, chopped down the door and looted the house. The confiscated plunder was loaded on two mules, the property of Mr. Ward, and, with Mrs. Ward as prisoner, the Indians hurriedly left to join their tribe on the Solomon... The fate of Mrs. Ward was never learned.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Republic County Bicentennial Historical Committee, *Homeland Horizons*. (Belleville KS: The Belleville Telescope, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Savage, *History of Republic County, Kansas*.

<sup>11</sup> The Republic County Bicentennial Historical Committee, *Homeland Horizons*.

<sup>12</sup> Savage, *History of Republic County, Kansas*.

<sup>13</sup> "1878 History of Jewel County, Kansas," accessed May 4, 2010, <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/jewell/history/1878/index.html>.

This gruesome attack shows how the Indians had no remorse within their raids. They would attack man, woman, and child in attempt to scare the settlers west of the Republican River.

The Pawnee Indian tribe, known as the Republic Pawnee<sup>14</sup>, was the major tribe that encompassed the White Rock Valley, but they were not the Indians doing the majority of the raids and attacks. The Sioux tribes were who the settlers had to worry about. The Sioux was a blood thirsty tribe set in its ways and traditions. They did not like that the settlers had begun to create towns west of the Republican River, an area where the Government had promised them land. The Sioux were not only thirsty for the blood of the newly come white settlers, they would also attack the Pawnee every opportunity available. The Comanche, Arapaho,<sup>15</sup> and Cheyenne<sup>16</sup> would also make raids into the White Rock Valley, but very seldom. The Pawnee were not always innocent and on good terms with the settlers. Like the other tribes, they were also angry about the settling upon land west of the Republican River. However though, the Pawnee were “ever ready to rob and murder when they thought it would be charged up to the Sioux, Cheyenne, and other hostile tribes on the plains.”<sup>17</sup>

On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of May, in 1870, we see the last recorded Indian raid. A band of Cheyenne Indians made their way to the Bowles’ settlement, where they stole two spans of horses, one owned by Sam Bowles’ and the other span owned by Peter Tanner.<sup>18</sup> After this raid at the Bowles’ homestead, Indian raids seemed to become nonexistent. There

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<sup>14</sup> Homer Socolofsky and Huber Self, "Early Indian Tribes in Kansas," Map #11 in *Historical Atlas of Kansas*. 2nd ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Alleman, Roy V., *The Bloody Saga of White Rock*. (Topeka KS: Capper Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Socolofsky and Self, "Historical Tribes," Map #11 in *Historical Atlas of Kansas*.

<sup>17</sup> Savage, *History of Republic County, Kansas*.

<sup>18</sup> "1878 History of Jewel County, Kansas."

was also a notable drop within the viewing of Indians. It was now an unusual sight to see the silhouette of an Indian in the horizon, a view that many of the settlers had become used to. Although the attacks felt as if they were coming to an end, the settlers still kept a keen eye out for trouble and they would often “set an extra dinner plate to keep them [the Indians] peaceful incase one happened to stop by.”<sup>19</sup> The settlers had finally outlasted the Indians with the help of the Independent Company of Salt Creek Militia.<sup>20</sup> Many had left the area for fear of their lives, but those who stayed and tenaciously fought would now be able to live peacefully.

#### DEATH OF WHITE ROCK

Different than many other towns, White Rock was able to overcome the Indian raids and massacres that it endured throughout its time. But reminiscent of many other ghost towns today, White Rock City began to gradually die down because of its inability to build a railroad line. White Rock City stamped its own death certificate with the railroad line, when the majority of its citizens voted against obtaining bonds that would have brought a rail line into White Rock City and another depot near the mouth of White Rock Creek. It was speculated that if White Rock City had voted “yes” on the bonds that it would have become a the leading city in Republic County because of its committed establishments, flourishing water power, and blossoming businesses.<sup>21</sup> Sadly though, White Rock Township voted “no” for the railroad bonds and has steadily died out. Today,

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<sup>19</sup> Sothers, Beverly. Interview by Tyler Clark, 6 March 2010. Courtland, KS.

<sup>20</sup> Savage, *History of Republic County, Kansas*.

<sup>21</sup> Savage, *History of Republic County, Kansas*.

White Rock Township has a paltry population of 88 people<sup>22</sup> compared to the vast population of 651 people that the Township held in 1880.<sup>23</sup>

In 1926, the last of the old rock school house and last building was cleared away when E.H. Smies bought the property. Today there is nothing left of the White Rock City site except the memorial marker, that is shown below in figure 4, carved out of the native white rock, plowed fields, and memories.

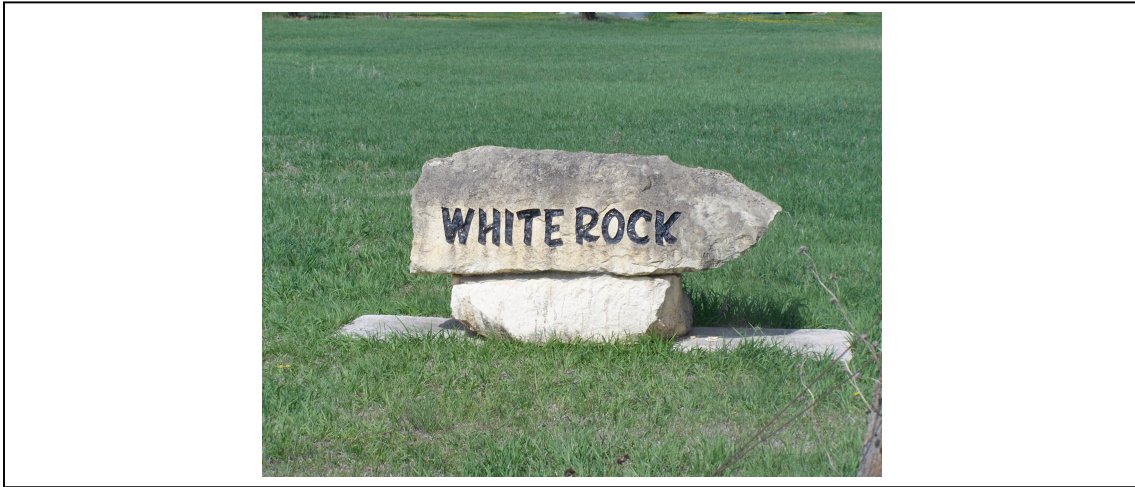


Figure 4: White Rock City Town Marker.

SOURCE: Tyler Clark.

NOTE: Figure 4 shows the only remaining sign of White Rock City. Figure 4 is carved out of the native White Rock found within the rolling hills a short distance away.

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<sup>22</sup> Savage, *History of Republic County, Kansas*.

<sup>23</sup> Alleman, *The Bloody Saga of White Rock*.



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Media

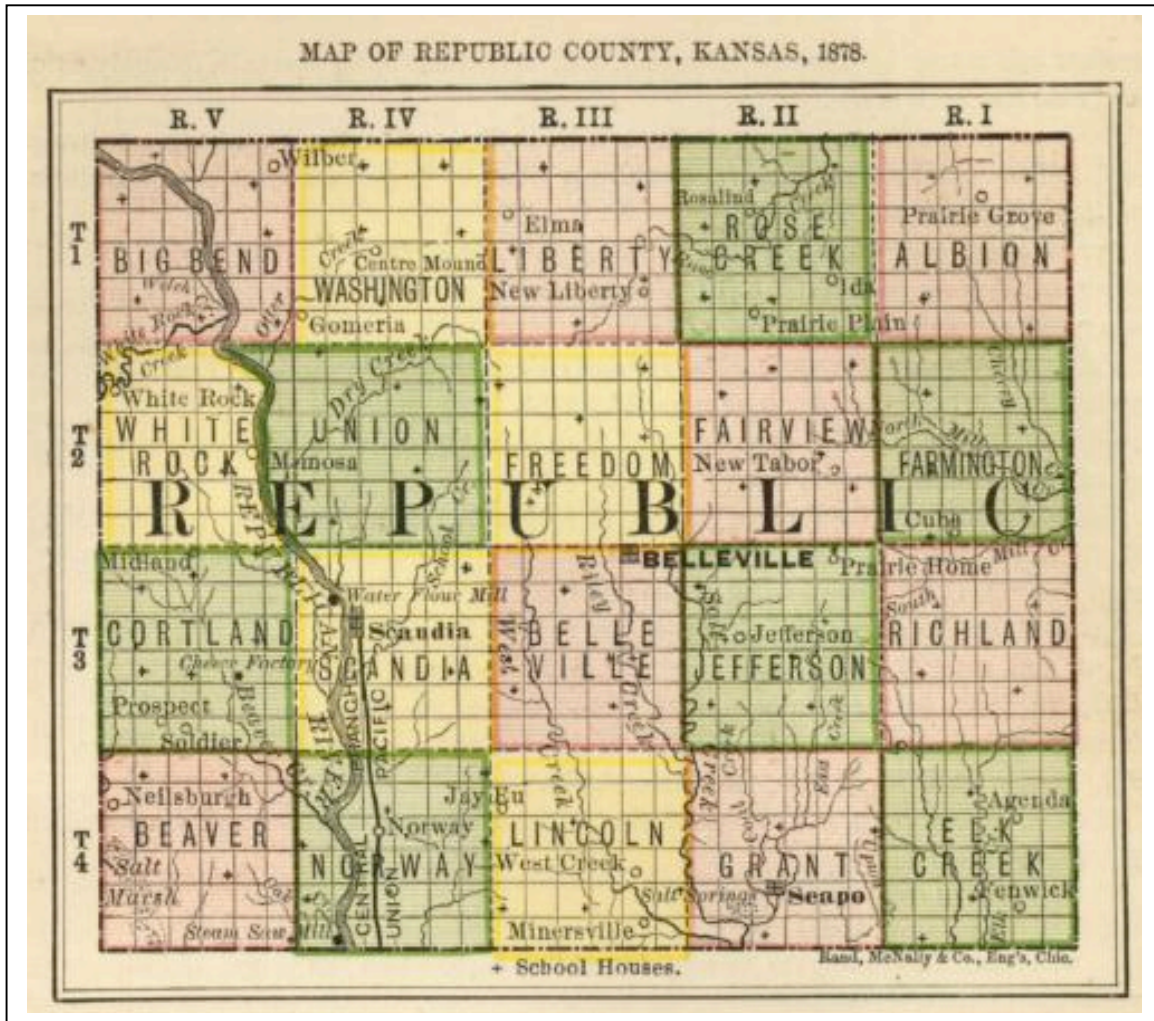


Figure 2: Map of Republic County, Kansas Townships and Towns in 1878.  
NOTE: Figure 2 shows White Rock Township, located in section R, V-T2 and White Rock City in the S.W. ¼ of section 7-2-5.  
SOURCE: "Kansas State Board of Agriculture, First Biennial Report, 1878." 1999.<http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/1878/images/republic.jpg> (accessed May 4 2010).

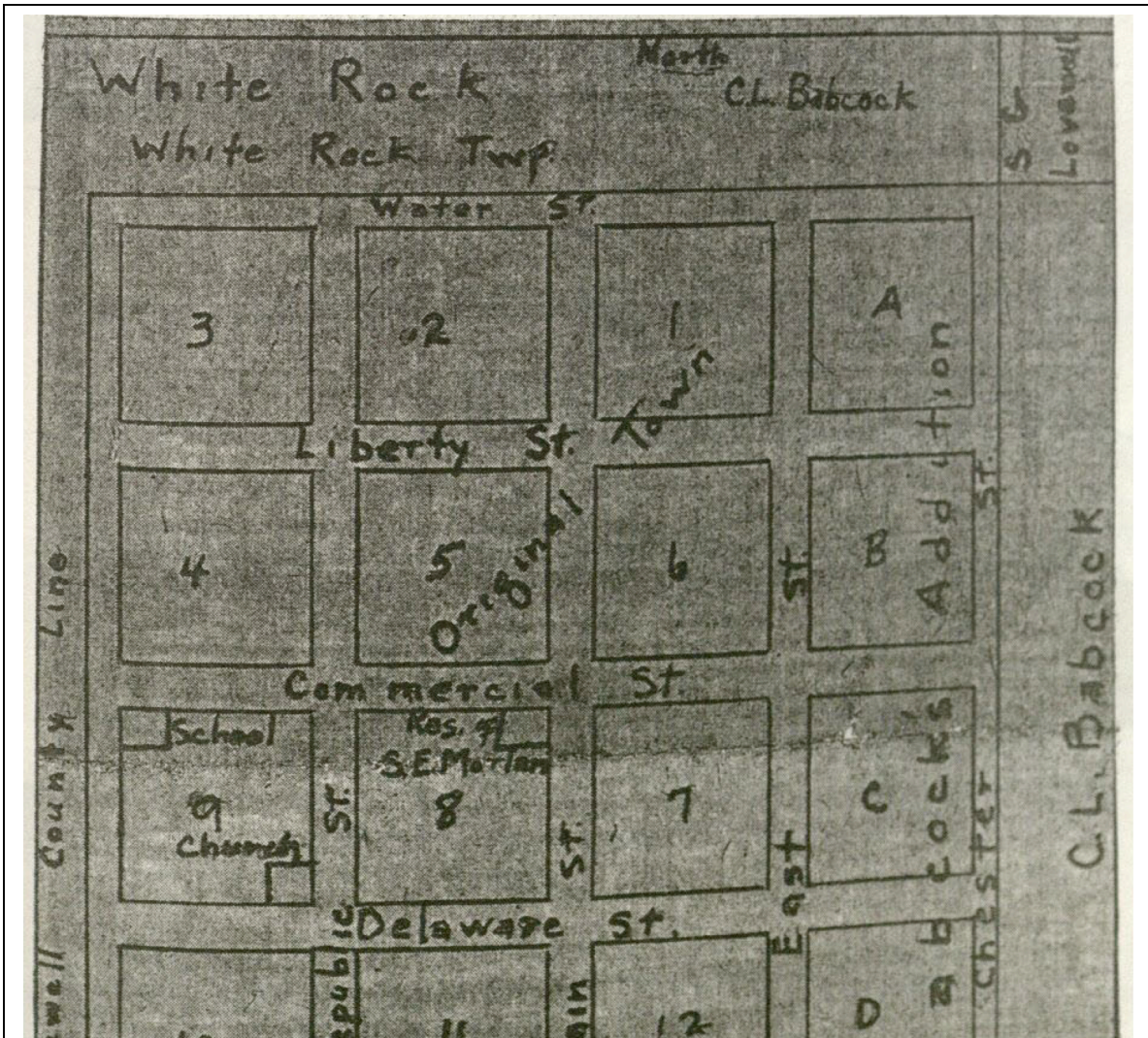


Figure 4: Plot map of White Rock City from 1904 Atlas.  
 NOTE: Figure shows the original White Rock City town plots. Completely labeled with the Street names and divided into a 12 sub divisions.  
 SOURCE: The Republic County Bicentennial Historical Committee, *Homeland Horizons*. Belleville KS: The Belleville Telescope, 1975