

**The Quivira Historical Society  
of  
Alma, Wabaunsee County, Kansas 1901-1912**

**By Anthony Porter, Chapman Center for Rural Studies, August, 2016**



Figure 1. A depiction of Quivira Historical Society co-founder and archeologist J.V Brower. His research is the groundwork for the earliest Kansas history. SOURCE: Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

This exploration of the amateur history and archaeological organization, the Quivira Society, was a semester-long KSU intern project involving a museum collection of rich primary sources, Indian artifacts, and publications. Although accessioned, the Quivira Collection had never been inventoried nor explored in-depth. This project provides an understanding of the society founders, goals, and accomplishments during the short time it was active. A full inventory of the Quivira Collection is available at the Wabaunsee County Historical Society, Alma, Kansas.

In the early years of 1890, two men fascinated by the mystery of the 1540 expedition of Spanish explorer Vasquez de Coronado happened into a chance meeting in Alma, Kansas. These two men were well-known archeologist Jacob Vredenbruch Brower from St. Paul, Minnesota, and Alma native, Judge John. T. Keagy. In a time wrought with a nationally invigorated interest in history, Keagy and Brower assembled an amalgamation of like-minded men creating the Quivira Historical Society. As part of - yet somehow distinguished from - the many other budding amateur historical and archeological societies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Quivira Historical Society carved its own place in history while members did their part to preserve other aspects within it. In order to fully understand and appreciate the passion these Quivira Society members shared, it is important to understand the story of Coronado's expedition and the mystery surrounding it.

### Coronado's expedition

During his time in the New World, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado became intrigued by rumors of wealthy cities to the north of New Spain (Mexico). In April of 1541, Coronado and his army embarked on a journey from Mexico in search of the "Seven Golden cities of Cibola" in a land called Quivira.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the Spanish expeditioners were not literally searching for gold; rather they were interested in "[conquering] populous and sophisticated native groups and [exacting] tribute



Figure 2. A Chart of the Central Settlements of Quivira and Harahey depicting village sites, ancient burial mounds and boundary lines between nations. Copies of this chart were distributed as the dedicatory address was delivered, 1904. SOURCE: Quivira folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

<sup>1</sup> Alan N. Winkler, *Artifacts Astray*, 1.

from them in an orderly, predetermined manner.”<sup>2</sup> The expedition, which was paid for by its members, did not have a traditional army by today’s standards. It “was not entirely or even predominantly Spanish, almost no one... possessed metal armor,” contained missionaries such as Friar Juan de Padilla, numerous guides familiar with the terrain, interpreters, and most surprisingly, the Indian allies who initially accompanied the Spaniards in Mexico outnumbered them 1,300 to 368.<sup>3</sup> Their journey led them east through New Mexico, past the Texas and Oklahoma Panhandles, eventually reaching what is present-day Kansas in June of 1541. They then they followed the Arkansas River east until they found a village of Wichita Indians near present-day Lyons.<sup>4</sup> There was no gold to be found in Quivira, however, but on the hearsay of locals, Coronado traveled to the eastern province of Harahey. Coronado and his band of what was now thirty men “came as far as McDowell Creek and from there, Coronado sent for the lord of Harahey who came with about two hundred men—all naked--with bows.”<sup>5</sup> Much to the dismay of Coronado and his men, Harahey yielded no riches either. Demoralized, Coronado returned to Mexico reporting his journey to find the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola a failure. Many of his companions dropped out and settled near Culiacán or Compostela rather than return to Mexico City in shame.<sup>6</sup> This was not the case for everyone in his party, as Friar Juan de Padilla was compelled to return to the land of Quivira as he saw great potential in the region and believed his holy teachings would benefit those in the area.

---

<sup>2</sup> F.T. Smith, review of *No Settlement No Conquest: A History of the Coronado Entrada*, *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 75(4) (Nov. 2009), 1031.

<sup>3</sup> F.T. Smith, “No Settlement No Conquest,” 1031.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Alma Enterprise*, “A Fine Obelisk: The Harahey Monument is an ornament to the Town and an Honor to Judge Keagy,” n.d., in the Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Planetary Science Institute, *Coronado's Journey Through New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas*.

Initially Padilla's return proved to be quite promising as he connected well with the Quivirians who whole-heartedly accepted him as a father. However, wishing to extend his field of labor and sphere of influence, he desired to go to the Guas Indians—enemies of the Quivira; this excursion proved to be his last. En route to the Guas, Friar Padilla and his party encountered a war party. Sensing their intent, Padilla urged his companions to flee while he knelt down in tribute to offer his life for theirs. Thus, Friar Juan de Padilla became the first religious martyr within the limits of the United States, a tale related by his “companions after considerable wandering and a ten-month captivity at Panuco, in Mexico.”<sup>7</sup> The mystery and interest surrounding Coronado's expedition stems not from whether or not he found Quivira, as that is a matter of record; the true mystery lies in the geographic boundaries and locations of these groups, a mystery that went unsolved for centuries. Yet this mystery *was* solved. Who were the men who unraveled the mystery that seemed to elude so many others before them? In the context of a relatively widespread national historical and archeological engagement, how did they ascend out of obscurity into national acclaim?

### **Quivira Society Members**

While the members of the Quivira Historical Society were not professional historians by title, they were far from uneducated. Having already established himself as a strong presence in the archeological world, J.V. Brower took great interest in the discovery of the true location of the land of Quivira. Before his interest in Quivira, Brower had already contributed much to his field of study. He is credited with discovering mounds and ancient village sites at Itaska Lake in 1894-95, charting the source of the Missouri river in 1896, discovering over 1100 ancient

---

<sup>7</sup> Edward A. Killian, *Killian's Paper*, in Quivira Collection, n.d., 115.

mounds at Mille Lac, Minnesota, and authoring six archeological books.<sup>8</sup> He did not search historical records for a living—rather, he was an amateur historian who pursued historical endeavors not for monetary gain but because he found enjoyment in the advancement of the field of history. In 1895, a collection was submitted to experts of “about 400 flint implements



Figure 3. Photograph of a stone scraper in the collection of John T. Keagy. Found at Mill Creek circa 1890. SOURCE: Photographed by author courtesy of Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

consisting of spear and arrowheads, scrapers, knives, and tomahawks found in a cultivated field

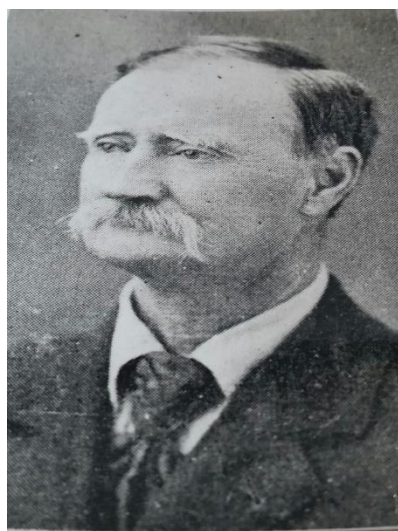


Figure 4. A historic photograph of Judge John T. Keagy of Alma, Kansas circa 1900. His collaborative efforts with J.V. Brower greatly contributed to the establishment of early Kansas history. SOURCE: Quivira Folder, Courtesy of Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

about 15 miles south of Manhattan.” (This collection was later destroyed in a fire). Brower noticed that the “artifacts differed from any others found in the Mississippi basin,” a difference “that was especially noticeable in the large number of tomahawks and knives and in the character of the rude chipping.”<sup>9</sup> L.R. Elliot, member of the Kansas State Historical Society and donor of this collection invited Brower to investigate the village sites near the junction of the Smoky Hill

and Republican River. It was during this time that he met John T. Keagy, an archeological enthusiast who spent the years between 1897 and

1902 amassing his own impressive collection of over 10,000 stone objects from Wabaunsee and its bordering counties.<sup>10</sup> Excavated from the land of farmers within the Central Plain Sites (A.D.

<sup>8</sup> Edward A. Killian, *The Real Quivira & its Discoverers*, Articles on Anthropological Subjects.

<sup>9</sup> Edward A. Killian, *Rediscovery of the Quivira*, Articles on Anthropological Subjects.

<sup>10</sup> John T. Keagy, *Kansas explorations at Mill Creek Valley, Ks*, 97.



Figure 5. A photograph of a stone celt found in Mill Creek circa 1890. The groove most likely means this tool was mounted on a wooden handle and used for chopping.  
SOURCE: Photographed by author courtesy of Wabaunsee County Historical Museum

900-1400), his collection of stone tools span the Archaic, Late Archaic, and Plains Village time periods and are the foundation of our knowledge of the tribes Coronado interacted with during his expedition.<sup>11</sup> With the cooperation of like-minded ethnological researchers Edward A. Killian of Alma, Kansas who regularly contributed to scholarly journals such as *Popular Science* and *The Conservative*, and Elmer E. Blackman, a professor and state archeologist in Lincoln, Nebraska, Brower and Keagy formed the Quivira Historical Society on October 29, 1901.<sup>12</sup> This diverse group of intellectuals agreed “to preserve and perpetuate the records of Coronado’s great march from Mexico to the present territory of Kansas in 1540-’42, and all that accurately

---

<sup>11</sup> Robert J. Hoard and William E. Banks, *Kansas Archeology*, 105-6.

<sup>12</sup> Quivira Historical Society, Preliminary Meeting, 27.

pertains to the province of Quivira for which he was seeking.”<sup>13</sup> After some initial changes, the organization was structured as follows: J.V. Brower as president, John T. Keagy, whose office was the annual meeting place of the society as Executive Committee Chairman, E. E. Blackman as Vice President and Edward A. Killian as secretary, whose proficiency in English, German, and French especially suited him for this position.

### **Framing the Society**

While it may seem strange that a group of men from many different disciplines and places of origin would come together to spend their time doing historical work, the context of their day and age helps to explain their actions. In the late 1800s and early 1900s a phenomenon was sweeping the nation. That phenomenon was the rise in a luxury that many of us today take



Figure 6. A photograph of a stone Metate in the Keagy collection circa 1890. This large quern was used in conjunction with a mobile hand stone to grind cereal grains, such as maize, into flour. SOURCE: Photographed by author courtesy of the Wabauunsee County Historical Museum

for granted – leisure time. In an era, devoid of rapid and reliable transportation, the development of railways and trains resulted in unprecedented town growth. As neighboring towns began to compete for citizens, the more amenities, conveniences, and resources available in a town, the more attractive it became. An ever-expanding railway system could reach major locations in a fraction of the time it took by horse, and for those living in successful areas, it was no longer necessary to travel long distances for their goods and services. This drastic change offered people leisure time as they had never

<sup>13</sup> Edward A. Killian, Articles on Anthropological Subjects II, 32-33.

known before. Capitalizing on this, scholars, intellectuals, and enthusiasts alike indulged in their own personal interest, the preservation of local history being a common theme. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “professional historians made national history their theme...they wrote about constitutional history, politics, diplomacy, founding fathers and finance.”<sup>14</sup> Further, to many professionals “the tendency of American history seemed to be from colonial diversity and multiplicity to federation and national unity” which meant that in regards to the history of states, everything after 1776 “was local history, unworthy of, and irrelevant to the grander, national themes they studied.”<sup>15</sup> According to one historian, professional historians of this time overlooked or obscured local variations, often completely misrepresenting local facts, and “unwittingly encouraging knowledgeable amateurs to tell the story as it really happened.”<sup>16</sup> The

efforts of these amateurs provided

ample evidence that, at the time,

the early twentieth century,

“concerned amateur archeologists

[were] the professional’s greatest

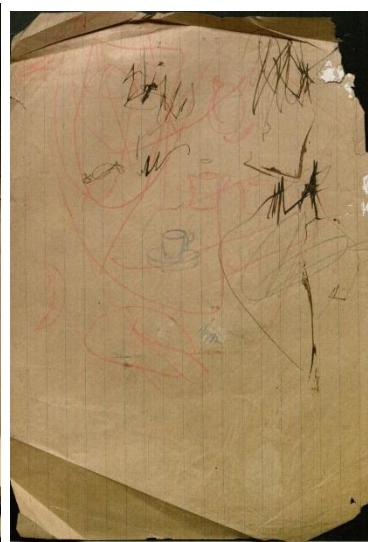
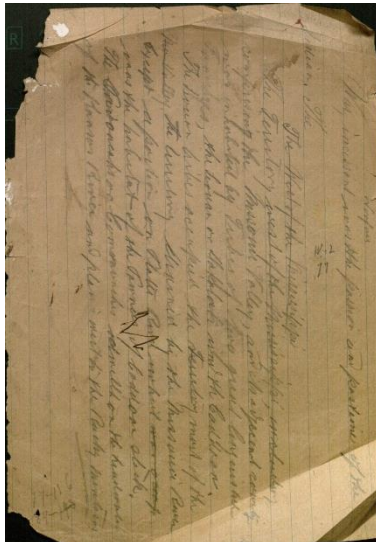
source of assistance and

support.”<sup>17</sup> This was especially

true for the Quivira Society whose

wide swathe of interests differentiated them from

other amateur historical societies of their time.



Figures 7. & 8. These two photographs show the front and reverse side of a document in the Quivira Collection. The figure 7 is the first part of an essay most likely written by Edward Killian while figure 8 appears to show the scribbles and drawings of a child. SOURCE: Quivira collection, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum

<sup>14</sup>Whitfield J. Bell Jr., *the Amateur Historian*, 267.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Whitfield J. Bell Jr., *the Amateur Historian*, 268.

<sup>17</sup> Charles R. McGimsey III, *Public Archeology*, 8.



Despite their name, the Quivira Society's total volume of work was far more inclusive than it may seem. They compiled research in subjects pertaining to the preservation of Coronado's expedition such as history, anthropology, geography, ethnology, and archeology – all of which were relevant to their objective; however, their interests also spanned the scientific, contemporary, and abstract. Over fifty strenuously assembled volumes on naval battles, popular science, botany, animal life, Eskimo languages, foreign torture techniques, French exploration, prehistoric tribes, physiology - such as conjoined twins, and other human oddities - German history, witches and even articles on Helen Keller can be found in their comprehensive collection. While a large portion of this collection consisted of scientific journals on archeology and other related subjects, the bulk is composed of newspaper articles clipped and pasted into books. Books with clippings in excess of over one hundred articles spanning news sources across the country reveal the tenacity and devotion this group had to their organization. There is also a significant portion of the collection consisting of military histories, encyclopedia entries, sketches of stone



Figure 9. Photograph of the Coronado monument at Coronado Park, Junction City circa 1980. Inscribed is the text: Quivira and Harahey - discovered by Coronado 1541 – Jaramillo Padilla Tatarax – Rediscovered by J.V. Brower 1896 – Erected for Quivira Historical Society by Robert Henderson 1902 – John T. Keagy Chariman – Edward A Killian Secretary – Kansas USA. SOURCE: Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.



commemorate their work, four monuments were erected in 1904, three on October 25<sup>th</sup>, and the final one on October 29<sup>th</sup>. Financed by Keagy and Brower, each granite monument stood at 14 feet tall and was inscribed with a dedication to the Quivira Society and a different aspect of their research: Tatarrax, the chief of Haraheys monument<sup>19</sup> in Manhattan, Kansas, Juan de Padilla monument in Herington, Kansas, Harahey monument in Alma, Kansas, and Coronado monument in Junction City, Kansas.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 12. A photograph of a stone core from the Keagy collection. A core was typically a larger stone that tools would be extracted from. The indentation in the center appears to be an arrow head.  
SOURCE: Quivira collection courtesy of Wabaunsee

## Controversy

As the case with many historical discoveries, a fair amount of controversy surrounded the Quivira Historical Society's findings. The most notable of these controversies was between the Kansas State Historical Society who not only did not accept but disputed the boundary line of Quivira and Harahey, the actual eastern point in Kansas that Coronado and Padilla reached, and what Indian tribes Coronado met as provided by the Quivira Society research. For example, in

---

<sup>19</sup> "Dedication of Harahey Monument" *Alma Enterprise*

<sup>20</sup> "A Fine Obelisk" (Quivira Folder)

his publications of the land of Harahey, J. V. Brower claimed the Indians seen by Coronado were Pawnee but other historians claimed they were Kaw Indians. As an act of retaliation, John T. Keagy gave his extensive collection of Wabaunsee County stone artifacts to the Minnesota Historical Society based in Brower's hometown of St. Paul. Keagy opted to move his collection where it would be "appreciated" and also as a token of his gratitude to Brower "who at his own expense, published two volumes, "Quivira" and "Harahey," to perpetuate the earliest Kansas history.<sup>21</sup> Despite the collection's diminished research value (due to the fact that the exact sites where many of the artifacts Keagy collected were not noted) in 1923, the Kansas State Historical Society traded duplicate newspapers from the Quivira Society's collection to the Minnesota Historical Society for the Kansas portion of Keagy's stone collection. These were in their possession until the fall of 2009 where it was loaned to the Wabaunsee County Historical Society.<sup>22</sup>

Years after the publication of Brower's "Quivira" and "Harahey," a man named W. E. Richey from Harveyville, Kansas, publicly took credit for the discovery of the Land of Quivira. Richey went as far as claiming that the work of the Quivira Historical Society was useful to him but that the true discoverer was himself. Richey was endorsed and upheld by the Bureau of American Ethnology at Washington D.C. and also by one of its leaders, Dr. F.W. Hodge.<sup>23</sup> Naturally, the Quivira Society was outraged by this blatant plagiarism and took to newspapers across the country to discredit him. Eventually Dr. Hodge reached out to the secretary of the Quivira Society, Edward Killian, stating: "Anyone who will take the trouble to compare Mr. Brower's volume "Harahey" with Mr. Richey's paper on Quivira...will find that the "province"

---

<sup>21</sup> Edward A. Killian, Probate Judge John T. Keagy... (Quivira folder)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Edward A. Killian, Articles on Anthropological Subjects, 32.

of Coronado's chronicles was definitely and finally located in the former.<sup>24</sup> In a separate correspondence Hodge continued:

“Early in 1899 Mr. Brower published a work which sets forth incontrovertible evidence of the location of Quivira; eighteen months later Mr. Richey published a paper which locates Quivira in the same region...Never before was there published such an array of evidence of the Quivira location as that set forth in Harahey and I do not believe that the location can ever be changed.”<sup>25</sup>

Journalist George R. Remsburg concurred in the July 12th edition of the *Alma Signal*: “I have had insight to all that pertains to the late discovery of the long lost province of Quivira; I have studied both sides of the controversy in regard to the real discoverer, and will say without hesitancy and without fear of successful contradiction that the whole credit belongs to Mr. Brower and his zealous co-laborers.”<sup>26</sup> The monuments erected in 1904 are a testament to the success of the Quivira Society in reclaiming their title as discoverers of the Quivira and Harahey regions.

## Conclusion

In an era of unparalleled interest in research and historical preservation, an amalgamation of intellectuals brought together by a shared passion culminated into the Quivira Historical Society. Amateurs by definition, historians by achievement, this society of men from varying backgrounds and locations distinguished themselves from other societies of the day by the sheer volume of their work, solidifying their place in history as the rediscoverers of the lost land of Quivira. Despite controversies, the organization maintained its reputability until it dissolved in the late 1910s, ensuring that the earliest history of what is now Kansas is available to posterity. Although their story and significance is lost to all but those in the Wabaunsee County area –

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Edward A. Killian, *Articles on Anthropological Subjects*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> George R. Remsburg, *Articles on Anthropological subjects II*.

many of whom will to this day speak of the discovery of elusive chainmail that belonged to Coronado's party - the Quivira Society's contribution to the fields of history, archeology, and geography will live on in perpetuity.

## Bibliography

*Alma Enterprise*, "Dedication of Harahey Monument," n.d., in the Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

*Alma Enterprise*, "A Fine Obelisk: The Harahey Monument is an ornament to the Town and an Honor to Judge Keagy," n.d., in the Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum.

Banks, William E. and Robert J. Hoard, editors. *Kansas Archeology*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006.

Bell, Whitfield J. "The Amateur Historian." *New York History* 53 (3), 1972. New York State Historical Association: <http://www.jstor.org.er.lib.k-state.edu/stable/23164698>. Accessed August, 2016.

Flint, Richard. *No Settlement, No Conquest: A History of the Coronado Entrada*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

Keagy T. John, *Kansas explorations at Mill Creek Valley* in the Quivira Folder, Courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, n.d.

Killian A. Edward, "The Rediscovery of Quivira" *Articles on Anthropological Subjects* in the Quivira Collection, n.d.

Killian A. Edward, "Richey's Claim as Original Re-discoverer of Quivira" *Articles on Anthropological Subjects* in the Quivira Collection, n.d.

Killian A. Edward, *Killian's Paper* in the Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, n.d.

Killian A. Edward, *Preliminary Meeting by the Quivira Historical Society* in the Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, n.d.

McGimsey III, Charles R. *Public Archeology*. Cambridge: Academic Press Inc., 1973.

Planetary Science Institute, *Coronado's Journey through New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas*. <https://www.psi.edu/about/staff/hartmann/coronado/coronadosjourney2.html>. Accessed August, 2016.

Remsburg J. George. *Articles on Anthropological subjects, II. The Quivira Collection*, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, n.d.

Smith, F.T. Review, *No Settlement, No Conquest: A History of the Coronado Entrada* in the *Journal of Southern History*, Vol 75(4), November, 2009.

Quivira Historical Society, *Probate Judge John T. Keagy...* in the Quivira Folder, courtesy of the Wabaunsee County Historical Museum, n.d.

Winkler, Alan N. "Artifacts Astray." In the newsletter *Indian Artifacts*, published by the Wabaunsee County Historical Society, 2012. See <http://www.wabaunsee.org/index.php/exhibits/ias> , last accessed August, 2016.