

COLORING THE PAST:

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY ON THE LINEAR TRAIL



Introduction

Coloring the Past: Walking Through History on the Linear Trail is a collaborate project of the **Riley County Genealogical Society** and the **Riley County Historical Society & Museum**. Together, we set out to create a book that invites readers of all ages to explore the stories woven into our local area. The detailed illustrations by artist **Hilary Wahlen** make this coloring book truly one-of-a-kind, offering a visual journey through the people, places, and moments that shaped our community. As you color, take your time, and imagine how these scenes might have looked like long ago.

A special thank you goes to the **Arts & Humanities Association of Manhattan**  and **The Strong Inn: Rachelle Routh, Owner** for their generous grant and contribution supporting our printing costs.

RILEY COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

2005 Claflin Road; Manhattan, KS 66502

(785) 565-6495

www.rileycgs.com

RILEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AND MUSEUM

2309 Claflin Road; Manhattan, KS 66502

(785) 565-6490

<https://www.rileychs.org/>

Riley County Genealogical Society

- *Charlene Brownson, Vice President*
- *Doreen Towne, FYI Editor*

Riley County Historical Society and Museum

- *Katharine Hensler, Director*
- *Melanie Highsmith, Curator of Education & Design*

Illustrator & Artist

- *Hilary Wahlen*



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The Settlement of Manhattan, Kansas

After the Kansas–Nebraska Act opened the region to legal settlement in 1854, lands within the Kansas Territory - including the area that would become Riley County - became available to incoming settlers. Although this land had been part of the Kanza (Kaw) Indian reservation, the Kanza people were no longer living in the Riley County area by that time.

1853 Free-Stater Samuel Dexter Houston arrives.

1854 George S. Parks establishes the settlement of Polistra along the Kansas River.

1854 Samuel Dexter Houston and four others establish the Canton settlement at the foot of Bluemont Hill.

1855 Isaac Goodnow and the New England Emigrant Aid Company settled at the confluence of the Blue and Kansas Rivers in the spring of 1855. By April, the three settlements joined to form the town of Boston.

1855 In June, the Cincinnati and Kansas Land Company traveling on the steamboat Hartford became stuck near Boston. The Boston group asked the Ohio emigrants to join their effort and with certain concessions, including renaming the town Manhattan to please a financier, they stayed. Thus, Manhattan was born and grew to become a third-class city in 1870, second-class city in 1880, and a first-class city in 1968.

Shortly after the town was organized, a college was established and a charter obtained from the Territorial Legislature for the **Bluemont Central College Association**. The school opened in 1860 under the supervision of the Methodist Church. Although early efforts were made to have the school declared the state university it failed. With the passage of the Morrill Act approved by Congress, **Kansas State Agricultural College**, became one of the nation's first land-grant colleges in 1863. Today, the college is known as **Kansas State University**.

Blue Earth Village

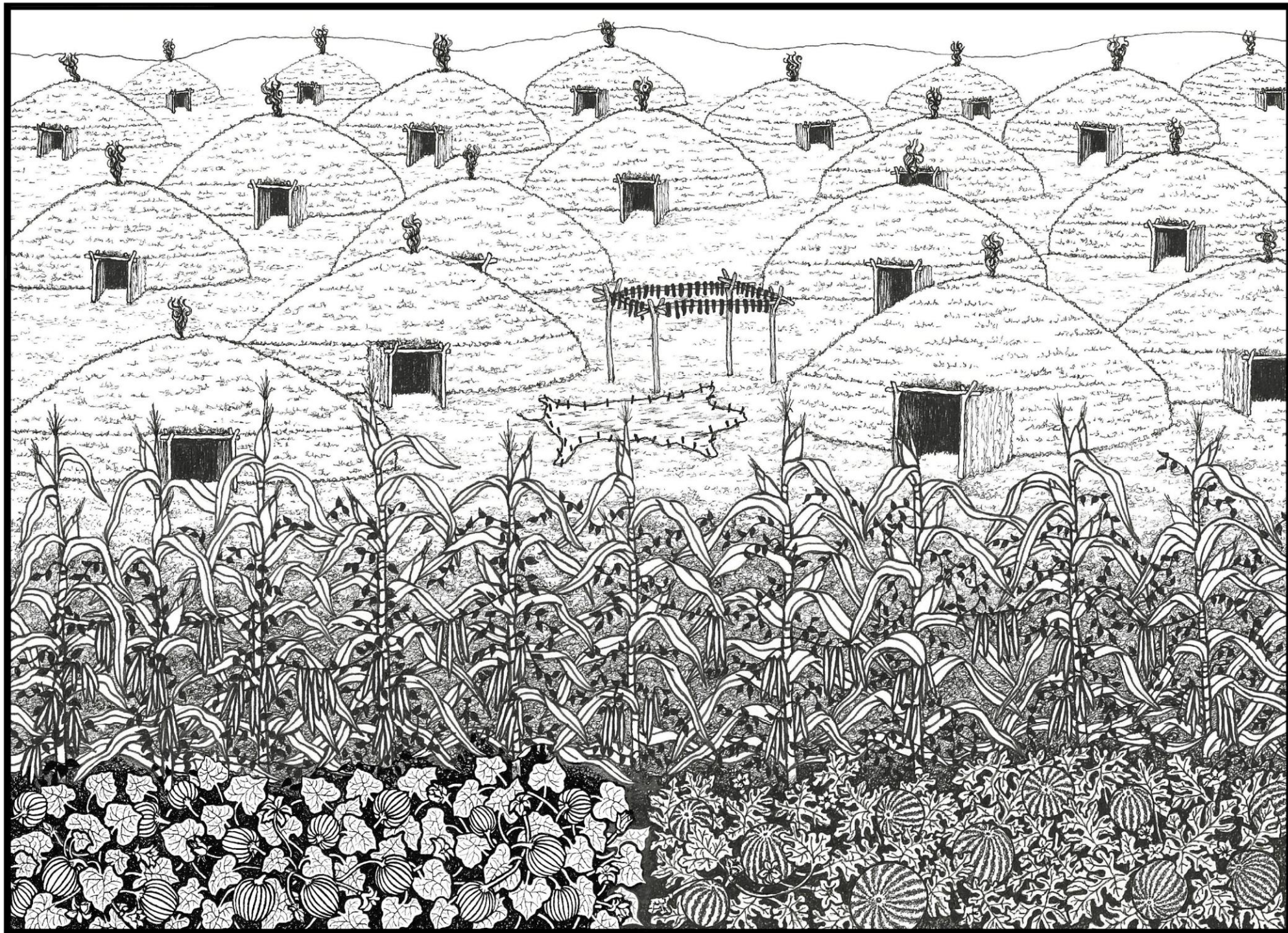
Kanza Blue Earth Village is located between the Kansas and Blue Rivers about four miles east of where Manhattan was founded. The Kanza or Kaw people, for whom the state of Kansas is named, recognize their early homeland in much of what we know today as Kansas and adjacent parts of present-day Missouri, Nebraska, and Colorado.

European contact with the ancestors of the Kanza began, at least indirectly, in the late 1600s. Soon thereafter, the Kanza were trading pelts and hides with the French along the Missouri River. Later that century, they moved their primary settlement to the Kansas River valley. Also known as the People of the Southwind, they established Blue Earth village in the heart of their homeland in what is now eastern Manhattan.

Blue Earth Village was home to approximately 1,500 people. They lived in about 120 earth lodges. These may have housed 1-2 families or as many as 10 related individuals. The women and men worked in distinct but complementary roles to plant and harvest crops such as corn, beans, pumpkins, and melons and hunt and process bison, deer, and elk for meat and hides.

The tribe then split into different bands in the years following the first land-cession treaty imposed on the Kanza in 1825. Later treaties in 1846 and 1859 took more land from the Kanza until 1872, when the Kaw Land Bill sold the last of it to non-indigenous settlers. The Kanza, reduced to only several hundred citizens, were expelled from Kansas, and moved into Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) in 1873.

Today, the Kanza, now known as the Kaw Nation, is a federally recognized self-governing tribal nation headquartered in Kaw City, Oklahoma. Although the Kanza have endured nearly unbearable hardships, their population has rebounded, and they are revitalizing their cultural lifeways. The Kaw Nation is dedicated to educating the broader public about their cultural and historical legacy in Kansas.



Kanza tribe at Blue Earth Village

The Opening of Kansas Territory

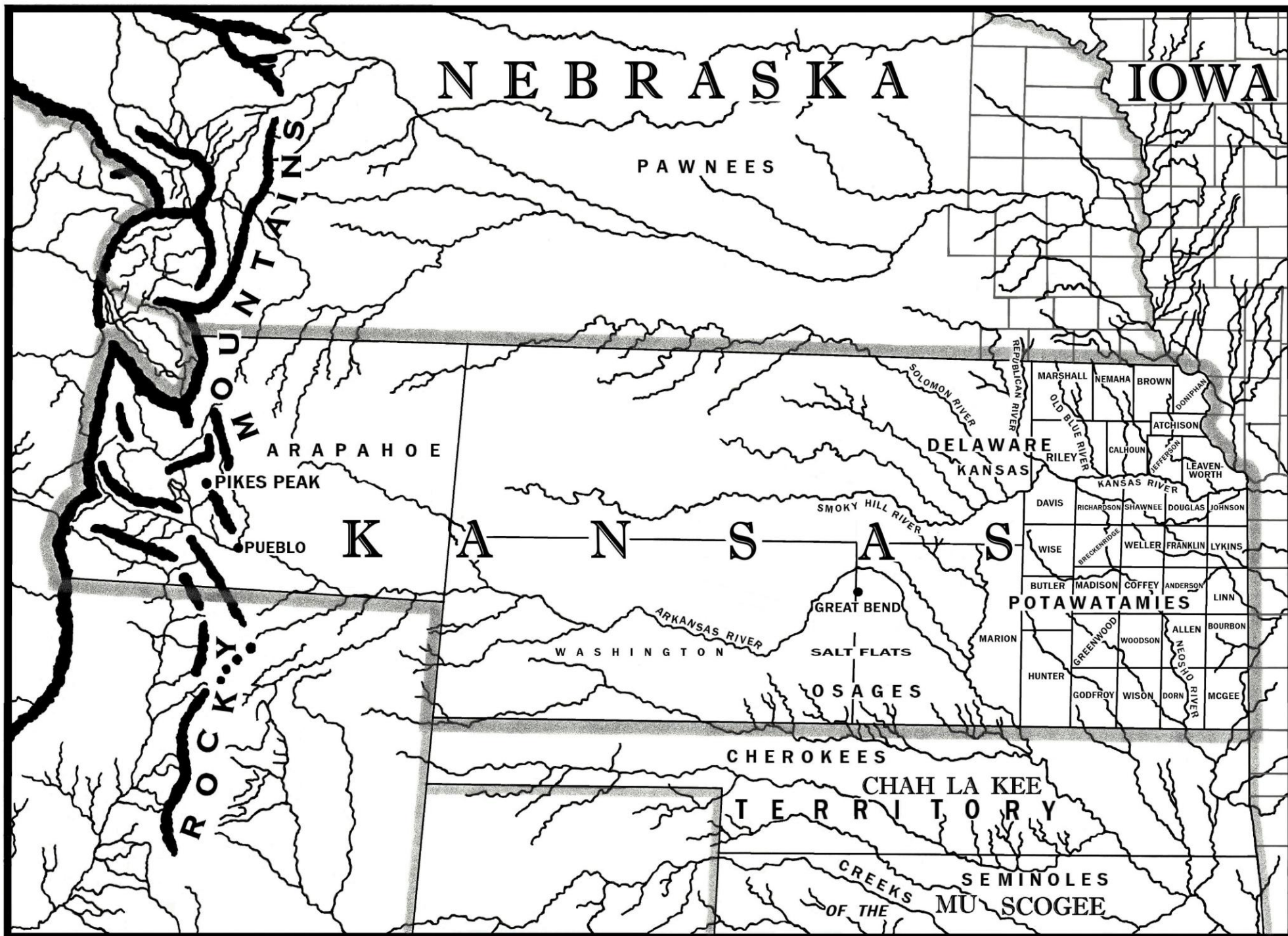
The Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed in May 1854, and Kansas Territory was opened to white settlement. The Homestead Act of 1862 gave settlers up to 160 acres of public land. Over 270 million acres were granted by the government while the law was in effect.

Manhattan was the only settlement to vote in anti-slavery delegates to the first territorial legislature in 1855. Elsewhere, pro-slavery men from neighboring Missouri flooded the territory at other election sites. Kansas became the first and only state in the Union to be settled solely on the proposition of having no slavery within its territory.

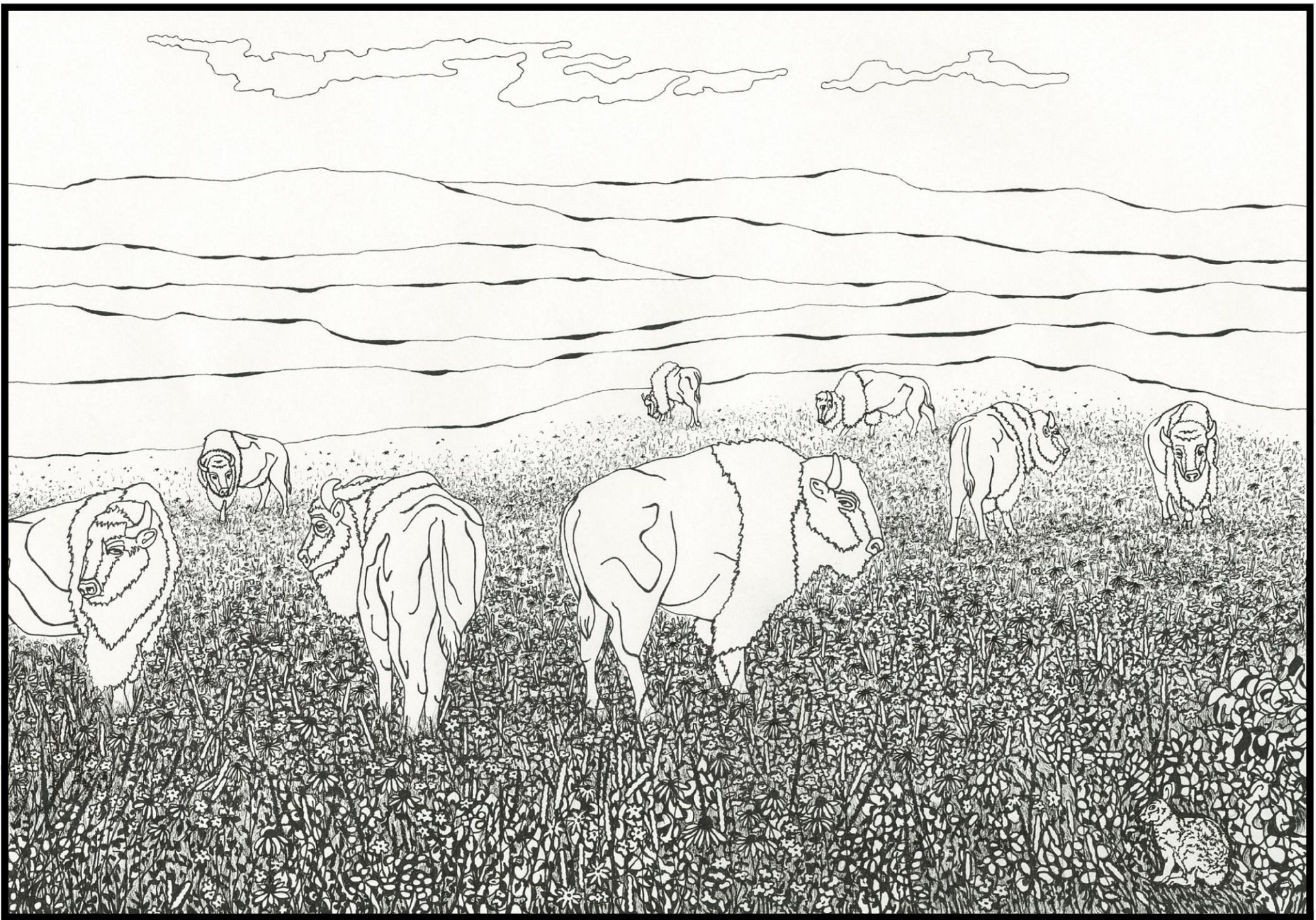
Though it was difficult, the Manhattan settlers managed to build a thriving frontier town with a schoolhouse, college, sawmill, and other businesses. The combination of these groups managed to build a town that encompassed the best of them all.

The State of Kansas

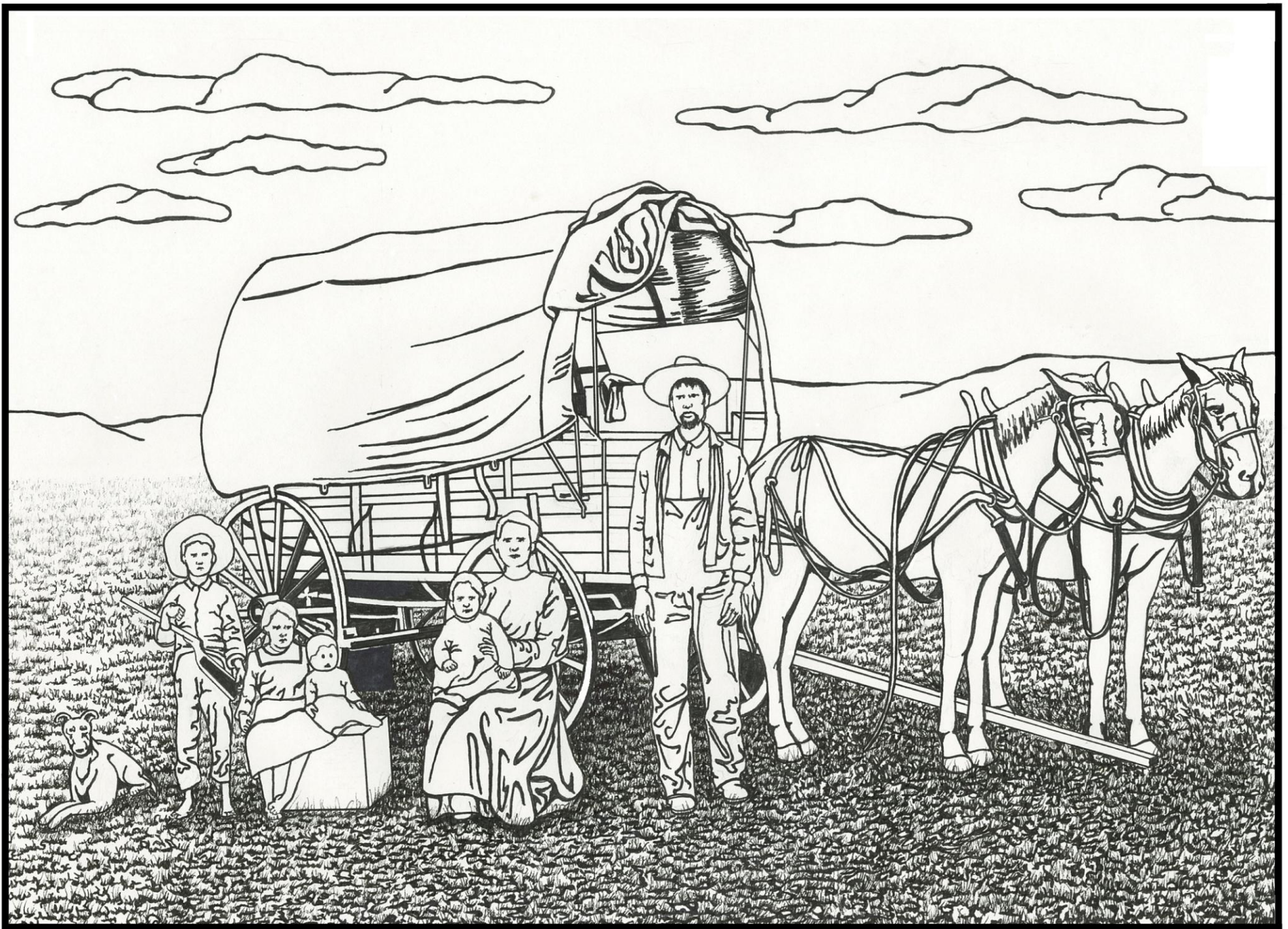
On January 29, 1861, Kansas was admitted as the 34th state of the Union. The state motto, *Ad Astra Per Aspera*, is a Latin phrase meaning “To the Stars Through Difficulty.” It signifies that achieving success or high goals (the stars) requires overcoming difficult struggles and hardships which Kansas had to do before becoming a free state. Tensions between anti-slavery settlers and pro-slavery supporters intensified, not only in the electoral process but also on the battlefield. Many of these deadly battles were fought on Kansas soil, earning Kansas the nickname “Bloody Kansas.” The state motto appears on both the Kansas flag and state seal.



Opening of the Kansas Territory 1854



Nature in the Kansas Territory



Pioneers in the Kansas Territory

Manhattan, the Town of Many Names

The Settlement of Polistra

In the fall of 1854, the settlement of Polistra was established along the Kansas River by Colonel George Shepard Park. Colonel Park was a land speculator and the founder of Parkville, Missouri.

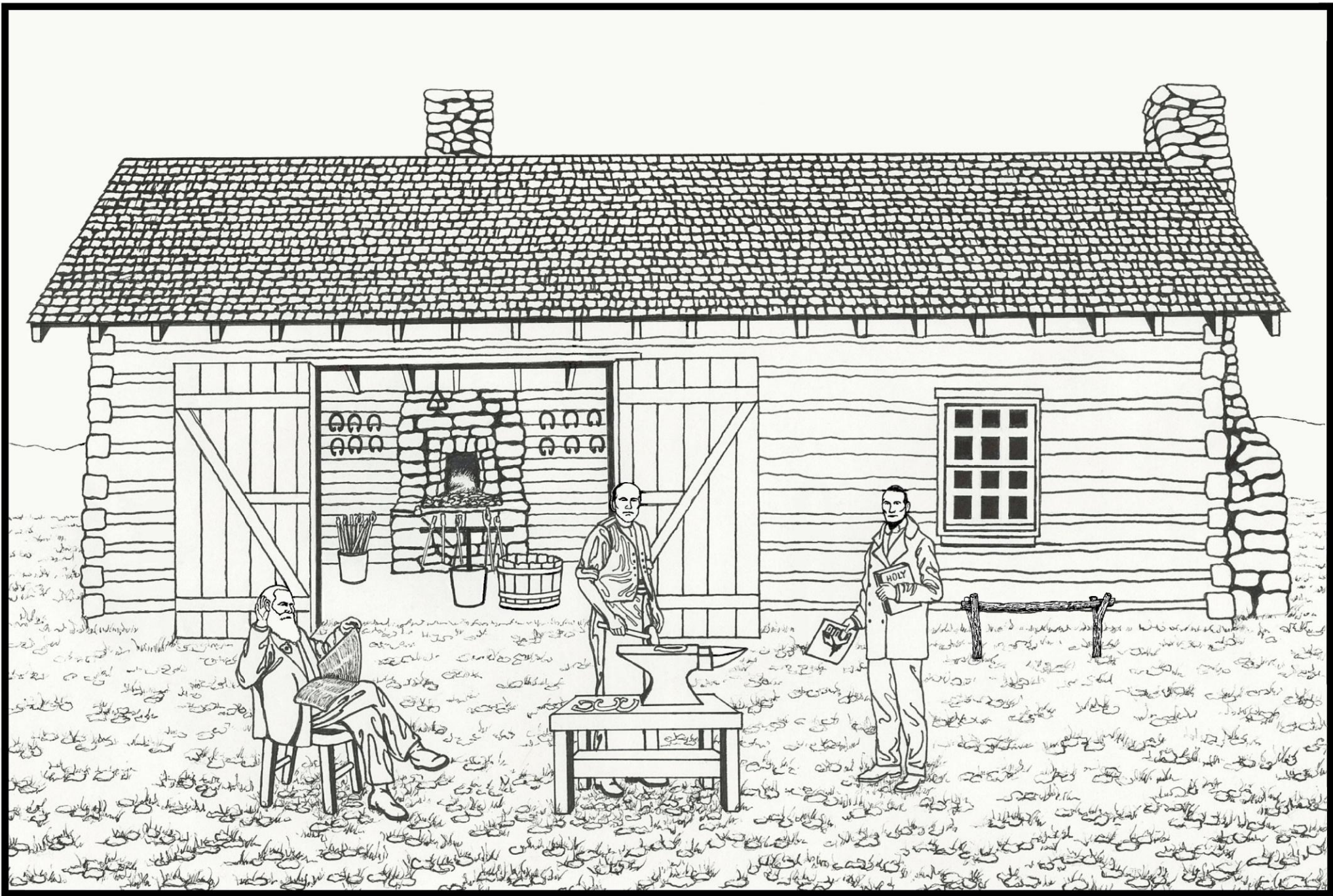
The unusual name of Polistra is thought to be derived from the Greek word, polis, referring to a city-state, and variations in spelling have been recorded throughout history, such as Poliska and Poleska.

Colonel Park, with help from Reverend Charles Blood and Seth Child, erected the first Euro-American log-cabin built within the current city boundaries. This cabin, used as a blacksmith shop with living quarters, was located near the junction of the Kansas River and Wildcat Creek.

Colonel Park, along with other early settlers, advocated education and was involved with the establishment of Bluemont Central College, which later became Kansas State Agricultural College and lastly, Kansas State University

Kansas Flag





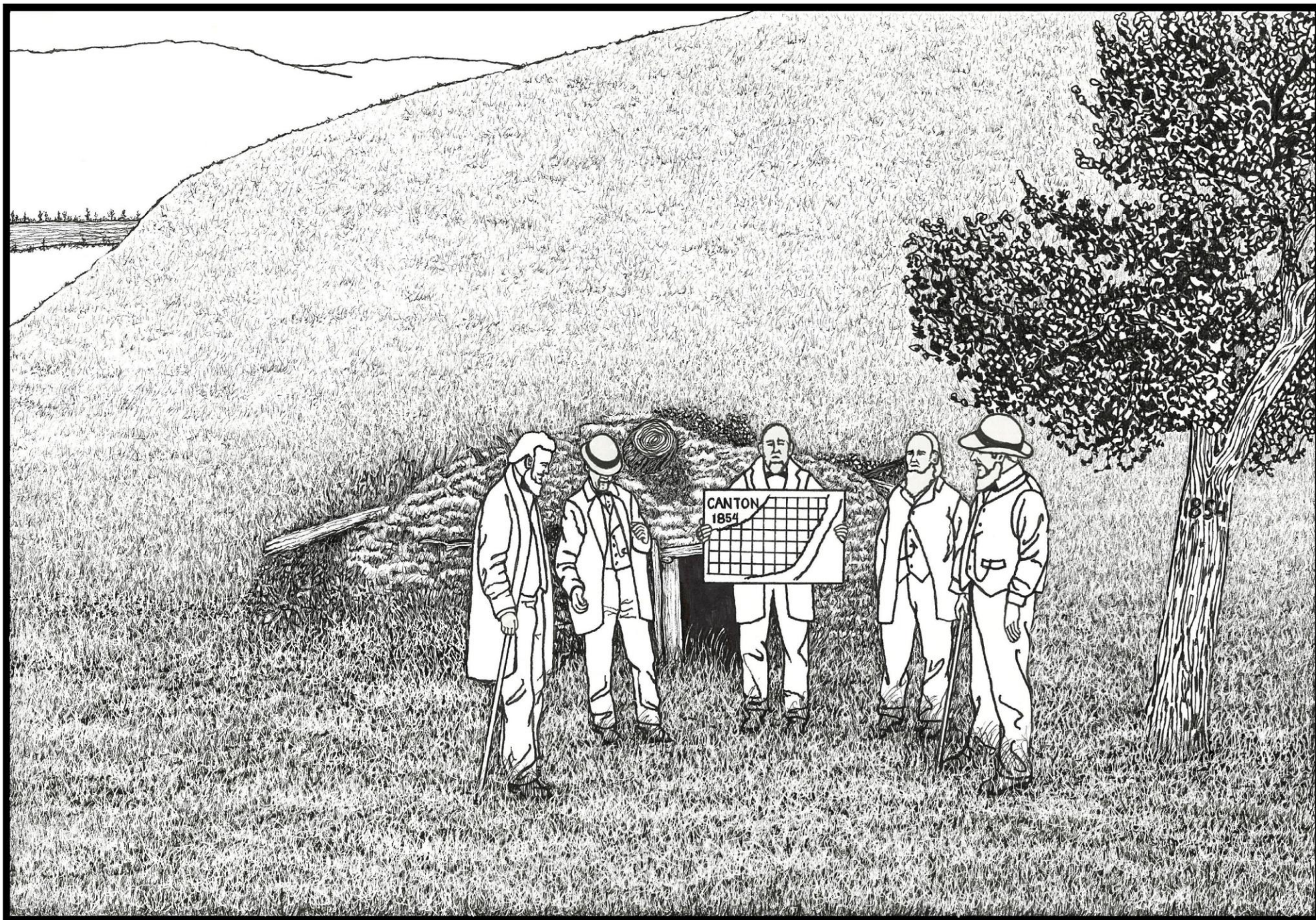
The Settlement of Polistra
Seth Child, George S. Park, Reverend Charles Blood

The Settlement of Canton

Originally from Illinois, Free-Stater Samuel Dexter Houston arrived in the area in 1853 and soon brought his family. He and four other men established the Canton settlement in late fall of 1854.

The group included Houston; Elisha M. Thurston, a lawyer from Maine; Dr. Horace A. Wilcox, a doctor and minister from Rhode Island; Chief Justice Sanders W. Johnston of Ohio; and Judge J.M. Russell of Iowa. The five men claimed a quarter-section (160 acres) of land at the base of Bluemont Hill, west of the mouth of the Big Blue River and together organized the Canton Company.

Samuel Dexter Houston was later elected to the first territorial legislature as a free-soil candidate. He was an ardent anti-slavery man, and very active and influential in the struggle to make Kansas a free state. He assisted in formulating the first Kansas constitution and was the first state senator from Riley County, representing two counties, Riley and Pottawatomie, in the state Legislature from 1860 to 1862. Houston was one of the original founders of Bluemont Central College. With others, he helped organize the donation of Bluemont College and its land to the state of Kansas to become the first land-grant college under the new Morrill Act. This school, Kansas State Agricultural College, is now known as Kansas State University.



The Settlement of Canton

Elisha M. Thurston, J. M. Russell, Samuel D. Houston, Dr. Horace A. Wilcox, Sanders W. Johnston

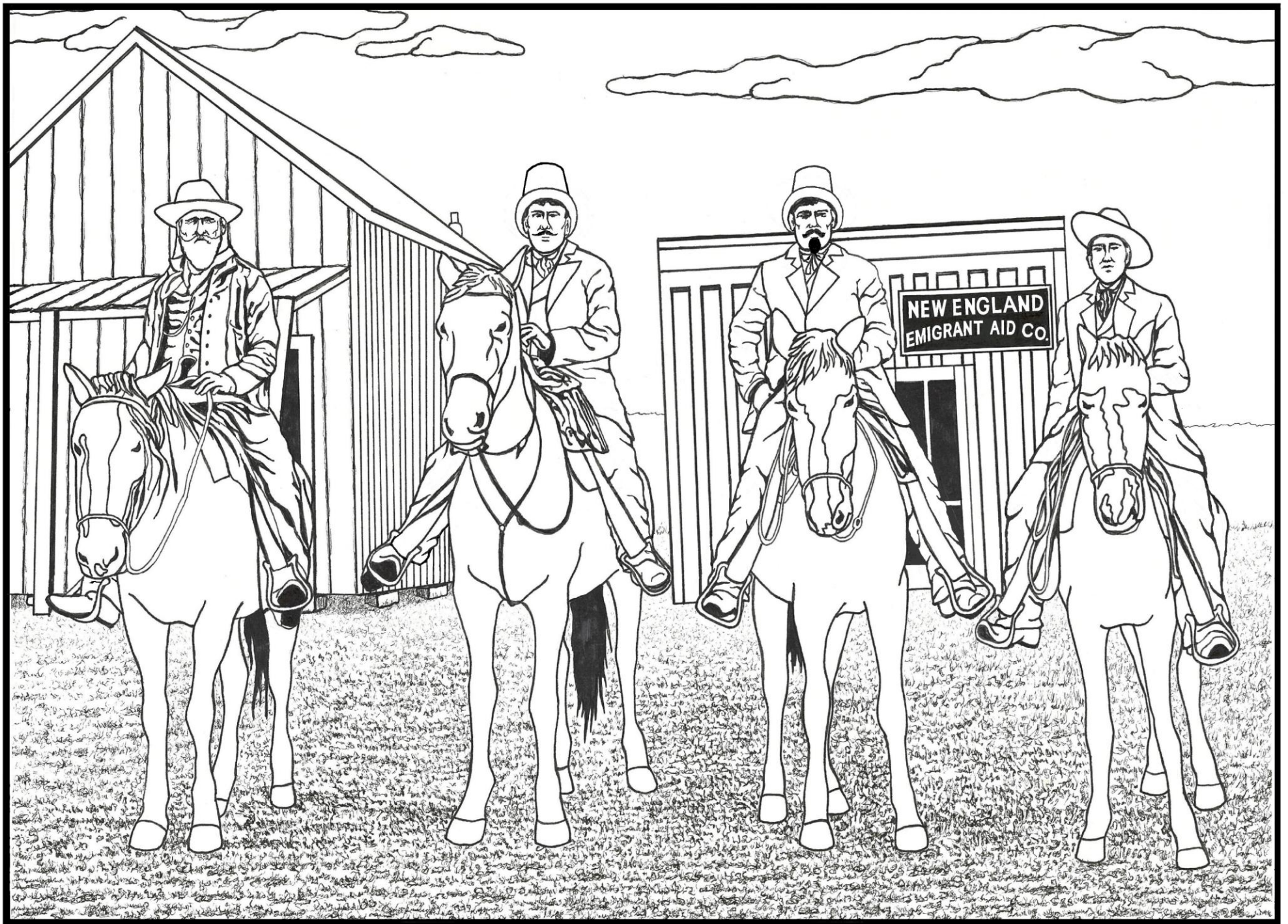
The Settlement of Boston

In March of 1855, 68 members of the New England Emigrant Aid Company began their journey in Boston, Massachusetts. They made it to Kansas City by train and steamboat and then headed west on foot. It was a long and perilous journey where many fell ill and died along the way. However, they were dedicated to ensuring that the Kansas Territory entered the Union as a Free State. Additionally, the group wanted to convey their ideas of progressive education and Unitarian faith to the new state.

Isaac Goodnow's initial group included Luke Lincoln, Joseph Wintermute, C.N. Wilson, Nathaniel R. Wright, the Rev. Charles Lovejoy and his son. When the New Englanders reached Goodnow's choice for the new frontier town in April 1855, they discovered two settlements in the area, Polistra, and Canton, previously established in 1854. Goodnow's group joined Polistra and Canton, and they agreed to consolidate into a Free-State town named "Boston."

Isaac Goodnow was a staunch Methodist and became involved with the anti-slavery movement in 1840. He was inspired to resettle in Kansas after hearing New England Emigrant Aid Company leader, Eli Thayer, speak in Rhode Island. Shortly thereafter, Isaac resigned from his job and began planning for a move to Kansas with his wife, Ellen.

Through his work, Isaac became a prominent member of Manhattan society. He was one of the founders of Bluemont Central College, the precursor to Kansas State Agricultural College (today, Kansas State University). He was a devoted public servant until his death in 1894.



The Settlement of Boston

The Hartford Steamboat & the Naming of Manhattan

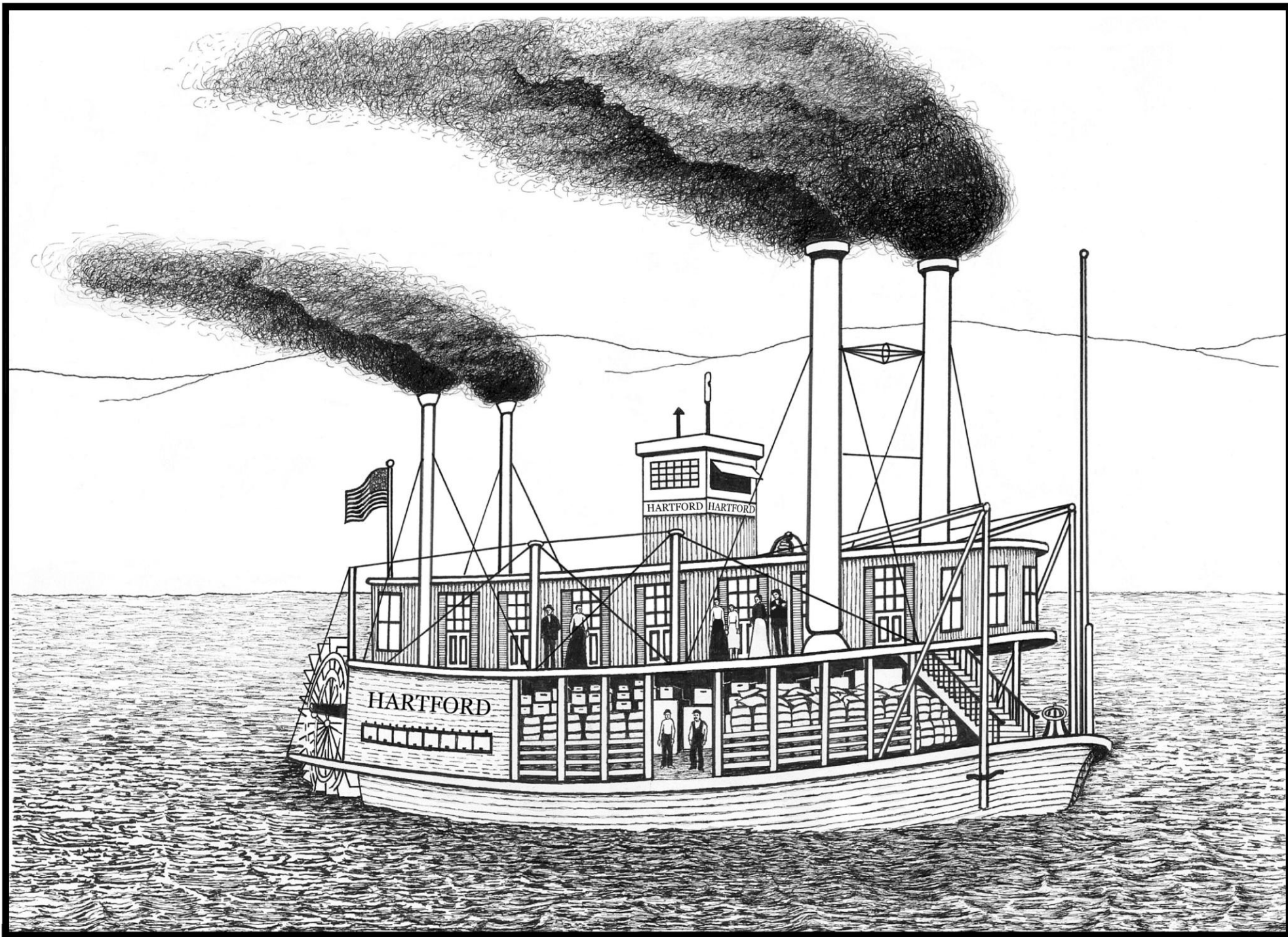
On April 26, 1855, a group of 75 settlers with the Cincinnati and Kansas Land Company, led in part by hardware merchant Andrew J. Mead (1815-1904), left for Kansas out of Ohio aboard the steamboat *Hartford*. The settlers were free-staters, and along with supplies, machinery, and 10 prefabricated houses, moved west with the intent to establish a new settlement. Their intended destination was to be located near present-day Junction City, and already had a name decided – Manhattan.

The trip itself was noted as difficult throughout, and on June 1, 1855, the *Hartford* ran aground at the mouth of the Big Blue River, near Polistra where Wild Cat Creek flowed into a long-gone loop of the Kansas River.

The leaders on board accepted an offer to join the community of Boston previously established from the settlements of Polistra, Canton, and Boston. Their major requirement was that the name of the town be changed to Manhattan. The town of Boston was pleased to have more free-staters join the community, and in the spirit of cooperation, the name was officially changed to Manhattan on June 29, 1855.

Later that year in October, the *Hartford*, which was now being used by Mead and Associates to make regular trips between Manhattan and the eastern markets, again ran aground. This time, near present-day St. Marys. It was here later that the steamboat caught fire and was destroyed.

The *Hartford's* bell was recovered and installed in the belfry of a Manhattan Methodist Church. The bell now hangs above the lobby of the Riley County Historical Museum. Today, the Hartford House, the only known remaining prefabricated house brought by the steamboat to Manhattan, is now preserved on the museum grounds.



Hartford Steamboat

The Kansas Underground Railroad

By the 1800s, social reformers began to petition for the freedom and citizenship of African-Americans in this country. When met with legal resistance, enslaved people and white supporters created a secret network known as the Underground Railroad to help relocate enslaved people from states where slavery was legal into states where slavery was not legal or Canada.

The underground railroad was not underground but consisted of an organized travel system of safe houses and hiding spots. Escapees would be fed, offered shelter, and transported to their next stop. Code words such as stationmaster, conductor, depot, and cargo were used to maintain secrecy. Many hopeful escapees did not survive the underground railroad trip as harsh weather conditions, lack of supplies, starvation, or recapture were distinct possibilities.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act became law in 1854 which allowed Kansas Territory residents to vote on whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or a slave state. This created a violent uprising known as *Bleeding Kansas*, and activists flooded into the territory to help sway the vote. By 1857 the activity escalated, and the routes between safe houses fluctuated as participants and specific roads were closely watched. This resulted in the trail moving further west to include the counties of Wabaunsee, Pottawatomie and Riley.

After first settling in the Manhattan area in 1858, Henry Strong and his wife, Elenora, became station masters, hiding escapees on their property. Although nothing was mentioned in Henry's ledgers, his granddaughter, Mabel Evangeline Baxter Hoerner, was told about her grandparents hiding these individuals in the Strong cabin and in a small hidden cave on the property.

Henry's diaries describe the networking of courageous men and woman like Rev. and Mrs. Blood and John Smith who had the same convictions as Henry and Elenora Strong. They believed that no man shall be held under bondage.



The Kansas Underground Railroad

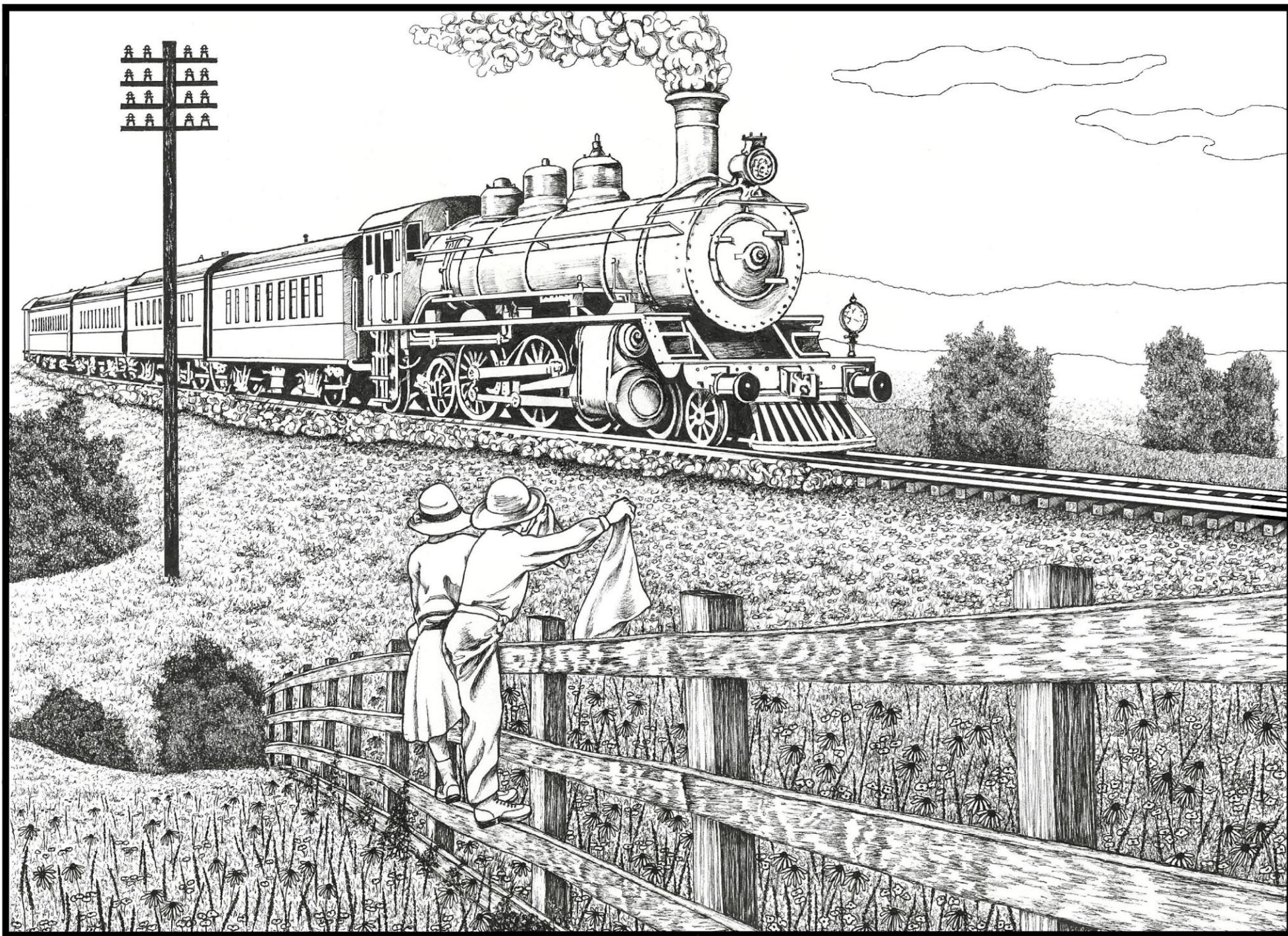
Railroads in Kansas

After the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act and the 1862 Homestead Act were implemented, early pioneers began to move into Kansas Territory. As westward expansion continued, the need for railroad service connecting from east to west became a need for survival of early towns. Although the Transcontinental Railroad did not connect through Kansas, railroad construction in the state began in 1863.

By the summer of 1866, the western end of the Kansas Pacific Railroad was approaching Manhattan, and soon the tracks reached the eastern shore of the Big Blue River. The original Manhattan train station was built in 1866, and in 1902, a new and modern station was constructed. In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt visited the present Union Pacific depot on the campaign trail.

Trains were the primary carriers of commerce and mail for over a century, and railway service rapidly developed after the Civil War. The mileage of track laid in Kansas increased from 71 miles in 1865 to 8,763 by 1890. Mail delivery by train began in 1832, and by 1868, mail trains began stopping in Manhattan at the Union Pacific depot to deliver mail to Manhattan residents. In 1917, there were 1,500 U.S. railroads that operated around 254,000 miles. After the Great Depression, strong government regulations, the popularity of automobiles and commercial aviation, and the loss of mail service aided in the decline of railroads. The decline of railroads in Riley County helped aid in the depopulation and decline of smaller communities in the farther regions of the area such as Bala.

The current Linear Trail bridge over Wildcat Creek was built in the fall of 1905, with the main span of the bridge possibly being completed in 1910. The bridge style, Warren Through Truss, was a common design for railroad bridges throughout the Midwest.



Steam Engine Train

Black Settlement after the Civil War

The Exoduster Movement, also known as the Exodus of 1879, served as the first general migration of formerly enslaved African Americans, known as Exodusters or Exodites into our state. Kansas was the destination of choice by many due the efforts of ardent abolitionists who successfully helped Kansas enter the Union as a free state in 1861.

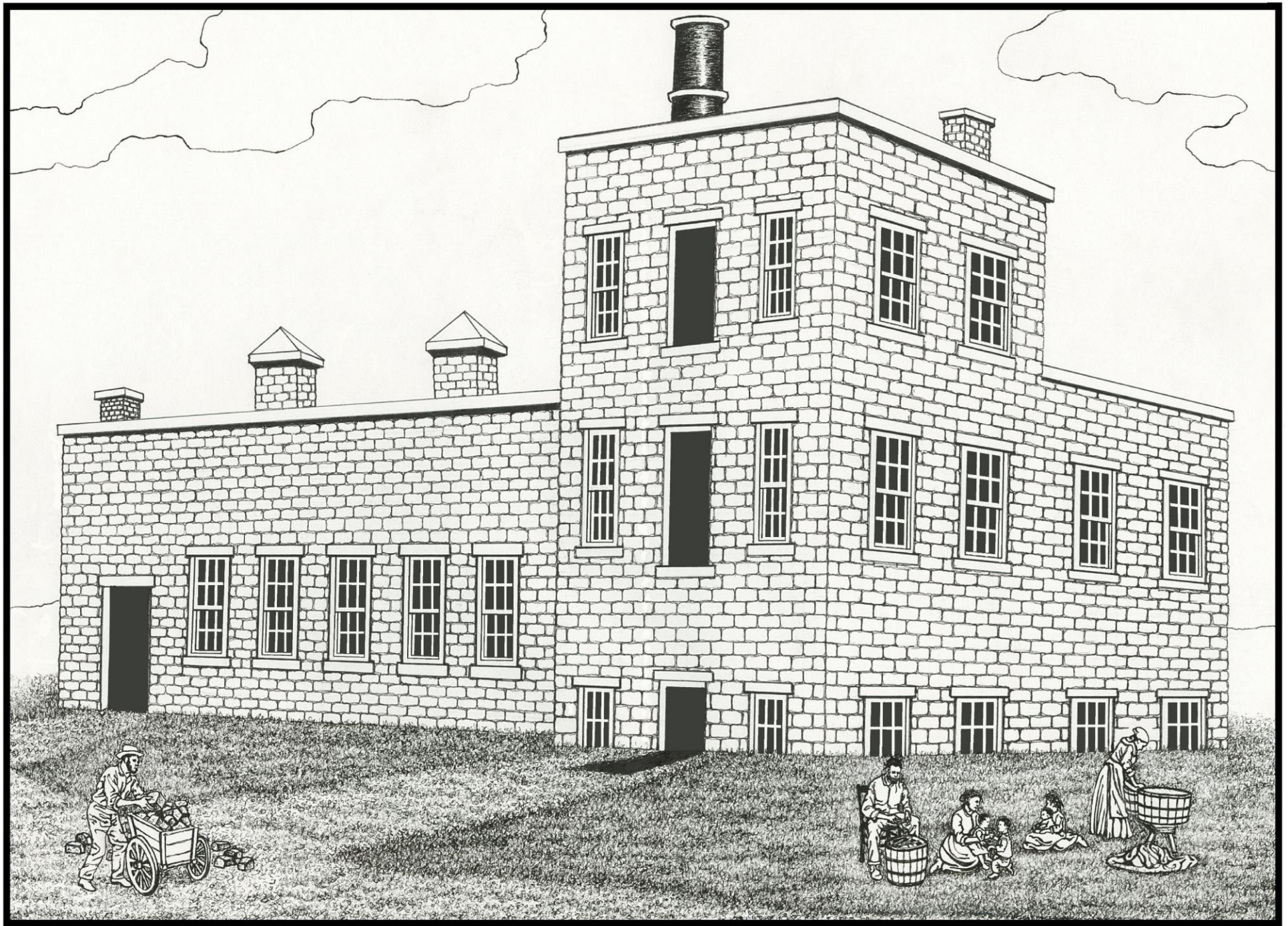
On April 24, 1879, two railroad cars arrived in Manhattan with nearly 120 refugees aboard who had just made their long journey from many different states.

The Exodusters were mostly well received upon their arrival in Manhattan. The *Manhattan Enterprise* newspaper covered their arrival in the May 2, 1879, edition: “As soon as it became known last Thursday that two carloads of Exodites had reached this place, they were visited by a large number of citizens of both sexes, all ages and colors... active measures were at once taken for their relief.” Any medical needs were met and all Exodusters secured places to live.

Early arrivals purchased land throughout the city, but by 1910, the African American population was primarily south of Poyntz Avenue. In 1880, the Bethel African Methodist Church Episcopal Church was constructed at the corner of Fourth (then Third Street) and Yuma Street. One of the founding members of the AME Church was Henry McDaniel, father of Hattie McDaniel, the first African American to receive an Academy Award for her 1939 role in *Gone with the Wind*. The AME Church constructed a new church building at this location in 1927 which is on the National Register of Historical Places.

By 1880, African Americans made up 14% of the Manhattan population, compared to the earlier 3% in 1865. The same census lists nine African American families living on Poyntz Avenue.

Many descendants of those who came to Kansas during the 1879 Exoduster Movement still reside in Manhattan today and the Yuma Street Historic District, now on the State and National Register of Historic Places, reflects the rich history of the community and legacy of the Exodusters.



Black Settlement in Manhattan after the Civil War, at the Paper Mill

Floods

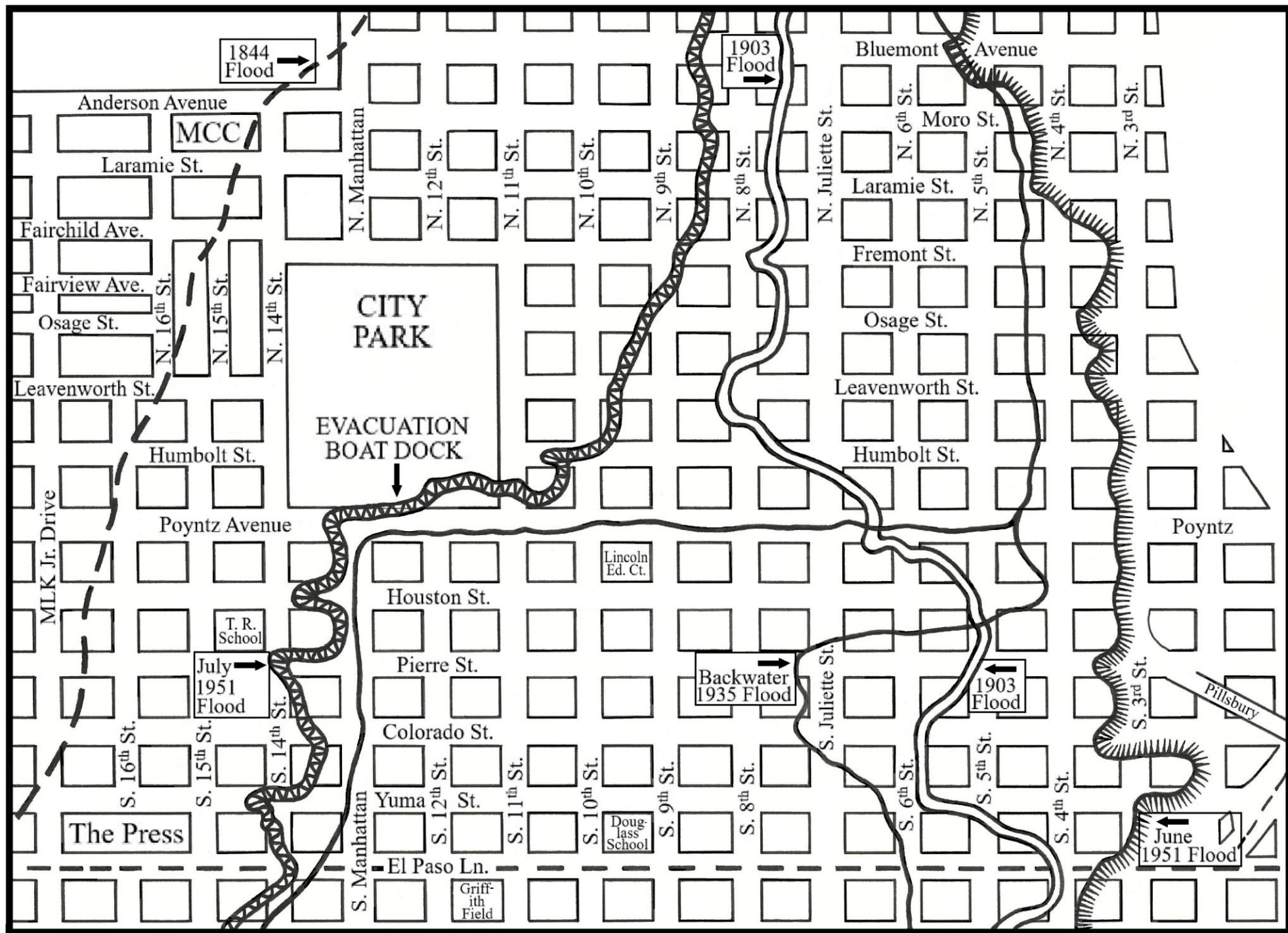
Though the Kansas River has flooded many times over the past two centuries, three major floods impacted Manhattan and changed the course of the river.

In the spring and summer of 1844, a flood greatly impacted the lower Mississippi River and extended into the upper Missouri River which led to flooding on the plains including the Kansas River. It is estimated that the Kansas River flooded anywhere from eight to ten feet. The results of this great flooding could still be seen along her banks 18 to 20 years later. In some parts, the river filled up an old riverbed and when the water receded, the river had changed its course as it meandered through the area. It is believed that unprecedented rains up the valley of the Kansas River and its tributaries caused this early flood.

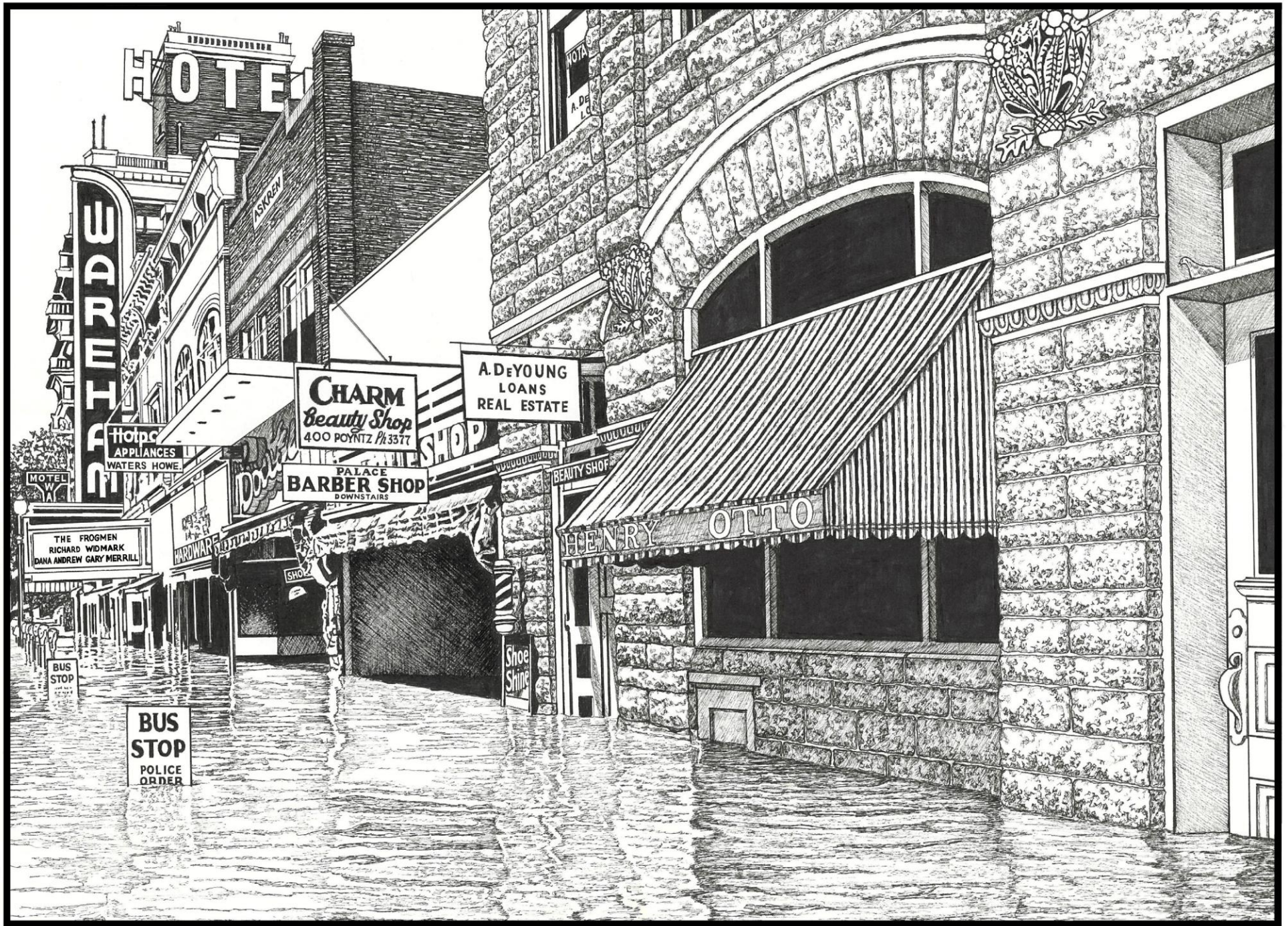
In May 1903, spring storms, freezes, hail, and tornadoes along with another unprecedented rainfall by as much as 17 inches fell to the east of Manhattan. Rivers were flooded from as far away as Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. Flooding extended more than 200 miles to the Missouri border. Pockets of northeast and north-central Kansas saw daily rains beginning on May 16 and lasting until May 31. During an 11-day period, the Kansas River was higher than it had been in the previous 22 years of record.

Manhattan was not as devastated by the flood as other counties. The Manhattan Republic newspaper reported that several families in town lost livestock and crops due to the disaster. George Temple Fielding, the mayor of Manhattan, formed a relief commission which doled out clothing and raised money for persons who were impacted by the flood. This flood altered the courses of the Kansas River, along with Eureka Lake, Manhattan Beach, and Hunter's Island.

In July 1951 another flood overtook the area. Between 8 and 16 inches fell within a two-week period. The greatest single day of flood destruction in the midwestern United States was July 13th. The river crested 4 to 6 feet above previous recordings. In Manhattan, the Kansas River stood at 33.4 feet, 15.4 feet above flood stage. Twenty-eight lives were lost and more than a billion dollars in damages, which would be more than \$6.5 billion today. After this flood, in hopes of mitigating future flood damage, the construction of Tuttle Creek Dam began in 1952 amidst much controversy and was completed in 1962.



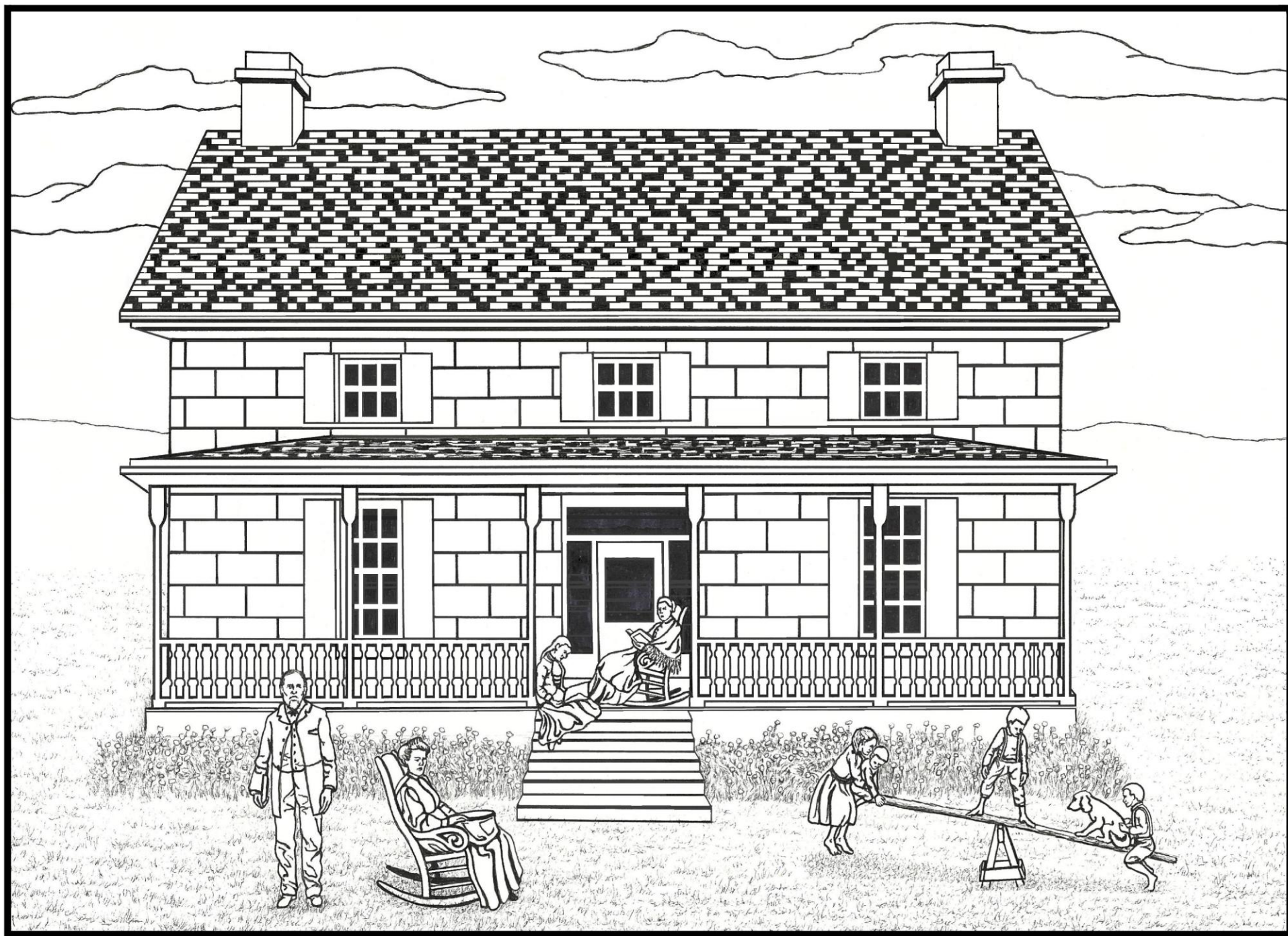
Flooding Flow Pattern Map in Manhattan - 1844, 1903, and 1951



Flooding in Manhattan, Kansas - 1951

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS & HOMES

1. Sam Houston arrived in 1853 and helped establish the settlement of Canton at the base of Bluemont Hill. His limestone house built in 1857 is located at 3624 Anderson Avenue and is on the Kansas State Historical Society National Register of Historic Places.
2. Isaac Goodnow was an abolitionist who arrived in the area in 1855 and became one of the founders of Bluemont Central College. Isaac and Ellen's limestone farmhouse was built in 1857 and is located at 2301 Claflin Road. Today, the home operates as a museum, preserved through a partnership with the Kansas Historical Society and the Riley County Historical Society & Museum.
3. In 1855, Reverend Joseph Denison traveled with his brother-in-law, Isaac Goodnow, to Kansas Territory to help establish Kansas as a free state. He became the first President of Kansas State Agricultural College in July 1863, serving in this position for ten years. His home was built in 1859 and is located at 1105 Hylton Heights Road.
4. In April 1855, hardware merchant, Andrew J. Mead, helped guide about 75 settlers on the steamboat *Hartford* to Kansas Territory, where his leadership contributed to the founding and naming of Manhattan. He established the first hotel in 1856, constructed from a prefabricated frame house brought to Kansas on the steamboat *Hartford*, and he later became mayor of the town. The original frame hotel burned soon afterward, and a limestone replacement was built on the same site, known as the Manhattan House Hotel. The hotel is no longer standing.
5. John Pipher was one of the original investors who traveled with the Cincinnati and Kansas Land Company aboard the steamboat *Hartford* in 1855. He became the community's first postmaster and co-owned one of its first stores. He was elected judge (Justice of the Peace) during the town's formative years and obtained the title of Judge Pipher. His home, located at 431 Pottawatomie Street, was built in 1877.
6. Washington Marlatt arrived in Kansas Territory in 1856 and was one of the early settlers committed to shaping the future of the region. He was among the founders of Bluemont Central College, the institution that would eventually evolve into Kansas State University. When the college opened on January 9, 1860, Washington and his wife, Julia, served as its first teachers, helping establish the school's academic foundation. Their farm, located at 1900 College Avenue, was constructed in 1856 of local limestone and is recognized today as the oldest standing stone structure in Riley County, Kansas.
7. Bluemont Central College was founded on February 16, 1863, in Manhattan, Kansas during the American Civil War. The college was incorporated in February 1858 and later became America's first Land Grant College, a forerunner to Kansas State University. Bluemont College stood at the northwest corner of Claflin Road and College Avenue. The building was demolished in 1883.



Samuel Dexter Houston Family and Home



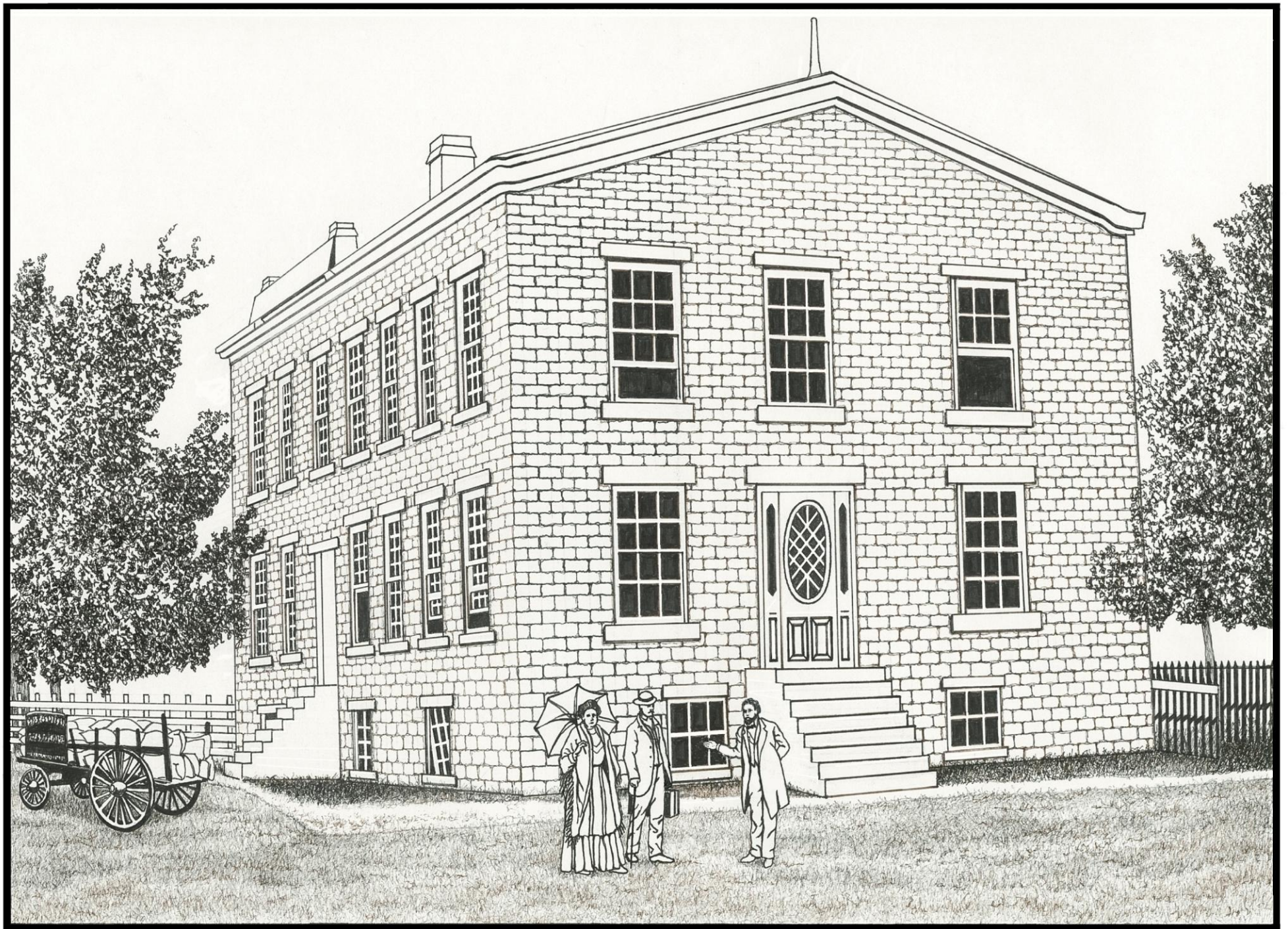
Isaac and Ellen Goodnow Home with Niece Harriet



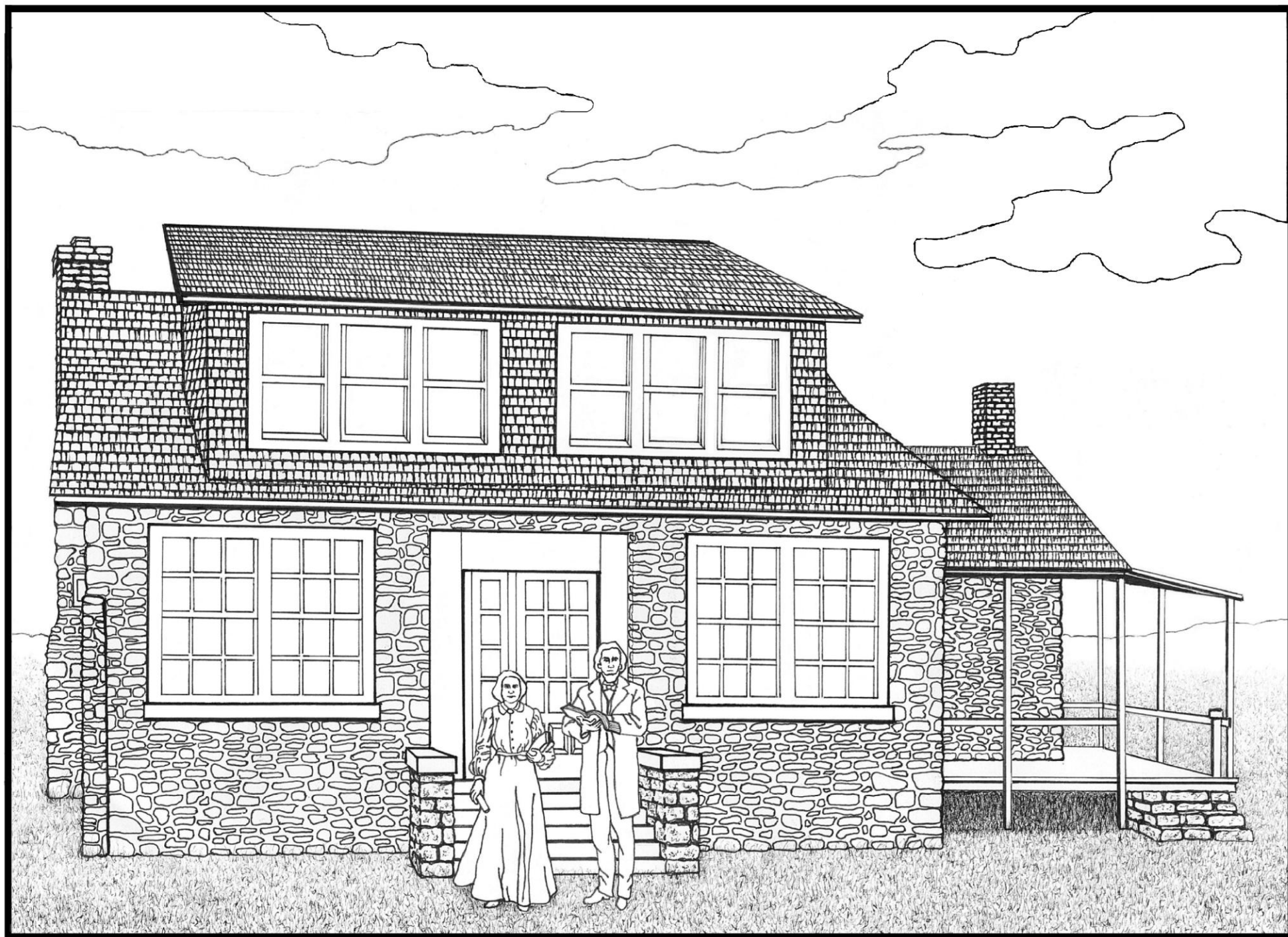
Reverend Joseph Denison Home
with wife Frances Ann, Ellen Frances, Charles, Ella Dennis



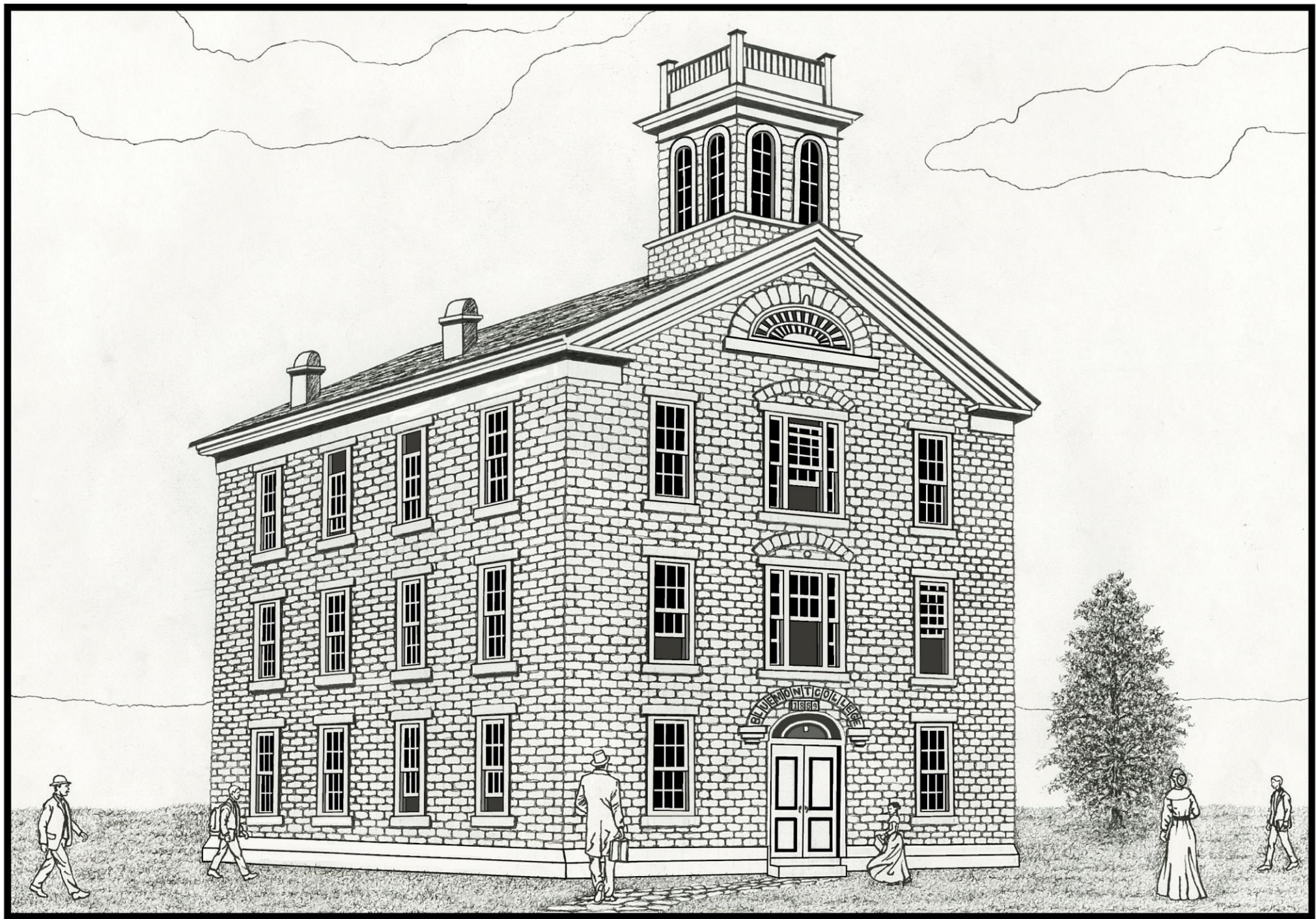
John Pipher and the Home that was Built for his Daughter



Andrew Mead at his Manhattan House Hotel



Washington and Julia Marlatt Home



Bluemont Central College

Walking Through History on the Linear Trail Project

In 2023, the trail project began with an idea from Charlene Brownson, Vice President of the ***Riley County Genealogical Society***, to install ten historical markers along Manhattan's Linear Trail to highlight key events that shaped the settlement and development of the city.

Together, the ***Riley County Genealogical Society*** and the ***Chapman Center for Rural Studies*** at ***Kansas State University*** researched local history to create the story on the trail panels. The ***Riley County Historical Society & Museum*** supported the project by verifying that the historical facts were factual.

Several organizations and individuals were responsible financially, and full support was received by the ***City of Manhattan Parks and Recreation Department*** for installation of the markers.

Additional information about the **Manhattan Linear Trail** project can be found on the ***Chapman Center Digital Projects*** webpage: <https://ccrsdigitalprojects.com/projects/walking-through-history-on-the-linear-trail>.



PRESENT DAY MANHATTAN, KANSAS



Photo by "Visit Manhattan"