

Alma Jane Barber

Early Life

Alma Jane Barber was the youngest sister of Lyman Barber, my great grandfather. She was the last of 8 children, or reputedly 10, spread out over nearly 20 years. No one is quite sure. My great great grandmother, Alma Jane's mother, Bathsheba Bonney (also known as Bersheba), was 45 years old when she gave birth to Alma Jane. Her oldest sibling was George Washington Barber. He was 18 when she was born. Her closest sibling in age was Lyman, a full 5 years older than she. Her being the youngest, like me, in a family whose prime was quickly passing, may have been what drew me to Alma Jane. I was intrigued when I discovered that she moved to the Western Frontier on her own, at age 23. And I'll admit that I felt troubled to know so little about who she was, why she made such a courageous life move, and whether anyone still thinks about her. And so started my search.

		Jason Barber 1798-1842		&		Bathsheba Bonney 1796-1866	
George Washington Barber 1823-1905	Charles Barber 1825-1904	Amanda (Aminda) Barber 1827-1904	Luke Barber 1829-1854	Jason Barber 1831-1898	Nathan Barber 1833-1916	Lyman Barber 1836-1900	Alma Jane Barber 1841-1879

Jason Barber, Alma Jane's father, died in 1842, when she was 3 months old. She was a Thanksgiving baby. He died in mid-March. In addition to baby Alma Jane, newly-widowed Bathsheba's household included her 6 sons, aged 19, 17, 13, 11, 9 and 5, and one other daughter, aged 14. This girl, big sister Amanda, who was known as "Alminda or Aminda," would come to play a big role in Alma Jane's girlhood.

We have little information about what happened between March 1842 when Alma Jane's father, Jason Barber, died and six years later in 1848 when his widow, Bathsheba, remarried. This period was when Alma Jane ranged in age from less than 1 to 6 years old. We do know that since 1837, the United States was in the grips of a recession that didn't pass until the mid-1840s. We might imagine the challenges that this family of nine encountered, living on their farm in Canton, New York, with a widowed female head-of-household. And we might imagine, with a string of boys some of whom had already become young men, that a new self-sufficiency and equilibrium could have been reached on the farm and in the household. However, beginning as early as 1848 and certainly by 1850, when Alma Jane was just 8 years old, the family had effectively dispersed.

What led to this family's dispersal? In 1848, Bathsheba, now age 52, married 59 year old widow Israel Elliot Conant, and moved in with him and two of his adult children. None of the Barber children went with her. That same year, big sister Aminda married, at age 21, and the two youngest Barber children, Lyman (age 11) and Alma Jane (now age 6), lived with her and her new husband, George W. Hale. Alma Jane's second oldest brother, Big Charley (6' 4" tall), was the first of the Barber siblings to get married in 1846, even before his mother left. Sometime before his marriage, he moved out to Massachusetts (where his new wife lived) and he remained in Massachusetts for at least 4 years after the marriage. The rest of the Barber family members can be found living in various places in and around Canton, NY — all of them boarding with other families. In the 1850 US Federal census you can see that oldest brother George Washington Barber is a boarder with the Chapman family; brother Luke Barber is a boarder with the Tuttle family; brother Jason Barber is a boarder with the Conkey family. I can't find where brother Nathan Barber lived. It's hard to know why the dispersal of the family happened, though one can imagine many possibilities, from financial realities, to interpersonal dynamics, multiple siblings approaching marrying age, or even perhaps the demands of Bathsheba's new husband. It cannot have been easy for anyone. It's worth noting that it wasn't uncommon for younger siblings to move in with older siblings, particularly given the large age span between siblings in those days, what I think of as long-tail families. I remember asking my own mother if when she died, my oldest sister (10 years my senior) would become my mother.

Bathsheba herself might have felt as if her own birth family was becoming lost to her. Both of her living sisters perished within a year of Jason's death; her younger sister, Olive, died in 1841 at age 42, likely in childbirth; and Bathsheba's youngest sister Fanny died in 1842 at the age of 38, when the youngest of her ten children was eight months old. Bathsheba's own mother, Olive Rood Bonney, died in 1844 at age 71. Certainly in those times, death was common, but the close proximity of the deaths of so many important family members — almost everyone in Bathsheba's birth family except her brother Luke Bonney — had to have been tough.

Charles Bonney 1752-1810		& Olive Rood 1773-1844			
Nathan Bonney 1793-1811	Luke Bonney 1795-1859	Bathsheba Bonney 1796-1866	Olive Bonney 1798-1841	Eliza Bonney 1800-died early	Fanny Bonney 1804-1842

Indeed, frequent death was an ongoing reality of the times. Between 1850 and 1857 (when Alma Jane spanned the ages of 8 to 15 years old), Bathesheba's second husband, Israel Elliot Conant, would die (in 1852), four years after their marriage. In 1854, brother Luke would die at age 24. We don't know the circumstances. Big sister Aminda and her husband George Hale, with whom Alma Jane and Lyman were living, would have three children in this seven year period, two of whom would die — little Henry at age 1; little Ella at age 2. Then in 1859, brother George Washington Barber's wife Amanda Rice died while giving birth to their second child. So much pain.

Early Adulthood

We know from the 1860 census that by then, twice-widowed Bathesheba was living with her oldest son George (37 year old widower with two little children). George remarried very soon after that. From the same 1860 census, we can see that 24 year old brother Lyman (Alma Jane's closest sibling) married 19 year old Cynthia Wiley and moved out of Canton, to nearby Fine, NY. In 1860, Alma Jane (now 19 years old), was living with her brother Jason Barber (29 years old) and his wife Mary. These facts paint a picture of siblings who relied less on their remaining parent and more on each other.

What were the interactions like between the Barber siblings? We don't know much about this in the pre-war period. We know that Alma Jane's siblings took turns housing her. And we know that brother Jason Barber worked closely with George Hale, Aminda Barber's husband, to build the Canton Methodist Episcopal Church in 1857, the St Lawrence County Jail, the Canton school house, and many other large buildings in Canton. Jason Barber was a master carpenter. He was 6 feet tall, had brown hair, blue eyes, and a florid complexion. George Hale was 5 feet 9 inches tall, had black hair, brown eyes, and a dark complexion. George began his career as a stone mason and eventually became a general builder. Together, Jason and brother-in-law George sustained a professional partnership that lasted for years. In a reminiscence communicated in a letter to the Canton Commercial Advertiser, many years later, W.H. Tisdale said this:

In 1857, ... I was working for the contractors in hauling the material for the building of that church. George Hale and Jason Barber built [the Methodist Church] and I drew the brick, lumber and lime that was used in its construction. George Hale had one son, Arthur. ... When I worked for his father he was about 7 years old. He was always with me on my trips for the material for building. ... Wm. Wright and Wm. Place worked for George Hale as

carpenters. I do not remember who done the mason work. I was only a boy then but everything is as fresh in my mind as though it was only yesterday.

Imagine then, what must have happened in 1861, when the Civil War broke out, or “The Rebellion” as it was referred to in the North. Three of Alma Jane’s five living brothers would end up fighting in this bloody war—though all survived it. Lyman, my great grandfather, was the first to enlist. He joined the 60th NY Volunteer Infantry in September 1861, leaving behind his new wife and 6-week old baby, Vermelia. Lyman, like his brothers, had brown hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. But he was substantially shorter — only 5 feet 9 inches tall (at least two of the Barber brothers were 6 feet or taller). Brother Jason (with whom Alma Jane was living in 1860) enlisted in December 1861. Chances are, that meant Alma Jane needed to move in with another sibling. Unlike Lyman, Jason enlisted in what would become the famous “Scott’s 900” cavalry unit. Several years into the war, in February 1864, Big Charley Barber also enlisted in the 60th NY Volunteer Infantry. This would have caused him to miss the birth of his sixth child when he was away, fighting. Brother-in-law George Hale also enlisted later, in 1864, on Sept 1st. Like his buddy Jason, he enlisted in Scott’s 900 cavalry unit. When George Hale left for the war, his son Arthur would have been 12 years old, and his wife Aminda Barber (37 years old) would have been pregnant with their fifth child (three of whom had already died). George subsequently missed the birth of little Abbey Hale in January 1865, while he was serving in the war.

What would the period of the war have been like for Alma Jane — from 1861 to 1865? She would have been age 19 to 24. Three brothers and her brother-in-law (with whom she had lived most of her life) would leave to fight in the war. There was a very real chance they would not come back alive. Given that the war was underway, the number of young men who might be marriage prospects would have been greatly diminished. Her only living parent, Bathsheba, was not self-supporting. Where did Alma Jane live? Who supported her?

Like many young women at the time, one can see in the 1860 US Federal Census, that Alma Jane became a teacher. She would have needed to attend a teacher education program before then, possibly St. Lawrence Academy in nearby Potsdam. Established in 1836 as a teacher education program for the region, St. Lawrence Academy, would become Potsdam Normal School in 1867 (attended by later generations of women in my family). Eventually it would expand its charge beyond teacher education and become the NY State University at Potsdam. Teacher education programs in the 1850’s were highly variable, and certification typically included establishment of a person’s moral character and subject matter competency tests, usually of content at the elementary level. People as young as age 14 or

15 could become certified teachers. Teacher shortages are nothing new, and during this time of rapid population expansion, the need for teachers skyrocketed. This shortage only intensified during the period of the Civil War.

Kansas-bound

Perhaps it is not a surprise then, that in 1864, even before the end of the Civil War, at age 23, Alma Jane moved to Auburn, Kansas to teach. She went there while the War was still ongoing, and as far as I can tell, she did this alone. The timing of her departure was before brothers Lyman and Jason returned from the War. It was also likely before brother Big Charley and brother-in-law George Hale had left (recall they enlisted late, in 1864). One can imagine that Alma Jane was involved in conversations of their enlistment and the prospect of these two leaving her behind as well.

What was Alma Jane's mindset when she left for Kansas? Was she fulfilling a goal and/or seeking a future of her dreams? Or was she fleeing her increasingly unrooted situation in Canton, NY, and choosing a place to go where the chances of employment and marriage might be higher than her current home. Why Kansas? What could have been the draw of that particular place? I have been able to figure out several potential scenarios.

One possibility is that Alma Jane was influenced by the Emigrant Aid Societies that sprang up in the second half of the 1850s, around the cause of the abolitionist movement, determined to keep Kansas from becoming a slave state. Eager to settle more of the Western Frontier, in 1854, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which opened up these two large Territories to white settlement and left determination of whether slavery would be legal in Kansas and Nebraska up to white male voters of those two Territories. The Emigrant Aid Societies subsidized the move costs of settlers with antislavery views, provided initial housing in Kansas (they built hotels), and worked to create infrastructure in these emerging settlements. Imagine my surprise when I discovered the close ties between this movement and the Methodist Episcopal Church, of which Alma Jane was a member in her home town of Canton—the same church that her brother Jason and brother-in-law George Hale built. It is also notable that the first church established in Auburn, Kansas was the Methodist



Episcopal Church—in 1856. These connections may have paved the way for Alma Jane’s move to Kansas, or at least ignited her interest.



Another possibility is that Alma Jane joined the movement to bring women teachers to the frontier. A search for information related to teachers, Kansas, and the 1860s revealed the concept of “prairie schoolwomen” and the work of Catharine Beecher (yes, the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe). In 1852 she founded The American Women’s Educational Association and later the Ladies Society for Promoting Education in the West. These organizations worked to promote women teachers and to place them in the high need areas of the western frontier, including Kansas.

One can also imagine that Alma Jane was influenced by her brother-in-law George Hale’s brother, Alonzo Harvey Hale, who was an early settler in Kansas. When I saw the name Hale in historical documents about Auburn, Kansas, I was excited to discover that he was George’s brother—who Alma Jane lived with for so many years of her childhood. Kansas didn’t become a state until January 1861, a few months before the start of the Civil War. But as a Territory, Kansas was opened up to white settlement in 1854. That year, several settlers put in a claim for an area for one of the first towns in Shawnee County. A.H. Hale moved from St. Lawrence County in New York to this town—Auburn, Kansas—in 1857; his wife and five children followed in 1859. He became the first trustee of the town of Auburn. Subsequently he was elected as the sheriff of Shawnee County. A.H. Hale and family would have provided a personal connection to Alma Jane, as well as an entree to the townspeople, and perhaps the position of teacher. There may have been other personal connections Alma Jane had to Auburn, Kansas, as well.



While we can’t know what influenced or who might have encouraged Alma Jane to make this big, courageous move, we can read in her death notice, published in a New York newspaper, that Alma Jane “...went from here to Kansas in 1864 to teach school.” And indeed, she appears in the 1865 Kansas State Census, at age 23 (recorded in the month of May). It was common at the time for school teachers to board with families, and that is what Alma Jane did, living with the Conklin family whose children were ages 14, 13, 9 and 3 years old. Living with the family, there was also a 13 year old, black boy named Samuel

Henry from Arkansas. This is likely the first black person that Alma Jane had seen, as there are no non-white people listed in the census in Canton, New York at this time.

Getting to Kansas

Imagine, in 1864, what it must have been like to travel to the frontier from the northern tip of New York, especially as a young, single woman. I found an account, from a diary, kept by a young woman who made a similar journey, from Illinois to Kansas, six years later, in 1870. We can't know if this young woman's experience mirrors any aspects of Alma Jane's, but it might have. Her name was Abbie Bright. She got her teaching certificate at age 16 and had been teaching for several years, when at age 22 she decided she wanted to "see the West." She wrote to her older brother, who had recently moved to Kansas to homestead, and asked whether he thought she could get a teaching job. He encouraged her to come; that there are no schools where he was, but that she could live with him, and perhaps make a land claim herself. Her journey involved taking a train to the end the line and then a stagecoach.



...Now my trunk is packed. It would not hold all—so a pillow with an army blanket was roaped on top. I will carry my big brown basket, with lunch and toilet belongings etc. and two shawles, beside my wrap. All ready to leave early in the morning.

...[I] left for Kansas [on the train]. Crossed the Mississippi at night, reached Kansas City next morning, where I had to change cars, and have my trunk rechecked.

The pillow and blanket that was roaped on top the trunk, were loose, and no one had time to roap it again, so I had to take them in the car with me. I wrapped them in the single shawl as tight as I could, and it looked just like a baby bundle. After we left Topeka I inquired of the conductor about stage connections at Emporia [Kansas] — He said the R.R. was now finished to Cottonwood. I should get out there, and get a ticket to

Cottonwood. He would take my check and recheck my trunk. "Dont hurry I will wait for you." he added.

There at Emporia I saw the first Indian.

The stereotyping of native peoples was extreme during this period, perceptions which undoubtedly were held by Abbie Bright. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 likely emptied Abbie Bright's home state of Pennsylvania of native peoples. The Kansas-Nebraska Act further squeezed native people with its opening up the territories to white settlement. From a 21st century perspective, we can see that European settlers arrived on a continent inhabited by over 900,000 people speaking over 300 diverse languages, and then proceeded to occupy the land and subsequently annihilate these people and their cultures. The serious dehumanization of Indians at the time was supported in foundational ways, including as just one example, in the Declaration of Independence, that states "...that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness..." and goes on to refer to native peoples as "merciless Indian Savages." This Indian that Abbie saw was likely an Osage Indian. In fact, history shows that the majority of interactions between the Osage and white settlers were peaceful.

Soon after leaving Emporia the stage agent came to book those who left by stage next morning... I paid \$10 for a passage to Wichita, 80 miles from Emporia. I asked some questions about the country, and we had a very interesting conversation, and a laugh about my pillow and blanket bundle.

He said the winds were so strong, that by the end of a month, I would be tanned the color of a buff envelop.

The hotel at Cottonwood Falls is nearly a mile from the depot, and the hardest looking place I ever stopped at, with so many idle men lounging around. I went at once to my room, and found I was to share it with a young girl—who had come down on an earlier train. We soon became acquainted. ...

Did Alma Jane stay in hotels? How long had it taken her to save up money for the trip? What did she choose to bring with her? Did she have photos of her mother? Her siblings? And where are those photos now?

The stage was to leave at 5:30 [a.m.]. We left the lamp burn all night, as a help not to over sleep... There were two stages—four horses to each. Both were packed tight...[M]y roommate and I, sat in the back seat. What with my basket and bundle I was somewhat crowded. Some one shouted "All ready" and away we went. They changed horses every ten

or twelve miles, and at times drove like fury. Sometimes your head would bang against the top; then those riding out side, would call, "How's that for high." A very common expression out here. When we came to rough places—the driver usually called out "Make yourselves firm." Knowing what to expect we grabed hold of the side of stage or the seat, and avoided getting badly thumped.

At El Dorado some of the passengers left to go over another stage rout. The girl got out too. She had told me that she was going to work in a hotel there.

*I was sorry to part with her.
From E[l Dorado] to Augusta
there was but one stage, with
six horses and fifteen or
eighteen passengers. I was the
only woman, and kept quiet,
and tried to be dignified,
weather it was a success or
not I do not know; but I do
know that I was always
treated with courtsey.*



Stagecoach and six, US post office image

*When we crossed White river
the water ran through the
coach. I raised my feet in time,
but my skirts got wet. The late rains had raised the water in the river, which is not wide—
but deep.*

*Augusta was the Land Office, and all but six of the
passengers stopped. We changed coches to a
smaller one, with four horses. The new teams
were fine grays—and rather wild.*



Augusta, Kansas

Land Offices were established by the US Federal Government. Settlers went there to make claims of public domain government land—land that had been “ceded” by Indian tribes under various conditions. At this time in Kansas, a person (US citizen, man or woman, or person who intended to become a

US citizen) could go to a Land Office, select a claim of 160 acres, and after living on it for six months, and doing a certain amount of improvement, could purchase it for \$1.25 per acre. The specific land that Abbie Bright's brother made claim to was part of the Osage Trust Lands which had recently been opened for settlement. Not all settlers followed this procedure, however, and many squatted on land that was still Indian territory either in defiance or anticipation that it was just a matter of time before the land became ceded.

The year 1870, when Abbie was in Kansas, was apparently at the height of tensions between the federal government, the Osage tribe, and settlers. Interestingly, such was the case of Laura Ingalls Wilder's family who in *Little House on the Prairie* squatted (some say inadvertently) on Osage land not far from where Abbie and her brother homesteaded, at approximately the same time. After many requests by the Osage, the Federal Government sent troops in to remove squatters. This was the apparent reason that the Ingalls family returned to Wisconsin, their "Little House in the Woods."

A little way from the stable was a draw or water course some what stony--or at least very rough.

The driver called "Make your selves firm." We went over the draw, and part way up the slope, on a run—then something happened. The driver yelled to the horses and finally we stopped. Then he yelled—"if there is a man in there, get out quick, and hold a horse. If I get down I will loose controll of all." [The person in front of me] was so long getting out, I felt like pushing him, and by the time he did, the man from the stable was there to help. ... They fixed the harnes, and we started, only to have the same horse begin to kick something awful.

This time they had to go back to the stable for new harness. The driver explained that the horse that made the trouble, was a new one, on the team, and not broken in yet. We were detained about an hour, and it was nearly dark now. ...

When we could see the lights of W[ichita], I began wondering where I would stop. The men began to talk about hotels, and one said, "there are two, one about as good as the other."

When we stoped at the first, the clerk came and opened the door and asked, "Any passengers for here?" When no one moved to get out, I said I would, and was the only one to stop there.

In all that ride of 80 miles from 5:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. I was treated with the greatest respect. It was a great disappointment not to see or hear something of my brother. The

clerk suggested that he might not have my letter—as he lived 20 miles out along the Ninnescah. I was tired and went to my room.

It was a new hotel—the room was clean, but very simply furnished. The partitions were boards, and one could hear the talk in the other rooms.

I was very tired, for dinner I ate some lunch [from my basket], not wanting to leave the coach when the men did, and before going to bed, I ate a little more.

I slept well, felt rested next morning, and after breakfast the landlord went to the P.O. and there was the letter I had written my brother that I was coming. He then inquired if there were any teams going to the Ninnescah river, but found none. So I had to hire a team to take me out. They charged me \$7—for the open spring waggon, drawn by a pair of mules. The driver was a boy of sixteen.

Note that Wichita, Kansas where Abby was headed, is 130 miles farther west than Auburn, where Alma Jane was headed. However, it is located along the same southwest trajectory from Topeka. Further, because Alma Jane travelled 6 years earlier, the railroad had yet to go beyond the eastern border of Kansas, so it is likely that Alma Jane's journey required a similar amount of stagecoach travel as Abby's.

Kansas Before and During the War

Even before the Civil War began, Kansas Territory was embroiled in violent conflict over whether Kansas should enter the Union as a free state or a slave state. Abolitionist and anti-slavery settlers flocked to the territory from Ohio and further East as part of an effort to overcome the rush of pro-slavery factions moving into Kansas from neighboring slave state Missouri and elsewhere. Vigilante groups on both the “free-stater” and “pro-slavery” sides engaged in violent raids on each other during this time, earning the moniker of “Bleeding Kansas” for this soon-to-be state. There was a failed election (with many more votes cast than eligible voters); apparent voter obstruction (huge crowds accommodated by only small windows of voting opportunity), and more. The close proximity to Missouri, which was comprised largely of Confederate sympathizers, made for continuous conflict.

I wonder if Alma Jane understood the degree to which violent conflict had permeated the lives of regular people in Kansas. It was very different from the situation in upstate New York. The reality in Kansas and Missouri was that the citizenry itself was split on loyalty to

the North and the South—though there were geographical patterns, allegiances sometimes varied house-to-house. While Kansas eventually entered the Union as a free state in 1861, emotions continued to run high during the War years, with desires for revenge and retaliation still burning bright. The War in Kansas didn't just exist as military actions, but played out neighbor-to-neighbor through peoples' social networks.

Following is an excerpt from Kansas Civil War Soldier Reuben Smith from May 1862, written by him in Pleasant Hill, Missouri [*The Diaries of Reuben Smith, Kansas Settler and Civil War Soldier*, p. 80]:

About two months ago, a [wagon] train loaded with government stores going to our troup south of here was attacked and burned. I learned that some of the property taken from the train was here, it having been divided amongst the rebel citizens, they, no doubt, assisting in capturing the train. In the cellar of a man named Wickersham, I found a number of things that belonged to the train. In the house of old man Armstrong, I found a lot of tobacco in boxes that belonged to the sutler's wagon. On a farm a short distance from town, a rebel citizen had two yoke of the oxen of the train. These of course, we killed.

In escorting the mail, we pass the Jackson County Poor Farm. A young woman, the daughter of the person who has charge of the poor farm, I think is a little sweet on me. She is a rebel, of course, and as we pass the house going or returning, I call in to get a drink of water. She tells me of the movements of Cole Younger's band and that they are going to get me and the mail right away, that they have been waiting until the leaves on the trees were as big as a squirrel's ears when they would bushwhack me. I tell her that she must let me know all about their movement, and when this "cruel war is over, we will marry."

After years of unending conflicts in this region, largely from guerilla raids, as well as the inability to provide more troops in Kansas and Missouri, the Union Army leadership instituted a policy calling for the "ousting" of Southern sympathizers, who were found to be aiding and abetting the Confederacy. This resulted in the arrest of wives, mothers, and sisters of known guerilla fighters and their subsequent imprisonment in buildings in Kansas City. On August 13, 1863, one of these "makeshift" jails collapsed, likely from overcrowding and the wartime filching of supporting beams from the building to use for other purposes. The collapse killed four women and injured many others. Only a week later, on the morning of August 21, 1863, a Confederate guerilla group came into the town of Lawrence, Kansas and sought out and killed more than 150 men and boys in what became known as the Lawrence Massacre. One of these men was the Kansas State Superintendent of Schools.

Lawrence, Kansas was a noted Unionist town, founded by abolitionists. Many considered it to be ground zero of Kansas' anti-slavery movement. These two events occurred less than a year before Alma Jane arrived in Kansas.

The fall after Alma Jane arrived in Kansas, the Governor of Kansas called for all able-bodied men in the State to report for military duty, in order to rebuff an imminent invasion from Confederate forces. Every able-bodied man in the whole State! The urgent preparations for and drilling of all men not already serving in the military must have been a huge and chaotic undertaking. The subsequent battle of Westport, one of the largest battles to happen west of the Mississippi, took place right outside Kansas City, Missouri — just 80 miles from Auburn, Kansas, where Alma Jane was living. It involved 30,000 soldiers, and resulted in over 1000 casualties. It was a rout, and Union troops were able to chase their Confederate counterparts to the otherside of the Mississippi, never to return to Kansas or Missouri again.

Even though Alma Jane didn't arrive in Kansas until 1864, it is likely that she bore witness to and endured hardships from the War.

After the War

It was approximately a year after Alma Jane arrived in Auburn, Kansas, that the Civil War ended. Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered on the 9th of April in 1865, though apparently it took until summer for all of the Confederate troops to follow suit. Obviously the mood in the victorious North and the defeated South would have been different, but by all accounts this was not a straightforward situation. Public opinion was far from unified in either the North or the South.

For instance, a prominent Unionist movement arose in the 1860s, centered in Ohio, whose members were referred to as "Peace Democrats," also nicknamed "Copperheads." As the Civil War was increasingly perceived to be about the issue of slavery rather than the Union of all States, the Copperhead Movement



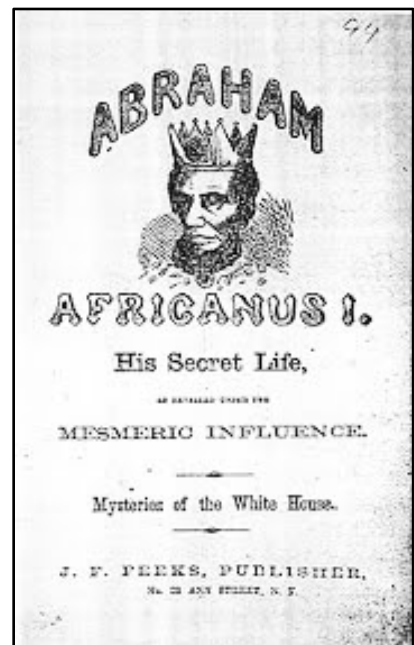
escalated with many claiming that slavery was not an issue that was worthy of such a brutal war and others decrying that Abolitionists were the cause of the War. The Copperheads were adamantly opposed to the Union draft, many refusing to fight in a war they did not support, others promoting desertion among soldiers, and still others organizing “conspiracies.” Whether the Copperhead movement impacted the outcome of the War or not, it is clear that it caused significant strife and division among Northerners.

The Civil War letters of Christian Isely describe the discord and contention within members of his Ohio family, of difficult conversations, and family members growing apart. As he said, *“These wounds will remain.”* (*A Kansas Soldier at War*, Ken Spurgeon, 2013. Chapter 6.)

The situation was further complicated by the fact that five days after Lee surrendered, Lincoln was assassinated. Apparently, as the news of the assassination spread, many considered it just rumor. It took time to establish that this was not false news promulgated by conspiracists and those wanting to sow chaos. While there was certainly an outpouring of grief, there were many in the South (though not all) that celebrated Lincoln’s death, even some suggesting that the war be reopened. There were also Unionists angered at Lincoln’s desire to be merciful to the South as he sought to heal the divide among Americans; many were said to have even revelled in Lincoln’s death. The desire to punish the South was very real within Lincoln’s cabinet, and across the North. It is also the case that abolitionists were in the minority, even in the North. Reportedly, many people believed that equality for blacks was too radical a solution and suddenly a post-slavery world seemed threatening.

And then there was the toll of this war on individuals who fought in it and on their families. More people died in the Civil War than all other United States wars combined: it is now estimated that there were as many as 750,000 casualties. For every three soldiers who died in battle, another five died from disease. Approximately one in four soldiers that went to war never returned home.

In an analysis of the 1865 Kansas Census, I counted 26 living soldiers who returned to the little town of Auburn in the summer of 1865. Though we don’t know what shape these soldiers were in, we know that across the country, one in thirteen soldiers returned home missing one or more limbs.



Though the term PTSD did not yet exist, the trauma endured during this terrible war must have been enormous. At the time, people referred to mental and emotional post-war conditions as “soldier’s heart.”

It’s hard to know what the sympathies of the little town of Auburn were. Approximately one-tenth the size of Lawrence, Kansas, in 1865 Auburn had a population of 500-600 people. In examining the 1865 Kansas State Census, I could see that though approximately 65% of the town’s population came from free states (in particular Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, etc.); close to 30% came from slave states and/or border states (Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, etc.). While one’s state of origin is certainly not a determinant of political perspective, peoples’ birthplaces help to paint a sense of the regionally-cultural diversity of the town in 1865. It’s also worth noting that in 1865, 6% of the town’s population was African American, and about the same percent were European immigrants (from Ireland, England, Scotland, Germany, France, and Sweden).

It was in this time, and to this town, that 26 living soldiers returned from their service. They ranged from ages 16 to 39 (at the end of the war) and all but two has been born in free states. One of these two, born in Missouri, was a 28 year old black man named William Geog.

It’s important to say that the number 26 does not include soldiers who died during the war, or who mustered out before the end either because they had served their term or because they were wounded or impacted by disease.

One of the young men who mustered out several months before the end of the War was William Henry Harrison Fox, the man Alma Jane would marry. William enlisted in the Kansas 9th Cavalry on 17 Oct 1861 and was discharged on 21 Nov 1864, with chronic dysentery. Dysentery was the number one cause of death of soldiers in the Civil War; it was caused by bacteria in unsanitary living situations. Keep in mind that



Unidentified members of
the Kansas 9th Cavalry

it was not until 1864 that Louis Pasteur had discovered that germs caused disease, and it was not initially an accepted idea, yet alone disseminated broadly. It was common for soldiers to dig latrines upstream of where a regiment camped. Apparently, most soldiers experienced dysentery at one time or another; it was when the disease became chronic that soldiers died from it. William Henry Harrison Fox's release from the cavalry likely saved him from that fate.

Schools in Kansas

What were the schools like in 1864 when Alma Jane arrived in Auburn, Kansas? After the formation of the town of Auburn in 1855, it rapidly became a boomtown. By 1857, the town had a population of 400, and they built a two-story concrete schoolhouse in anticipation of continued robust population growth. By 1860 the population surpassed 600, of which close to half were school-aged children. And yet, at that time, there appear to be only two school teachers in Auburn.

Territorial law, established in 1855 required that there be common schools that were, *"open and free for every class of white citizens between the ages of five and twenty-one years."* It specified that, *"All teachers employed under this act shall use their best endeavors to impress upon the minds of the scholars the principles of morality, justice, and sacred regard for truth."*

By 1858, the Territorial requirement broadened to serve more than the white children of Kansas, that all schools would be free, and that no religious instruction be allowed in the schools.

While on the surface including all children seems better than limiting public schooling to white children, it essentially began a process of forced assimilation of immigrant and black and brown people in our nation. The Indian Removal Act physically removed native peoples from their historic land. The collection of "Americanization" and "Assimilation" efforts effectively took away these peoples' language and culture. A particularly dark chapter involved the establishment of Indian boarding schools, in which young native people, often imprisoned in these "schools," were forbidden from using their given names, speaking their native language, dressing in ways customary to their tribes, or having contact with their families. While there were no Native peoples living in Auburn when Alma Jane arrived, there were black and immigrant children.

At the end of 1863, the Kansas State Superintendent of Schools made this statement about the educational progress that had been made since the establishment of Kansas as a Territory in 1855 and as a State in 1861:

To retard the cause of education, we had first the border troubles of 1855 and 1856, the financial crisis of 1857, the drought of 1860, and lastly, the rebellion of 1861. If, with one-seventh of our population in the army, with the excitement and dangers from guerrilla raids, we can show continual progress in the work of education, no higher compliment can be paid to the virtue, intelligence and heroism of our citizens; and truly we can "thank God and take courage."

Or perhaps he should have thanked teachers! It appears that the town of Auburn worked to do its part to meet the educational needs of its rapidly growing populace.

By 1865, there were nine teachers listed as living in Auburn (including Alma Jane). That is a lot more than the two there were in 1860! All but one were women. Looking at the records, I can see that they ranged in age from 18 to 31. One third of them came from elsewhere, and are boarders in others' homes. All the rest are daughters living in their parents' homes. The exception is the one male teacher, Reuben Hyde (the 31 year old). He was head of his own household.



Auburn School in 1900

Life in Auburn after the Civil War

In April of 1866, at age 24, Alma Jane married William Henry Harrison Fox (who was often referred to as WHH Fox in records). WHH was the oldest son of Henry Fox, one of the first settlers of Auburn, Kansas. William's big sister, Elmira Fox Carrier, lived next door to where Alma Jane lived as a boarder, as did his younger brother James Wilson Fox. Like WHH, James mustered out of service in Kansas 9th Cavalry, early.

Also in 1866, Alma Jane's mother, Bathsheba, died the day after Christmas, at age 70. Unlike Alma Jane who had already departed for Kansas, at least Bathsheba would have been able to see her three sons' safe return from the Civil War, as well as her son-in-law's. Surely Alma Jane must have communicated with her family through letters. I would so love to read them.

In 1868, Alma Jane and William Fox had their first child, who they named Katie Bathsheba. Oddly, I am unable to locate Alma Jane, William, and little Katie in the 1870 US Federal Census. There is a good chance that they moved out to live the requisite 6 months on a land claim, likely in a rural area, though they still should have shown up in the census.

However their family *is* listed in the 1875 Kansas State Census, living in Auburn, with children Katie Bathsheba (age 6) and second child William Ethan (age 3— born in 1871). The Kansas Census also provides detail about their farm at that time: it was 40 acres, worth \$1,374. Much of it was fenced. They had 14 bushels of winter wheat, 12 of corn, 6 of oats, ¼ of Irish potatoes, as well as a horse, a milk cow and a dog.

A year later, in 1876, Alma Jane gave birth to her third child, Fred Arthur.

William Henry Harrison Fox 1842-1903	&	Alma Jane Barber 1841-1879
Kate Bathsheba Fox 1868-1953	William Ethan Fox 1871-1947	Fred Arthur Fox 1876-1957

Initially, Auburn was one of the fastest growing towns in the newly-opened Territory of Kansas. It was in the running to be selected as the site of the Shawnee county seat and subsequently the State capitol. However, Topeka won this honor instead. A decision to locate the westward railroad along a more northerly route through Topeka, as well as its location on the Kansas river near a major ferry site led to this decision. Consequently, the population of Auburn started to dwindle, as people and businesses relocated to Topeka. Auburn's peak population of over 600 people in 1860 gave way to smaller numbers in subsequent years. By 1880 Auburn had a population of only 100 people—this stayed steady at 100 for several decades.

From a piece written in 1882 by William Cutler about Auburn (*History of the State of Kansas*):

The village, not quite deserted, is still 'Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain.' Flocks and herds feed on the unfenced prairies, extending miles to the north and east, and the

herdsmen still live in the village. Two churches are there, a school, two stores, a blacksmith shop, a shoemaker, a wheelwright, and perhaps a dozen neat dwellings... There is now no mill in the town, the machinery was long since removed, and the buildings have gone to decay. The old stone structures, half unroofed, with port holes on either side, still stand as reminders of earlier times. The postoffice, the churches, and the school house, the never-dying emblems of Republican, Christian civilization, which ever planted, are perennial, still hold their accustomed place in the little hamlet.

What did this mean to Alma Jane and her family? Decreasing population likely meant decreasing employment opportunities for teachers as well as other trades and professions. Accordingly, the 9 teachers that appear in the 1865 Kansas State Census, had been reduced to only 2 teachers listed as living in Auburn in the 1870 US Federal Census. The number of school age students logged as attending school is more like 150 in 1870 versus 200 in 1865. But that was not the whole story. Apparently school attendance was an issue in general in the 1800s, with a reported attendance rate in Kansas of only 59% of school-aged children. In 1871, the State Superintendent of Education stated:

A law compelling the daily attendance at school of every healthy boy and girl, for at least four months in the year, between the ages of seven and sixteen years, would have a most salutary effect. It is not only the imperative duty of the State to provide a full and free education, but to see that every son and daughter receive the benefit of that education.

And within a couple of years, by 1874, a compulsory education law was enacted requiring parents and guardians to ensure their childrens' attendance or risk fines.

So Alma Jane likely taught for about one-third of the year at most, with widely varying attendance from day to day. As a woman, when she first arrived, she was likely paid about \$16 per month. Over time this went as high as \$30 per month (men were paid about \$40 per month—sound familiar?). When she first came to Auburn, it appears that there were enough teachers for them to specialize according to grade. But as time went on, and the number of teachers and students diminished, it is likely that there were more mixed grade settings — a riff on the one-room school house that was so common in frontier times.

Too Soon

Tragically, on June 6 1879, Alma Jane died, at age 37.

Her death record states that she died of “apoplexy,” which in those days, meant sudden loss of consciousness followed by death. Her death notice published in a New York newspaper said, “She was taken sick in the school room, and died within an hour.” She could have died of an aneurysm, a stroke, a heart attack. We don’t know.

Her three children, now motherless, were aged 11, 7 and 2 years old. It’s hard to figure out what happened to them; what we do know is as follows:

Two-year-old Fred Arthur, was adopted by his Aunt Mariah Fox (WHH’s younger sister) and her husband Charles Ross. Fred became theirs, never returning to live with his father, even changing his last name to Ross. Judging from the records, it appears that Mariah Fox and Charles Ross, who adopted 2 year old Fred Arthur Fox, were unable to have children.

Within the year, twelve-year-old Katie Bathsheba appears to be living with Charles Ross’ brother Walter Ross, his wife Julia, and their four children Sylvester (11), Jay (9), Charles (4) and May (7 mos.), in Michigan. This family was Katie’s Aunt Mariah Fox’s inlaws. Presumably Katie would have known this family, as they were still living in Auburn, Kansas when Alma Jane died (and at least through early November of 1879). Katie would eventually return to Kansas, and live with her father. You can see in the 1885 Kansas State Census, that Kate is living back in Auburn, with her father and 12-year-old little brother William Ethan. The census indicates that Kate (no longer Katie) was 18 years old, and had attended school that year.

It is only eight-year-old William Ethan who stayed living continuously with his father, William Henry Harrison Fox.



Imagine the grief of not only losing one's wife, but of needing to give away one's children. Alma Jane's husband, WHH, never married again, living the remaining 25 years of his life as a widower. This was somewhat unusual, particularly when one still had young children. Perhaps Alma Jane was the love of his life. Or perhaps he was unwilling to bring in a surrogate wife and mother for his children and to start a second family. Whether holding onto Alma Jane in some way was William Henry Harrison Fox's reason to not remarry after Alma Jane's death or not, he surely paid a steep price for not remarrying—the subsequent inability to hold all of his children close.

WHH remained in Auburn for most of the rest of his life except for the last few years when he lived with grown son William Ethan Fox and family.

I have wondered about the fact that Alma Jane has no headstone in the Auburn Cemetery. After some investigation, I learned from her great great granddaughter that Alma Jane was buried next to WHH, but no headstone was put up. This might indicate that the family was under financial duress at the time. Indeed 1879 corresponds to the steep decline of the population of Auburn when it had not yet stabilized and right-sized as the little town it would be for the next couple of decades. Part of me would like to pay to have a headstone erected in Alma Jane's memory.

Thinking of Alma Jane

The highs and lows of Alma Jane's life were far from unusual among those of the 19th century. Disease, poverty, war, the vulnerability of childbirth, and frequent deaths were all shared realities of the times—and to a different degree and in different ways, they still are. I was especially affected as I considered all of the events that occurred in concert with one another in Alma Jane's life. Any one event could have been devastating, but the relentless frequency of hardship and death must have been on its face, unbearable. A lot has been written about how families coped with death in the 19th century. While some things were different than now (for instance the recognized high mortality rate of children, and the broadly held belief among Christians that children were pure and went straight to heaven), this did not mean that grief was absent. In 1879, a Kansas newspaper from a town nearby to Auburn reported the attempted suicide of a woman who was greatly depressed over the loss of a child.

Investigating Alma Jane's life, I am also struck by how birth order determined so much of one's fate particularly when childbearing years spanned decades—those long-tail families.

In a way, this produced different seasons of a family, impossible choices about what to do when you couldn't care for your children, and blurred roles as children became caregivers for their younger siblings.

Alma Jane's bold decision to travel to the Western Frontier alone, as a 23 year old young woman, was not only an act of courage, that hugely impacted her life. It impacted the lives of her offspring. Unlike the offspring of all of her siblings, who largely remained Easterners, at least for a generation or two, Alma Jane's offspring truly became Westerners. Her daughter, Kate Bathsheba, went off in search of gold. Her son, William Ethan lived a long life in Kansas. Her youngest, Fred Arthur, ended up in California.

I find myself wondering why it is that there are no photos of Alma Jane. Even her missing headstone is a gap. Where are the letters that must have been written with her family in Canton, New York? What about the family stories of her? Do any of these live on among her descendants? I haven't given up looking for them.

Alma Jane's son William Ethan named his oldest child, Alma Jane Fox. I nearly leapt out of my seat when I came across this photo of her online, first thinking that this Alma Jane Fox was Alma Jane Barber, not her granddaughter.

In addition, another child was named in Alma Jane's honor. Recall that Alma Jane lived most of her childhood with her oldest sister, Aminda Barber and husband George Hale. Alma Jane was only 11 years older than their son Arthur. In some ways she must have been more like a big sister to him. Arthur named his first child Alma Aminda Hale. She was born the year that Alma Jane died.



Alma Jane Fox

Using public records and found artifacts to discover the history of a person is so much harder to accomplish for women than men. Women's names changed. In newspapers, names appear as William Fox, or Mrs. William Fox, but rarely Alma Jane Fox. Often only male head-of-households are listed by name on a record. More men had professions or trades through which a part of their life could be illuminated. Men had draft registrations, records of military service, tax payments, voter registrations, names on mortgages, and

they served as witnesses on official documents. Short biographical pieces can be found in regional histories, but I have yet to see one of a woman who wasn't famous.

Tracing a family is particularly hard in the case of families like Jason and Bathsheba Barber's, where there are no saved letters and photos accessible, at least to me. The photos I have found of the Fox family were found through the miraculous social networking that occurs on family history sites.

I suppose that the most lasting evidence a person can leave for the record are offspring. Though Alma Jane died at the young age of 37, her 3 children produced 14 grandchildren who in turn produced 25 great grandchildren — all carrying on Alma Jane's DNA and perhaps her spirit.

Here are photos of Alma Jane's three adult children.



Having unearthed more about Alma Jane and her life *has* made me feel more comforted, somehow. I now have some details about her. I know that she was raised largely by her siblings and at the same time, she helped raise her siblings' children. I know that she chose her future as a teacher, and some of the conditions (both personal and societal) that may have led to when and why she went to Kansas. I know she likely experienced more proximity to action from the Civil War than if she'd stayed in upstate New York, that she chose her husband, and that she had several children with him. I know that while she was raising a family that Alma Jane also worked outside the home as a teacher, and that in fact she died in the school room. I even know where she now lies, in an unmarked grave in a

small prairie town in Northeastern Kansas. Though the details of her life are skeletal in some ways, coming to know more about the context of her time and place, and those around her, has enriched my understanding. She doesn't feel as invisible.

As I have worked to figure out more about Alma Jane and her life, I have thought about the many reasons that can explain how a person can fade from a family's history. These include being the youngest of a long-tail family; being the one sibling who moved thousands of miles away from the rest of the family; being ensconced by a spouse's family to the exclusion of one's birth family; strife between siblings and/or parents; death at a relatively young age; and probably most of all, just the sheer passage of time. Certainly multiple reasons apply to the case of Alma Jane, and why she was unknown to me and my family. I can't help but thinking that being a woman is a key factor in explaining why some of our predecessors become more invisible than others. We see how often 19th century women died, frequently in childbirth. They are replaced in the home by the next wife, who brings the next batch of children.

I still have many questions. Did Alma Jane love teaching? Or did she continue to do it mainly for the income? Did any of Alma Jane's siblings come to visit her in Kansas? Did she ever return to Canton, New York to visit? How did her New York family find out about her death? Did WHH send a letter? A telegram? Did he even know her birth family? While I am curious to know these kinds of things, what I'd most like to know is whether there are people who still think about Alma Jane. I am hoping that now there will be a few more of us who remember and admire the strength and courage of Alma Jane Barber.

William Henry Harrison Fox

The only real picture I have seen of William Henry Harrison Fox looks sad to me. His life was certainly full of sadness, maybe not more than the typical 19th century life, though each person is equipped differently to manage the string of tragedies that life serves up. My interest in Alma Jane was what first motivated me to learn more about her husband, William Henry Harrison Fox (WHH); this picture further fed my curiosity and spurred me on to learn more about him and how his life unfolded.

Once I dove into learning about his life and the Fox family, I became captivated. In particular, the story of the Fox family's arrival in Kansas gives a feel for the experiences that many early Kansans had, and perhaps some insight into the tenor of the new Kansas settlements and the mood of those who came to live their lives there.



WHH's Early Life

William Henry Harrison Fox was one of only two boys in a family of eight siblings — he was the older of the two boys, an auspicious role to fill. Though firstborn sons have many advantages, one can imagine that it could be a difficult position, particularly if there were differences in temperament between father and son.

Henry Fox 1815-1887		&		Mariah Rood 1817-1854			
Elmira Fox 1838-1917	Alvira Fox 1840-1856	William Henry Harrison Fox 1842-1903	James Wilson Fox 1843-1912	Mariah Ray Fox 1846-1911	Minerva Fox 1847-1929	Jerusha Fox 1849-1849	Sarah G. Fox 1854-1883

WHH's father, Henry William Fox, was an ambitious and community-minded person, who like so many other Americans at the time, was captivated by the promise of opportunity through participating in the US westward expansion. It's somehow fitting that the trade

Henry learned in his youth, as a wagon- and carriage-maker, would provide him with the means to be on the move.

In fact, Henry was so enamored with the enterprise of westward expansion that he named his firstborn son after William Henry Harrison, the 9th President of the United States, whose efforts were key to opening up territories for white settlement. I was going to say that that was his claim to fame, but in fact William Henry Harrison is most known as the US President who only served for 1 month before dying suddenly of typhus. This happened 18 months before WHH Fox was born.

WHH's mother, Mariah Rood (who went as Maria) married his father in 1835. They were married for 18 years during which time Maria bore 8 children. Both Henry and Maria grew up in small towns in New York. WHH's two older sisters, Elmira and Alvira, were born there. The little family "went west" to Ohio, in 1841, presumably to improve their fortune. Maria's parents, William Rood and Jerusha Plummer, as well as Maria's siblings, also moved with them to the town of Sharon, in Medina county, Ohio, which at the time was considered part of the Western Frontier. Though Ohio had been a state since 1803, it would take many more decades for the Frontier to extend to the other side of the Mississippi River.

WHH was the first of the Fox family children born after they settled in Ohio—in 1842. I shouldn't really say "settled," since they appear to have lived in four different locations in Ohio — Sharon Center (Medina county), somewhere in Allen county, in North Camden (Lorain county) and in Clarksfield (Huron county). At first I thought that this was the fate of a wagon-maker (and his family) — needing to move around as the local market got saturated. However, I wonder how much of this movement around Ohio was fueled by Henry's wander-lust, and eagerness to chase opportunity. At age 64, Henry and his wife would take a 6 month trip in their own carriage, traveling over 2500 miles in 6 different states including Minnesota. He appears to have thrived on moving about.

In 1849, Henry and Maria's seventh child, little Jerusha, died at 6 months old. And in 1854, when WHH was 12 years old, his mother Maria died of complications after the birth of her 8th child, Sarah. This left WHH with no mother. It left Henry with children aged 16,



14, 12, 11, 8, 7, and a newborn. The two oldest girls, Elmira and Alvira, must have suddenly been tasked with caring for newborn, Sarah.

Perhaps, then, it is not a surprise that less than a month after Maria died, Henry married his second wife, Betsey Ann Signor. What a shock for WHH and his siblings, to within weeks of their mother's death, have a new stepmother. I wonder if Elmira and Alvira continued to have to care for newborn, Sarah. This wouldn't be the last time Henry's children would experience a quickly replaced "mother."

Betsey had been married twice before — once to an "adventurer" who it was discovered had another wife, and once to another man from whom she divorced. Betsey and her 15 year old daughter had been living with Betsey's carpenter father, Jacob Signor, when Betsey and Henry married. I have to say that Betsey looks formidable, though perhaps that is an unfair assessment. She is less than 41 years old in this picture. How quickly women aged back then!



It appears that Henry left the children with Betsey for significant periods of time—in 1855, when Henry went to Kansas and joined a handful of men who founded the town of Auburn (first called Brownville), and then again in 1856, when Henry became one of several trustees of the new Kansas town. First your mother dies, and then your father leaves you with your new stepmother for long periods of time. Doubtless, Henry was trying to provide for his family by moving them farther west for greater opportunity, but it must have been a big adjustment for WHH and the rest of the Fox children. For that matter, imagine Betsey suddenly going from mother of one child to stepmother of seven.

Fox Family Travels to Kansas

It was in 1856, at age 14, that WHH traveled with his family — father, step-mother, and siblings — by wagon to settle in Kansas. Many Kansas settlers took the water route (via rivers and the Great Lakes) as far as they could go, traveling on steamboats; others would take a train as far as it would take them. Then they would purchase a wagon and/or go via stagecoach to their final destination. A biographical sketch made of Henry Fox by William G. Cutler (*History of the State of Kansas*) implies that the Fox family went via wagon the whole

way from Ohio to Kansas. Recall that Henry was a wagon-maker and undoubtedly felt comfortable with this mode of transport.

Going by wagon actually meant going by foot and by wagon. The Fox family wagon would have been loaded up, needing to transport all of their gear and all nine members of the family (including seven children spanning ages 2 to 18); there is no indication that Betsey's daughter accompanied them. At some point, they would have joined a wagon train, for safety. It would have taken months to get to Kansas. Being the oldest son, WHH would have likely taken turns driving the wagon and in between times have been more likely to be walking rather than riding in the wagon. He undoubtedly did his fair share of carrying 2-year old Sarah and entertaining the little girls.

Recall that 1856 fell right at the peak of the Bleeding Kansas violence, much of it centered around the Missouri-Kansas border. This caused the Fox family (and many others) to travel to Kansas by way of Iowa and Nebraska rather than the more direct route from Ohio through Missouri where they risked being waylaid, or even worse, attacked by pro-slavery groups. The length of the journey and this less direct route might explain why they arrived in Kansas on 14 October 1856—not the best time of year to settle in.

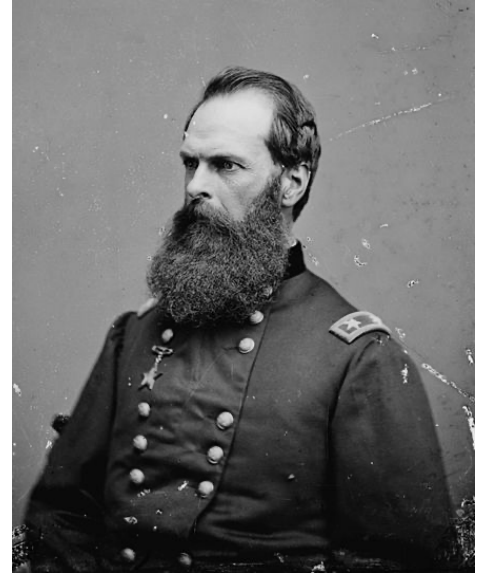
Then, according to Cutler's biographical sketch, when they were just four miles over the northern Kansas border with Nebraska, the Fox family's wagon train was arrested by the US Cavalry, led by Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, and was escorted to Indianola, Kansas. The numbers of settlers flooding over the border into Kansas, with either pro-slavery or anti-slavery positions, and the associated violence led the new Governor of Kansas Territory to ask for the assistance of federal troops to control the situation, which as you can imagine was not popular with Kansans. It's clear that the perspective of the biographer and perhaps Henry Fox



himself (whom the biographer likely interviewed) was that this arrest was partisan. This was probably untrue. Groups were being escorted by the military to keep them safe. That said, it is true that not all government officials, including military units, were neutral in the Bleeding Kansas struggle. Though from Virginia, Colonel Cooke was eventually considered to be an anti-slavery Unionist, his conviction strong enough that he would later serve as a General in the Union Army, a choice that resulted in him fighting opposite one of his sons.

However, Henry and family had no way of knowing Cooke's views and whether or not they would be treated fairly by him.

After the wagon train with the Fox family arrived in Indianola, John W. Geary, then Governor of Kansas Territory, met them, ordered their release, and told them to "seek their homes." John Geary, the same man for whom San Francisco's Geary St. is named, was the first Mayor of San Francisco, and apparently had served "heroically" in the Mexican American War. He was 6' 6" tall, 240 lbs and considered to be a good candidate to carry out his role as a neutral peacemaker, or at least be able to stand his ground. Nonetheless, Governor Geary had a tough time, angering both pro-slavery and anti-slavery proponents. After only 6 months, Geary, fearing for his personal safety, fled Kansas during the night. Neither previous nor subsequent governors were able to manage the Kansas conflict well. Like Colonel Cooke, Geary, too, would later serve as a General in the Union Army.



The biographical account of Henry Fox goes on to say,

"The morning they were taken prisoners, it rained, and being ordered out of the wagons, his children all took cold; in consequence of the exposure, four were attacked with typhoid fever, from which one daughter [sixteen year old Alvira] died, three weeks after they reached Topeka."

How terrifying this must have been to have four of their seven children be stricken with fever. Though it is now known that typhus is caused by a specific type of salmonella spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated with the feces of an infected person, it is clear that the whole ordeal of having been arrested and how they were treated was traumatic for all, not to mention the impact of the subsequent death of young Alvira. It's easy to understand why Henry and perhaps the whole family would blame Alvira's death on this encounter.

Now Kansans

Once they arrived in Topeka, it was mid-October, and the Fox family needed to quickly set up their living situation in order to survive the winter. They would not have known that the winter of 1856-1857 would be one of the most severe on record for many years to come. Years later, one Kansas pioneer wrote,

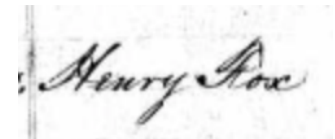
"I have spent fifty-two winters in Kansas and have passed through many blizzards, but for the amount of snow, high wind and intense cold, I think none have equaled the one...[of]...December...[1856]."

Most Kansan's lacked food, clothing, and adequate shelter for such conditions; particularly the new settlers. Aid was sent from back East during this period to help Kansans survive this intense winter. The Fox family lived in Topeka through this first winter where they were probably better off than in a more isolated setting.

In the spring of 1857, the Fox family moved to the town of Auburn, about 15-20 miles southwest of Topeka. Most of the family would live in Auburn through the period of the Civil War and then move to nearby towns, a couple to out-of-state. WHH would live in Auburn for virtually the rest of his life, as would his youngest sister, Sarah.

The first of the Fox children to establish her own household was oldest child, Elmira Fox. In 1858, now age 20, Elmira married 25 year old Milo Carrier, a carpenter. They moved to their own home in Auburn where their first child, little Henry, was born.

Henry Fox and wife Betsey were both active during this highly politicized time in Kansas. There were successive, competing constitutions being proposed in the Territory—some conservative and some progressive. Henry and Betsey were two among 69 men and women from Auburn, who signed an 1859 petition to the Wyandotte Constitutional Convention of Kansas, in support of equal political rights for Kansas women, protesting against "any Constitutional distinctions based upon sex." WHH's oldest sister Elmira Fox and her husband Milo Carrier were also signateurs to this petition.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry Fox". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid, typical of the mid-19th century.

In November of 1859, barely two years after they had arrived in the Territory, Betsey died at the age of 41. Within 9 months after her death, in August 1860, at the age of 45, Henry

traveled to Michigan where he married his third wife, 40 year old Sarah Ann Wilder, and brought her back to Auburn. I have not been able to figure out how Henry and Sarah knew each other — there must have been some prior connection. You don't just go to Michigan and hope to meet someone! With Elmira married and moved out, and Alvira now dead, who took care of 6 year old little Sarah Fox when Henry went to seek his third wife? Could it have been 17 year old WHH? His 16 year old brother, James? More likely it was 13 year old Mariah and 12 year old Minerva. But who knows? In less than two years, in 1861, WHH and brother James would both enlist in the 9th Kansas Cavalry.

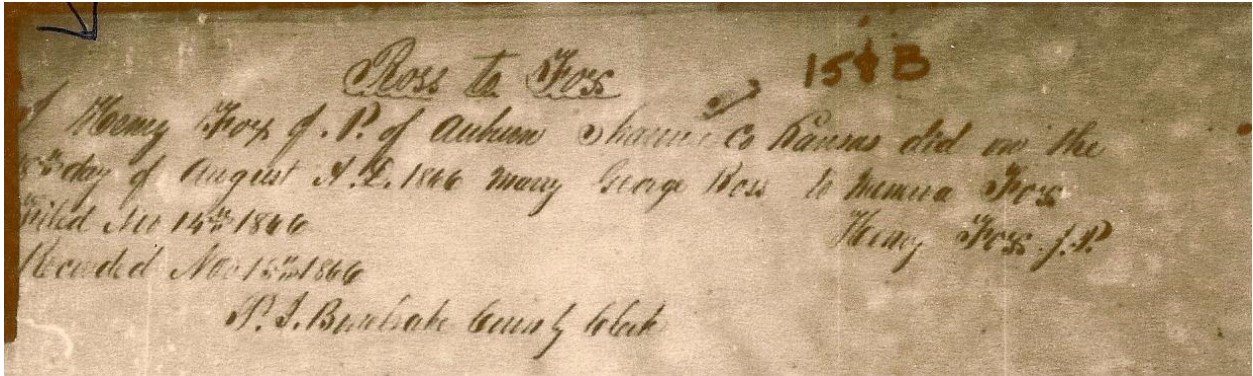
As Kansas banged out its constitution and built its political infrastructure, it was a time when many regular people populated key roles in its emerging government. While the opportunity to own land drew many to early Kansas, there were also abundant opportunities to assume leadership. In addition to being key in the establishment of Auburn, Kansas, WHH's father, Henry Fox continued pursuing lead roles in shaping Kansas, up to and throughout the period of the War. He served as Post Master General in Auburn, Notary Public, and a lawyer while continuing to farm. No mention of wagon-making! It was in 1864, the year that Alma Jane arrived in Auburn, and the year that WHH and his brother returned from the War, that Henry was elected to the Kansas State Legislature where he served one term "with zeal and ability." From the biographies in the book *Kansas and Kansans*, author William E. Connelley referred to Henry Fox as

"clearly identified with the free soil movement and ... one of the men of strong and self reliant nature who brought order out of the border ruffian period."

WHH in Adulthood

1865 and 1866 were big years for the Fox family. The War was over. James, Mariah, WHH, and Minerva all got married, in that order, leaving only 11-12 year old little Sarah Fox at home. Is it a surprise that Sarah subsequently married at age 15 in 1869? Interestingly, Henry Fox was the official who signed the marriage certificates of several of his children, including for Alma Jane and WHH.

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Eldest sister, Elmira, moved from Auburn with her husband and two sons to Minnesota, sometime before 1880.

WHH's only brother, James Wilson Fox, was just a year younger. Though younger, he was first to enlist in the Civil War (just by several months), mustered out at the rank of corporal (as compared to WHH's rank of private), and was first to marry. James, too, moved out of state (to Montana) with his wife and children as the town of Auburn went into its recession.

Mariah Fox (who like her mother went as Maria) and Minerva Fox, one year apart, each married one of the Ross brothers. Recall that one of these sisters (Maria) adopted WHH and Alma Jane's 2 year old after Alma Jane died. It appears that she and her husband were unable to have their own children. A third Ross brother and his wife were the family that took 13 year old Katie Bathsheba temporarily after Alma Jane died. In some ways, these are the two siblings that seem to have had the most success, I suspect in large part because of the connection to the Ross family. The Ross family was not only important to the Fox family — they were a very important family in Kansas. A separate story tells their tale.

Youngest sibling, Sarah, was the only one to remain in Auburn, besides WHH. She had 7 children and died in 1883 at the young age of 29.



Minerva Fox Ross

Father, Henry, who lived in nearby Alma, Kansas, died in 1887 at the age of 72.

Over the years, WHH's profession changed. He started out as a laborer and a farmer in the 1860s and 1870's. By 1880, WHH is listed as a Justice of the Peace, and in 1885, he is listed as a lawyer. How did that happen? Lawyering in the 19th century was much less formal than it has become. While there were some law schools at that time, becoming a lawyer in the mid-to-late 1800s typically just involved an apprenticeship, during which a person would observe and assist a lawyer over time, learning the trade by doing. It was pretty similar to all other professions. Ultimately, to practice law, all one needed was to apply to and be accepted by a court to serve in the role of lawyer in that particular court. As in other trades and professions at the time, this lent itself to there being family occupations. WHH would likely have apprenticed with his father, Henry Fox, who also became a lawyer later in his life. In some ways this was the big legacy that WHH got from Henry.

Though WHH was not a traveler like his father, he did travel to visit his married daughter Kate at least twice. In 1889, Kate Bathsheba Fox (now 21 years old) married William (Will) Harrison Mullen. They left Auburn sometime in the 1890's in pursuit of gold.



This is a photo of them in Duncan, Colorado in front of what must have been their mining shack. You can see WHH sitting in the chair to the back of the shack.

John Duncan founded the town in 1890, after he found gold ore in a nearby river. Duncan sold lots for \$25 a piece and attracted a number of prospectors and their families, to the extent that a post office was established in 1892 and a school in 1893. It's not

clear how much gold was found, but ultimately the settlers were considered to be squatters when someone else legitimately bought the land and mineral rights. After a Supreme Court battle, the settlers were pushed off the land. Duncan is now a ghost town.

There must have been a second trip as well, because WHH died on a visit to Wyoming to see Kate, Will and their baby Jane Lynne (Jennie) in 1903, at age 60.

In some ways, WHH seems like the antithesis of his father. Henry moved about his entire life. WHH chose to live in one little town throughout his adulthood. Henry had 3 wives. WHH lost his first wife at age 37 and never remarried. Henry became a key player in leadership at both town and state levels. WHH seemed to live a private life.

I wonder why WHH sent two of his three children to live with relatives after Alma Jane died, and why he never remarried. Was his experience with his own mother's death and two quickly-acquired stepmothers a factor—an experience he didn't want for his children? Was the burden he must have borne of caring for younger siblings part of why he placed two of his children, Kate Bathsheba and Fred Arthur, in other families—so none of his children would bear that burden? It may well be that my 21st century sensibilities and thinking about giving up my own children just don't fit with 19th century realities. What WHH could not have known, is that the solution he chose likely influenced one of his own children, William Ethan, to make a similar choice when his first wife died.

It's not clear whether as oldest son, WHH inherited the family farm — if anyone did it would have been him, since unlike his brother and most of his sisters, he remained in Auburn. However, it is not clear that there was even a family farm to inherit. Henry and his third wife moved out of Auburn in 1875, to Wamego, Kansas, where he ran a general store for four years, before "retiring." It must have taken capital to purchase the store.

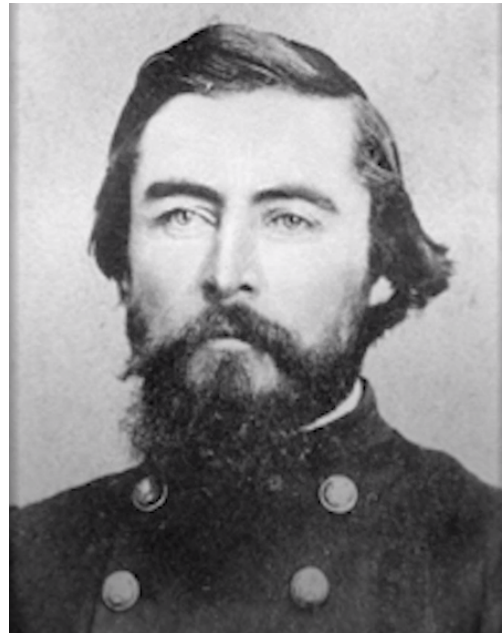
Recall that Charles Ross and Maria (WHH's sister) were the adoptive parents of WHH's youngest, Fred Arthur. Something that jumps out to me is the fact that Henry chose Charles Ross to be the executor of his will, not his oldest son, WHH. By any measure, Charles Ross was more successful than WHH, moving to Santa Ana, CA, serving as a "capitalist," starting a bank, sending Fred Arthur to college. I wonder whether WHH ever connected with Fred Arthur after he left with his adoptive parents for California, at age 5? I can't help but wonder whether WHH might have felt overshadowed in his roles as son and father.

Lives are complicated and William Henry Harrison Fox's was no exception. It's clear that he led a full life. In his obituary, WHH is described as a friend to all. It said that he became known as "Squire Fox" in his later years — so much less of a mouthful than William Henry Harrison Fox, or even just WHH!

The Remarkable Ross Family

When I think about who the most famous person I know is—not just that I have met, but that I know—I have to search a bit. These would probably be scientists—one after whom an element is named, and one after whom a mineral is named. The search would not be so hard for Alma Jane.

The Ross family — who I think of as WHH and Alma Jane’s “in-laws”—included Edmund Ross, about whom President John F. Kennedy wrote, decades later, in his Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Profiles in Courage* book. Edmund Ross served as a United States Senator representing the State of Kansas from 1866-1871. He is the Senator who cast the deciding vote to acquit then President Andrew Johnson of impeachment. The situation was more complicated than is worth explaining here, but it boiled down to Ross having had the courage to disagree with others in his party, with his constituents in Kansas, and even with his own extreme dislike of Johnson and his policies, in order to uphold what he believed was fair application of the principle of the law. Even as he acted steadily from his conscience, Edmund Ross knew that he was sacrificing his own political future. What he didn’t know is that his vote would be followed by years of being bashed in the press, protests at his home, and regular death threats. He and his immediate family would literally be chased out of Kansas. JFK describes Edmund Ross as having engaged in “the most heroic act in American history, incomparably more difficult than any deed of valor upon the field of battle.”



Edmund G. Ross

Alma Jane and WHH would not just have “known” Edmund Ross—their families were inextricably entwined. As mentioned in previous sections, two of WHH’s sisters—Minerva and Maria Fox—married two of Edmund Ross’ younger brothers—George Ross and Charles Ross. Not only that, but after Alma Jane’s death, Charles Ross and wife Maria adopted Alma Jane and WHH’s youngest child, Fred Arthur, and a third brother, Walter Ross, temporarily fostered Alma Jane and WHH’s oldest child, Kate Bathsheba. These were families that partnered in life.

The thing about famous people, is that it is much easier to find out details about their lives than the rest of us, even for those who lived over a century ago. There are multiple biographies of Edmund Ross, memoirs, published letters, collections in historical societies, features on websites, etc. By all accounts, Edmund Ross was an extraordinary person. He spent the first several decades of his life as an ardent abolitionist, holding to principle even as it impacted the personal. As a young man, he and his brother William were part of a group that stormed a jail to free Joshua Glover, a runaway slave and helped him escape to Canada. Edmund, his wife Fannie, and their young family traded their easy and comfortable existence, for a life full of hardships when they moved to join the battle for a free Kansas. One year into the Civil War, in 1862, when President Lincoln made the call for an additional 30,000 troops to enlist in the Union Army, Edmund stepped up despite his personal reluctance. In a letter to his wife Fannie, he wrote *"This time I felt the necessity of the country demanded the sacrifice from every man that could possibly make it."*



Fannie Lathrop Ross

Even his initial appointment as United States Senator (to take the place of Senator James Lane after his unexpected death) was a complete surprise to him, and something he accepted with ambivalence. He had recently been away from his family for 3 years during the War and now Fannie was late in her pregnancy with their sixth child. Edmund's then 17 year old daughter, Lillian, would later say, *"At the close of the war, we had thought we would not be left alone again—we had but one winter together—but we could not be with him."*

I'm getting a little ahead of myself, though. What was it that contributed to Edmund Ross becoming the courageous, principled, person that he was?

Like the Fox family, the Ross family were early Kansas pioneers who came from the East, via an extended stay in Ohio. The Ross family moved on to Wisconsin before homesteading to Kansas. Ross family patriarch, Sylvester Flint Ross, was characterized as:

"a man of great force of character, and a very pronounced anti-slavery advocate."

Sylvester Flint Ross & Cynthia (Synthy) Rice									
1798-1873 1805-1875									
Sylvester Ross	Sylvia Florinda Ross	Edmund Gibson Ross	William Wallace Ross	Anna Ross	Nancy Amelia Ross	George W. Ross	Charles A. Ross	Walter Ross	Julia Ella Ross
1822-1849	1824-1906	1826-1907	1828-1889	1830-1907	1832-1918	1840-1895	1843-1915	1847-1922	1849-1939

His wife, Synthy, was clearly a force of her own, having had 14 children over the course of 27 years, 10 living to adulthood—a very long-tail family.

Though formal schooling was not always available, especially for older children in the relatively early days of rural Ohio, brother William recalled that *“he learned much concerning history and government affairs from daily conversations with his father, who was a man of intelligence.”* Sylvester Sr. was a former teacher turned farmer. In addition to fostering an environment where ideas were discussed, Sylvester Sr. worked to ensure that his children had a foothold in a future that suited them. When his older children became teenagers, he arranged for them to apprentice with printers. In 1841, Sylvester Jr. purchased a printing press and began publishing a newspaper in Sandusky, Ohio. Edmund moved to Sandusky with his older brother and apprenticed with him while also attending high school, working mornings and evenings at the newspaper office. In 1846, he was still attending high school at the age 20, highly unusual for the son of a farmer—but this was not your typical family of 19th century farmers. By the time he left high school, Edmund already had seven years of experience as a typesetter and printer. While these practical skills would set Edmund up for future employment, it was the attraction of using print to share ideas that would be the driving force for both Edmund and to some extent his brother William. Sadly, Sylvester Jr. died in 1849 at age 27 in a cholera epidemic that took hundreds of lives in the town of Sandusky, including that of his only child, Flint.

In late May of 1856 Edmund Ross led a wagon train to Kansas. (This Ross family emigration was preceded by an earlier Ross family emigration by his brothers William and George, and sister Nancy Amelia, and their respective spouses who homesteaded as part of one of the earliest wagon trains to Kansas in 1855, organized by The New England Emigrant Aid Company.) Edmund organized a group of settlers, beginning in his home of Milwaukee. According to a Milwaukee newspaper,

“The party of emigrants for Kansas, numbering about fifty persons, started yesterday on their journey over-land, the white tops of their wagons, as they passed through the streets,

reminding one of the California caravans of a few years since. They will be joined on their route by other parties from the State and will form a welcome addition to the Army of Freedom in Kansas."

What does one choose to take on a journey to start a new life on the Kansas frontier? Edmund Ross chose to take his books: histories, the works of Shakespeare and Milton, and medical journals. According to Richard Ruddy's biography of Edmund Ross,

"Ross had carefully packed his family wagon to leave a flat surface on which Fannie and the children could ride, which he covered with a carpet. He also built up the sides of the wagon with additional boards against which their featherbeds, used at night for sleeping, were placed during the day to make couches. [Daughter Lillian] remembered her baby brother learning to crawl inside the wagon as it moved along. She could also see an older woman in an adjoining wagon sitting in a rocking chair and either sewing or reading."

Edmund chose a route that went by Janesville, Wisconsin, enabling his parents, Sylvester and Synthy Ross, and three more Ross siblings to join the caravan. Richard Ruddy recounted that,

"Edmund's father had loaded a farm wagon with all the belongings he could squeeze into it. His two youngest sons [13 year old Charles and 9 year old Walter] drove the wagon pulled by four oxen. A cow named Crump and a black filly named Meg were tied to the back of the wagon. In addition, Sylvester rigged a two-seat surrey with a canvas top in which he and Edmund's mother and youngest sister [15 year old Julia] would ride. Sylvester drove the surrey ahead of the caravan, scouting for resting places and overnight campsights."

By the time the wagon train arrived in Kansas, it numbered over 100 wagons and 500 people. Edmund's oldest child, Lillian, then just shy of 7 years old said, *"I remember my mother holding me over the side of the wagon, that I might look back toward the rear as the train rounded a curve. Someone remarked, 'It was a mile long.'"* This is just one of many examples of Edmund Ross' natural leadership abilities.

Edmund and family stayed in Lawrence, Kansas, while his father and other siblings were one of the first groups of white settlers to settle in Mission Creek. Edmund's oldest daughter, Lillian, recounted her fondest memories of their first winter in Kansas, where there would be trips to her grandparents' home, requiring them to stay all night. As related by Richard Ruddy:

"There was a large fireplace with a 'huge back-log. White curtains in the windows and a red carpet—cozy and bright.' Her father [Edmund] would take his bass viol, while her uncles George and Charles would play their violins. Grandfather Sylvester and ... uncle Walter, took down their flutes, and everyone else would sing."

The rich conversations in the Ross family home, the value the family placed on education as well as their direct support of their children (and the siblings' support of each other) as they built careers, bestowed unmistakable advantages on all of the Ross children, not just Edmund. They appear to have been a family that remained closely connected with one another over the years, reaping the power of alliance, and challenging my thoughts that long-tail families inevitably dispersed before all family members were grown. During the Civil War, many of the Ross family adult children, wives of their sons who were away at War, as well as a number of grandchildren lived together on Sylvester and Synthy's property in Mission Creek, Kansas. I suspect that the connectedness of their family may have also played a role in producing so many notable individuals.

Among the Ross children who became well-known, in particular for their leadership roles in Kansas, are:

Third son, William Ross, who was appointed by President Lincoln as a government agent to the Pottawatomie Indians, a role he served in until the end of the Civil War. In his honor, a town in Kansas was named for him, "Rossville." Subsequently he was elected as mayor of Topeka.

Fourth son, George Ross, who married Minerva Fox, also served as a member of the Kansas State legislature.

Though less well-known, fifth son, Charles Ross, who was the husband of Maria Fox, was Treasurer of Wabaunsee County, Kansas, and built a financial career.

Despite the rigid gender roles of the 19th century, women, too, played important roles in establishing a free Kansas, though these roles were less recognized. Due to the prominence of Edmund Ross, we can get the tiniest peek at contributions of Edmund's wife Fannie and his sister Nancy Amelia, which otherwise might have just been passed over as unimportant details.

While Edmund led the wagon train, and doubtless was key in decisions about the route, water crossings, brokering additional wagons joining the train, according to Richard

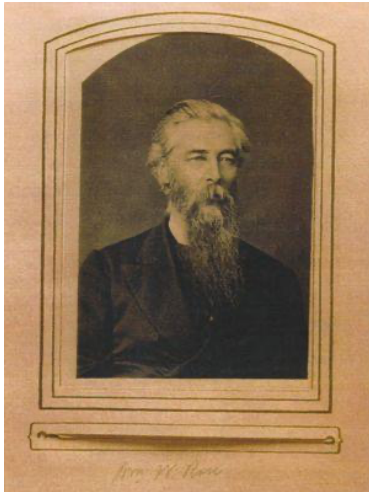
Ruddy's biography, Fannie was the one to organize the regular acquisition and then sharing of food and supplies each day when they arrived at their camp, something that must have required great skill and diplomacy.

Nancy Amelia Ross, Edmund's sister, made bullets by melting down lead type from a printing press, to help their community weather the siege of the famous Wakarusa War between pro- and anti-slavery proponents in the Fall of 1855. According to her obituary, Nancy *"took part in all the activities that finally resulted in Kansas being admitted into the Union as a free state."*

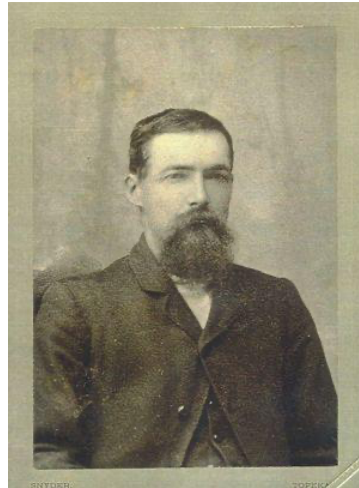
It is worth saying that because of the choices he made, Edmund Ross and his wife Fannie always struggled to support themselves financially. One might expect prominence to translate to wealth, but in their case it did not.

Figuring out why Edmund Ross became who he was, or why one family produced so many prominent individuals, is not likely something we will ever know for sure. It is worth recognizing that these were tough times, with war, diseases, and high childhood mortality in addition to regular droughts, and Kansas' legendary grasshopper invasions. There were no social services then—no unemployment insurance, no farm subsidies, no medicare, no food banks, no social security. It follows that people from families who remained close and connected to one another had a life advantage. I can't help think that there was also an advantage that came from growing up in a family where learning and moral courage were valued, both things that Sylvester and Synthy seemed able to nurture.

The Ross family members were not only important to Kansas, they were important to Alma Jane and WHH Fox. Somehow, to me, this has meant that understanding who the Ross family was, is necessary to understanding a little bit more about Alma Jane's life. The Ross' and the Foxes were that set of relations, not all close relatives, but insiders to each others lives nonetheless. In addition to their being no social safety nets during the 19th century, there were also no fertility treatments. The generosity of Charles and Maria Ross, to have adopted Alma Jane and WHH's youngest, is matched only by the generosity of WHH offering a childless couple the opportunity to parent, when he felt he couldn't.



Brother William W. Ross



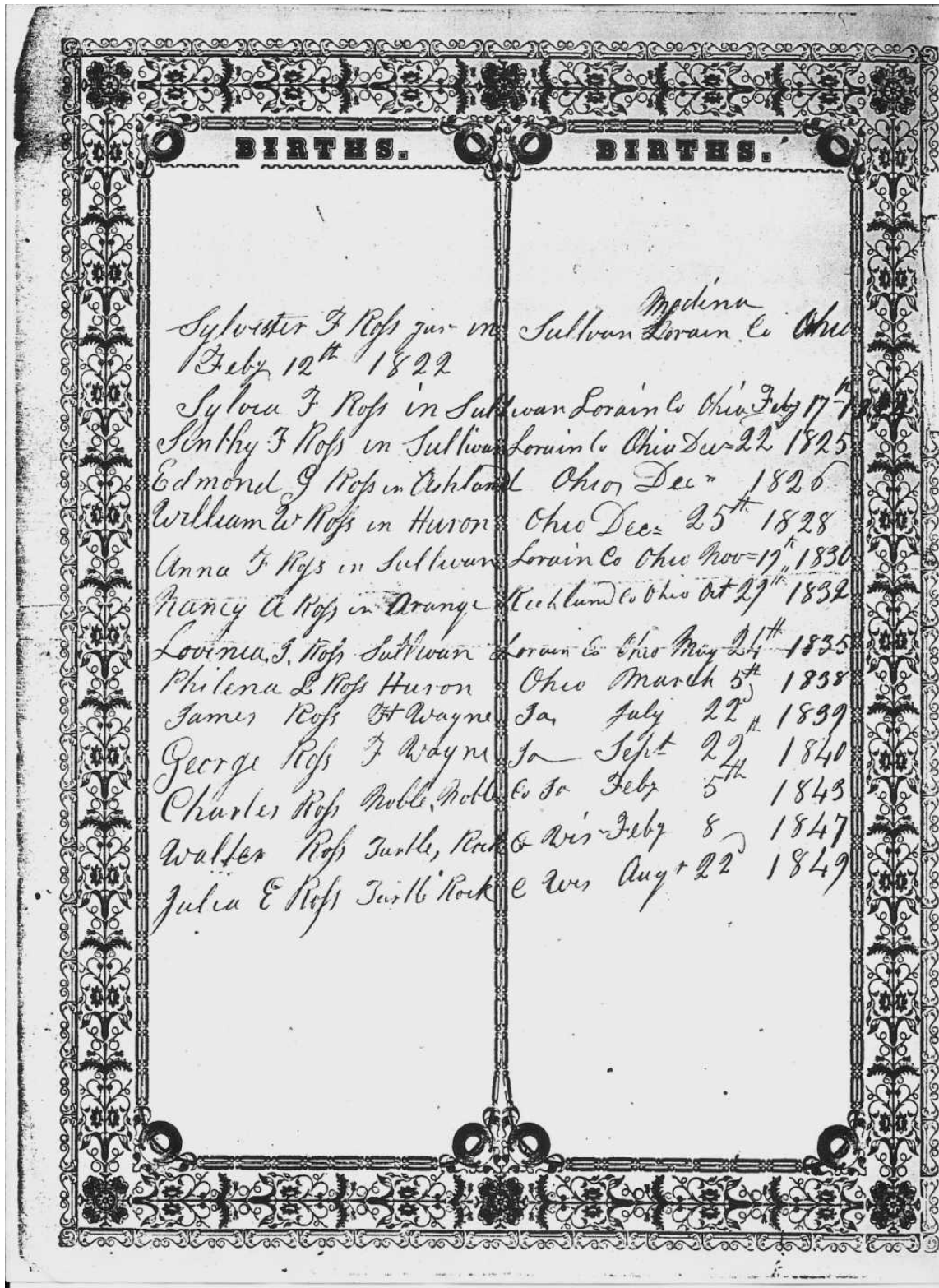
Brother George Ross



Sister Anna F. Ross



Edmund Ross, Children, and Grandchildren in 1899



From the Ross Family Bible