

The Westporter



May 2021

WESTPORT
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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24 Windows to the Past...or, Future

2021 CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Many thanks to all who have donated to the *1855 Harris-Kearney House Window Restoration Capital Campaign*. It is vital for this year's capital campaign to be a success so that the Mansion House is secure for another 166 years and beyond. As you know, the society receives no local, state, or federal funds, so your generosity is deeply appreciated.

With continued support from donors like you, we will be able to raise the \$24,000 needed to make the restoration of 24, 166-year-old windows possible.

If you have not made a tax-deductible donation to our building's capital campaign, please consider supporting our vital window restoration. May we look for your check to "Westport Historical Society" with "window restoration" in the memo?

Our address is at the left. Or, if you prefer, donations can be made online: www.westporthistorical.com.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support.

Our generous donors to date:

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The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum and Westport Historical Society are a §501(c)(3) charitable organization

Thank you to our friends & sponsors for your continued support and generosity





CELEBRATING COLONEL CHARLES ESMONDE KEARNEY

Col. Charles Esmonde Kearney was born on March 2, 1820 in County Galway, Ireland. He migrated to America the day after Queen Victoria was crowned. After arriving in New York, he obtained a job in a dry goods store. In 1842, he moved to Mobile, Alabama, he, again, worked for a mercantile house. At the outbreak of the Mexican War, Kearney went to New Orleans where he joined the Texas Rangers. After mustering out, he began a dry goods business in Camargo, Mexico on the Rio Grande. Moving to Independence, MO in 1847, Col. Kearney got into the Santa Fe trade. While doing business in Westport, he met Josephine Harris, and after a period of courting, the couple married in 1851. When the trade in Westport began to quicken, Col. Kearney entered into a partnership in an outfitting business with his brother-in-law William R. Bernard. Their headquarters was located in a building next door, to the east, of the Harris House Hotel on Main (now Westport Road).

During his lifetime, Charles Esmonde Kearney dealt in the Mexican trade, bought and sold commodities, entered the field of stocks and bonds, and worked in the real estate business. In 1866, Col. Kearney became President of the Kansas City and Cameron Railroad. He and three other men of Westport were responsible for bringing the railroad to Kansas City. Finished in 1869, the Hannibal Bridge opened connecting both sides of the Missouri River at Kansas City. Col. Charles E. Kearney was given the honor of driving the last railroad stake to open the bridge to the railroad. Today, Col. Kearney is remembered as the "Father of the Railroads in Kansas City."

NO WESTPORT IN OURS

John J. Mastin and Thos. H. Mastin do a banking business at the corner of Fifth and Delaware Streets, but neither are eligible for Mayor of Kansas City, because their families live near Westport, and there they make their residence. Col. Charles E. Kearney has an office in the New Exchange and does business in Kansas City, but living in Westport, is not eligible for Mayor. Col. Case has a post office in Kansas City, but living out by the cemetery [Union] is ineligible for Mayor of Kansas City. And how can Shelley be eligible when his family lives at Westport, and where, as a good husband and father, all his hours, except when attending business, must be spent. We don't want the expense and uncertainty of electing a man mayor and uncertainty of electing a man mayor when he may be ineligible. Westport is a quiet and a favorite suburb of Kansas City, but while it will do for the residence of bankers and merchants, it will not do for mayors [of Kansas City] to live there. There are men living in Wyandott that would make good executive officers for any city, but the charter of Kansas City forbids us to avail ourselves of their service. If Shelley wants to be Mayor, Westport will elect him at one-tenth what it will cost for the empty honor of running in Kansas City.

~The Daily Journal of Commerce (Kansas City, Missouri) Tue. Apr. 2, 1878, Page 4

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IT ALL BEGAN . . .

A glimpse of a racially mixed block of Westport in early 1900s

"It was unusual for black and white families to live on the same block as Midtown Kansas City developed, but that's just what happened on a few Plaza Westport neighborhood blocks. For example, the block from W. 43rd to W. 43rd Street Terrace (or Steptoe Street) had almost two dozen homes in 1940; about half were occupied by black families, while half were home to whites.

"The block was part of an area known as **Steptoe**, a section of Westport later incorporated into Kansas City. In the early 1900s, black families owned and rented homes on the south side of this block, while white families owned and rented on the north side. The neighborhood known as Steptoe, now nearly gone, set aside land where former slaves could buy homes. Steptoe flourished in the early part of the century."

For more visit:
<http://midtownkcpost.com>

West Port had its beginning primarily for two reasons: first, there was the Indian Removal Act of 1830 which relocated a number of the Eastern tribes to the Kansas Territory. Their "removal" provided them with government monies to spend with traders and others in the area. Second, the town had its beginning because of the trails that passed through it in the 1820's and the 1830's.

William Becknell left Franklin, Missouri in September of 1821 with goods headed in the direction of Santa Fe. His purpose was simply to trade goods for money and return home. His profits were so great, that others soon followed his lead creating a "trail." Little did Becknell realize that when he started out that September day that he would go down in history as the "Father of the Santa Fe Trail."

Becknell's first trip consisted of several wagon loads of trade goods worth \$15,000 and the train was protected by seventy men. Trade along the trail increased to thirty-seven wagons, with \$65,000 worth of goods and 130 men heading westward in 1821. By 1833, Becknell had 105 wagons heading west with cargo valued at over \$180,000. The route the wagons followed was one leaving from Independence, Missouri along the Independence-West Port Road. The journey from Independence to West Port was about twelve miles and took one and half days to reach the valley just north of where the Westport High School building stands today. The wagon trains would camp there for the night, and then begin the trip into Westport. They would head the wagons up the hill to the west and then west to Westport road and on into the town of West Port. There was a spring on the land at the southwest corner of Water (Mill) Street where families would, outfit their wagons, and camp for a few days before beginning the long journey to Santa Fe, California, or Oregon and places in between.

One of the first families to settle in present day Westport was that of Rev. Isaac McCoy and his wife, Christina Poke McCoy. McCoy was a Baptist Missionary and a land surveyor. Their son was John Calvin McCoy. In 1833, at the age of 22, John purchased land from his father at present day Westport Road and Pennsylvania, cleared the land, and built a small log cabin as his residence and business. He opened a store and stocked it with goods he purchased from J. P. Hickman. The purpose of the business venture was to capture the trade with the travelers headed west on the trails, and to sell to the Indians who had moved to the area.

Pioneers began to stay in the area around McCoy's cabin, and in 1833, McCoy platted the town of West Port—the Portal to the West. At this time, McCoy wanted to receive the goods for the store at a quicker pace. The trip from Independence took 2 days, and a new landing at the outcropping where the river meets today's Grand Avenue, to be the perfect place for riverboats to land, and cut the travel time for the goods to reach West Port. McCoy established West Port Landing. The steamships came and goods were unloaded onto wagons pulled by oxen. It took 8 hours to travel the four-mile, uphill, south route to West Port. With the new landing, the landing at New Franklin was replaced as the port of call for goods going to West Port and the pioneers. Thus, West Port Road became the Santa Fe, California, and Oregon Trails in 1833.

DID YOU KNOW . . .

1. The United States Camel Corps was established in 1856 at Camp Verde, Texas with 66 camels imported from the Middle East?
2. Billy the Kid was RIGHT-HANDED, NOT LEFT-HANDED?
3. The first Gold Rush in the United States began in Cabarrus County, North Carolina, in 1799?
4. The gunfight at the O. K. Corral did not take place in a corral, but near the present-day intersection of Third Street and Fremont Street in Tombstone, Arizona, which is actually behind the O. K. Corral?
5. The Long Branch Saloon in Dodge City served milk, tea, lemonade, sarsaparilla, alcohol, and beer?
6. Established in 1827, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas is the oldest military post in continuous operation west of the Mississippi?
7. Jesse James was called "Dingus" by his friends?
8. Meriwether Lewis supplied the *Lewis and Clark Expedition* with 193 pounds of dried "portable soup" to be eaten when fresh game was scarce?
9. After the White House had telephones installed, the first community to have telephone service was Deadwood, South Dakota?
10. Cowboys driving cattle to market could expect to make between \$25 and \$40 dollars a month?

WHAT IS HISTORY?

History tells everything that has happened since man was born. Its "primary purpose is to stand at the center of diverse, tolerant, intellectually rigorous debate about our existence: our political systems, leadership, society, economy, and culture," then learn from our tragedies and our triumphs. We seek to understand the past by determining and ordering facts. Once we have the facts, we can hope to explain the decisions and processes which occurred and shaped our existence in our world. "It is only those things and facts which are experienced or seen and then written down that outlast the memory span of individuals."

History is the study of behaviors, actions, interactions, decisions, and people. It is not just names and dates, but rather a true story of the lives and activities of men and women and their influences on each other and the communities in which they live. History is the study of behaviors, actions, interactions, decisions, and people. History provides us with a sense of identity. It provides a sense of context for our lives and our existence. History helps us understand the way things were, are, and how we might approach and make the future better for all of us: we must learn from the past and we can only learn if we take a good, hard look at what went on before today.

THANK YOU TO OUR BUSINESS SPONSORS

The Westport Historical Society would like to say "thank you" to our business partners for being a part of our family. We are truly grateful for the support and commitment each has shown to us in the last 12 months. Keep it up!

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When Ezra Meeker of Oregon Trail fame visited Kansas City in September 1910, he said:

“As reverence for the past dies out in the breasts of a generation, so likewise patriotism wanes. In the measure that the love of history of the past dies, so likewise do the aspirations for the future. To keep the flower of patriotism alive, we must keep the memory of the past vividly in mind.”

NATIVE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

So, live your life that the fear of death can never enter you heart.

Trouble no man about his religion—

Respect him and his views, and demand that he respects yours.

Love your life; perfect your life.

Beautify all things in your life.

Seek to make your life long and of service to your people.

Show respect to all men, but gravel to none.

When you arise in the morning, give thanks for the morning light, for your life and strength.

Give thanks for your food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault is yours.

~Tecumseh—Shawnee Warrior/Chief

DAYS TO REMEMBER

When crises come, and skies are leaden, when the grim specter of hysteria sweeps through the land, it is good for the people to retrace their steps and see again the astounding glory of those into whose inheritance they have entered.

If we knew history better, we would not be so dangerously disturbed. There would come a fresh upswelling of courage if we would permit the past to speak to us. A nation that has no past, has no future. Those who never look toward yesterday with gratitude will discover that the future will never look toward them with any measure of appreciation.

Man lives in the past and in the future. We are creatures of memory and hope. If the past is blotted out and memory no longer functions, man is robbed of a source of great pleasure. If thoughts of the future are blotted out, life is robbed of its hope and vision, its brightness and its light.

~Joseph R. Sizoo, Author and Missionary

NEW KC HISTORY BOOK OUT SOON!

A new book will soon be added to local history bookshelves that will commemorate the sesquicentennial anniversary of Octave Chanute and George Morison’s greatest achievement to 1869—the completion of the Hannibal Bridge—and the engineers’ 1870 report, *The Kansas City Bridge*.

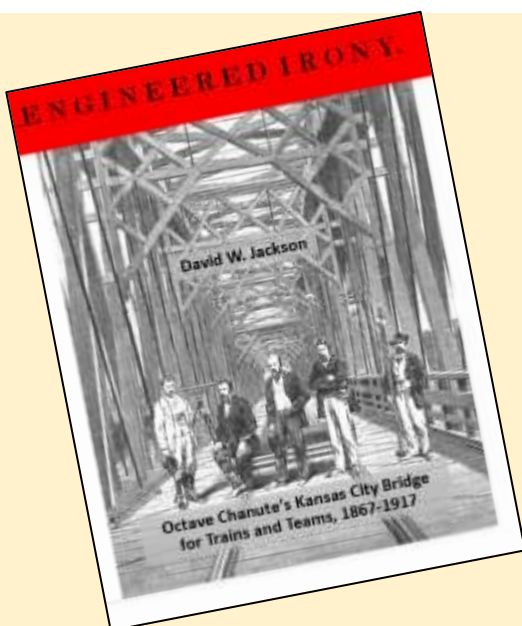
Engineered Irony by David W. Jackson honors the hundreds of skilled laborers/builders (and names them for the first time in 150 years) who toiled on the project from 1867-1869.

A special memorial describes a handful of men who were rediscovered to have paid the ultimate sacrifice towards the historic engineering endeavor.

Engineered Irony also remembers those who maintained and operated the historic bridge over the next half century, with details of events that transpired between 1869 and 1917 when the bridge gave way to its descendant, the Second Hannibal Bridge.

Most impressive is a comprehensive image gallery you wont want to miss!

Kansas City, 150 years after opening its prophetic bridge in grand celebration on July 3, 1869, is “stationed” at the dawning of the Solar Age to again “spike” prominence. Let’s come together to allow anything to be **Made in Kansas City** so that future citizens in 2070 will look back and applaud our efforts!



*Engineered Irony:
Crossing Octave Chanute's Kansas City Bridge for Trains and Teams, 1867-1917*

by David W. Jackson

Over the last 20 years I have researched, written, and published on Kansas City and Jackson County, Missouri's rich history, lectured on our diverse heritage, and advocated on behalf of historic preservation opportunities. Along the way, I have added on my own or in concert with others nearly 40 titles to local history bookshelves (orderlypackrat.com). The breadth and depth of this work product illuminates two-time Pulitzer Prize winning historian David McCullough's declaration:

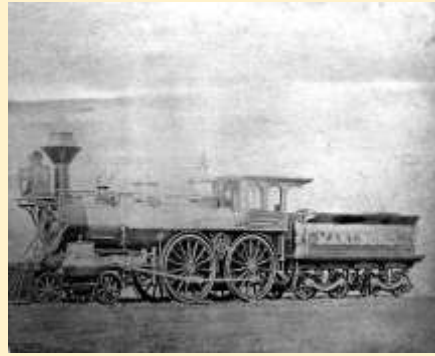
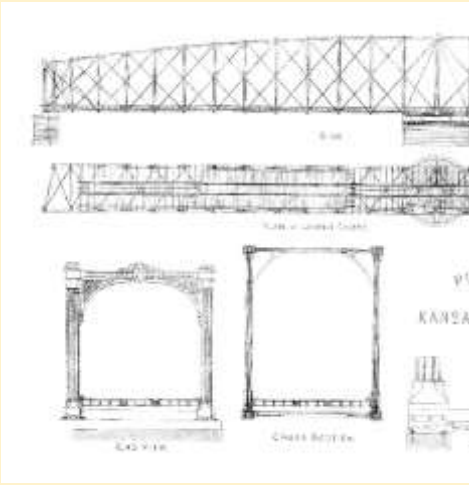
"I cannot think of another landscape of similar size that has had so much American history as Jackson County, Missouri."

—David McCullough

while researching his 1993 biography, Truman

McCullough's truthism kindles a plethora of events in local history that, indeed, have national import. Some of those seminal moments and notable figures include:

- * the Spanish and French explorations through native grasslands to Missouri's savannah;
- * the epic Westward Movement (trail, steamboat, and rail) experience that involved the Lewis and Clark, Santa Fe, Mormon, Oregon, California, and Pony Express Trails;
- * a tumultuous, early Mormon history rife with expulsion, tarring, and feathering;
- * a cultural landscape that involved the enslavement of people of African descent;
- * sensational stories involving frontier justice with connections to Jesse James and contemporaries in the days before Kansas City shook its 'cow town' image;
- * a major stock raising and grain futures trade rivaling Chicago for Grade-A agribusiness;
- * divisive, escalating border guerilla warfare preceding the Civil War by seven years;
- * the 1861 American Civil War when martial law was first imposed upon U.S. civilians;
- * a vibrant fashion design and garment manufacturing beacon, ranking second only to NYC;
- * a renowned parks and boulevards system that was emulated by cities across the nation;
- * the birthplace of Mickey Mouse, and other Hollywood and Broadway stars: Robert Altman, Ed Asner, Don Cheadle, Peter DeLaurier, Jean Harlow (Harlean Carpenter), Virginia "Ginger" Rogers, Ellie (Elizabeth Claire) Kemper, Diane Wiest, and others;
- * Harry S Truman's ascent to the highest office in the land . . . as mob- and boss-politics in Kansas City were swept clean;
- * Kansas City's 'women of independent minds' who led the charge on so many local, regional, and national programs that generations have enjoyed and benefitted;
- * a tradition in compassion caring for citizens of all ages in need whether it be world class medical, nursing, or hospice services . . . for educating and training medical and dental professionals . . . and for leading biomedical scientific research;
- * unnumbered inventions including the shopping cart, multiplex movie theaters, Teflon™, bumper stickers, electric hair clippers, Eskimo Bars, wrapping paper and greeting cards (Hallmark), M&M's candy-coating process, the automatic fire alarm, electric hair clippers, Bomb Pops, and McDonald's Happy Meal™;
- * Kansas City pioneer activists who in February 1966 lit the kindling leading to the Gay Liberation Movement sparked at the Stonewall Inn in NYC in June 1969;
- * a spectrum of entrepreneurs from Hiram Young and "Russell Stover" (i.e. Clara Stover); and two, true Kansas City originals: KC Jazz-Charlie Parker & KC BBQ-Henry Perry;
- * a series of sports teams who have scored high across the nation (from the Kansas City Athletics and Monarchs, to the Blades, Chiefs, Comets, Mavericks, Royals, Scouts, T-Bones, and even Sporting Kansas City); and;



* as we, at the doorstep of the Solar Age, barrel towards doomsday scientific climate projections, Kansas City is leading the nation with messaging, projects, and strategies supporting Green New Deal-inspired ideals and similar campaigns to wean U.S. off gasoline and to champion renewables that might reverse the global warming crisis.

Kansas City and Jackson County’s origin stories are among my favorites. These genesis experiences are where the Heart of America truly beats. Here, seeming happenstance, disparate actions and diverse people’s actions have formed and continue to shape the unique metropolis that is Kansas City.

Engineered Irony commemorates the 150th anniversary of one of those momentous Kansas City achievements with national significance that solidified Kansas City’s “destiny as the metropolis of the Missouri Valley.” Arguably, if this one event had not unfolded as it did, history would have forged a vastly different historical timeline for the region.

In 1870, engineers Octave Alexandre Chanute and George Shattuck Morison published their book, *The Kansas City Bridge*, a report recapping the previous year’s completion of their greatest achievement up to that moment.

Chanute and Morison’s 1869 “Kansas City Bridge” masterwork—most commonly known as “The Hannibal Bridge” named after the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad that was responsible for its creation—was the first, permanent bridge to span the winding, often treacherous, muddy Missouri River.

The Hannibal Bridge actually predates the Brooklyn Bridge in New York and the Eads Bridge in St. Louis, so Chanute’s experiences likely factored into the planning of those landmark structures. Chanute’s modern engineering achievement in iron was accomplished “right here in river city” in an ‘ironic’ twist of fate.

“President Lincoln picked a route from Omaha for the first rail line to reach the West Coast.” The famed “Golden Spike Ceremony” drove the celebrated “last spike” on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit in Utah Territory. Technically, that event conjoined the railroad system only from San Francisco, California, to Omaha, Nebraska. **The nation’s railroad system was not yet truly transcontinental until the Missouri River was bridged.** At Omaha, that connecting link would not happen for another three years in March 1872.

Two and a half years earlier on **July 3, 1869**, Kansas City opened the first bridge across the Missouri River! Our “Hannibal Bridge” opening fete attracted a conservative estimate of 30,000 spectators. The “last spike” celebrated that day (honorarily by Col. Kearney and William Gilliss; or, more likely, their designated railroad strongmen) set an unparalleled trajectory for any midwestern city to date. Not only did Kansas City become the hub for coast-to-coast transportation, but it shortened the trip from roughly six months on foot leading an ox-pulled wagon to as little as eight days by train from New York City to San Francisco.

Volume 1 of this 150th Commemorative Edition reprints Chanute and Morison’s 1870 report, *The Kansas City Bridge* published by D. Van Nostrand, with an added biography of Chanute by local historian Bill Nicks, and a testimony to his engineering genius by local engineer Brian Snyder. **Volume 2** of *Engineered Irony* represents my decade plus effort to relive that auspicious day in 1869, and to memorialize the promoters, campaigners, and skilled workers who engineered, constructed, then operated the Hannibal Bridge over the next 48 years . . . and to name the handful who lost their lives in the process. ***Engineered Irony* will “leave the station” and be ready to procure from Amazon.com by July 3, 2021. All aboard! Tickets! Tickets!**

Thank You!

WHS Invites Volunteers!

Do you have a few hours to spare? Do you enjoy learning about history and sharing what you know? Would you like to be a part of an Historic House Museum and Historical Society?

Whether you would like to be a docent giving tours, or if you would just like to help out at special events such as field trips, ice cream socials, or Christmas Candlelight Tours — we always welcome folks who would like to volunteer! Whatever your skills, talents, and interests, we have a place for you!

Call Alana Smith for more Information at (816) 561-1821 or (913) 648-0952



The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum is open for the 2021 tourism season. The House Museum is available for group tours, events and meetings, too. Please call 913-231-6749 for reservations and information, or send an email to westporthistorical@gmail.com.

Thank you for your continued, generous support!

**Westport Historical Society
4000 Baltimore
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