

The Westporter



February 2019

WESTPORT
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Find Us on Facebook

The Westport Historical Society celebrates and commemorates the 19th Century when Americans journeyed West to chase their dreams of greater possibilities.



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



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

Freedom's
Frontier
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA



An Important Designation

IT'S OFFICIAL!

The Secretary of the Interior of the United States has certified that the 1855 Harris-Kearney House has met the national trails criteria under the National Trails System Act and is now designated as an official site on the **California** and **Oregon Trails**. The house has been a site on the **Santa Fe Trail** since 2008. We are proud to be designated as a site on all three trails! The Westport Historical Society would like to thank everyone who generously helped us obtain the designation.

The National Parks Service and the Westport Historical Society will work jointly on planning, interpretation, resource management, and other matters that relate to the three national historic trails for "... the identification and protection of the historic route and its historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment." (National Trails System Act 16 USC)

There will be a dedication of the national certification in the spring. Please look for announcements in future publications, on Facebook, and in emails.





West Port and The Trails

On August 10, 1821, President Monroe signed the document that admitted Missouri to the Union. The fertile valleys of the Kaw and Missouri rivers and the rich, rolling plains became a magnet for the farmers of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina. At the time, these four states provided almost 75% of Jackson County's population born outside of the state. The farmers wanted to come to Missouri because of what they thought was cheaper, fertile lands; higher-than-coastal-states product prices; and lucrative trade opportunities. The farmers had easy access to Missouri by taking the Tennessee or Ohio rivers to the Mississippi and across the Missouri by keelboats. Letters from Missouri settlers to Kentucky and Virginia relatives told how hemp and tobacco production equaled that of Kentucky. They went on to say that a man could make a living in Missouri with little more than half the labor used in Virginia, because everything that was planted yielded near double with less the work. With the influx of settlers, in 1832, John Calvin McCoy, the son of a missionary, founded the town of West Port which became the center of the migration west through the middle of the 1800's.

For the first half of the 19th century, Missouri served as a great funnel for the traders and settlers moving west. The Mississippi and Ohio Rivers gave access from the coasts. Once in Missouri, the broad and navigable Missouri River provided nearly 300 miles of water transportation before the rough and tough overland trek. The settlers in western Missouri took advantage of this great migration and acted as suppliers and outfitters for those difficult trips.

In 1821, the Mexican people won independence from Spain and Santa Fe became a Mexican holding. Immediately after the revolution, western traders were anxious to open the 800-mile trade route from Missouri and trade the goods they were raising. Iron goods, textiles, tobacco, tools, silver, furs, grain, and mules were exchanged.

When Indian tribes moved from their lands in the East and relocated on reservations in the Kansas territory in the 1830's many frontier merchants profited. The U.S. government annually gave annuities of \$300,000.00 in silver to the displaced tribes. Thus, the Indians were able to trade pelts, furs, and annuity money for gun powder, lead, beads, salt, fabric, whiskey, tobacco, and leather goods. West Port captured the bulk of this trade and the town became a mix of frontiersmen, scouts, wagon masters, pioneers, Santa Fe traders, and long lines of teams of oxen and mules.

Continued Next Page . . .

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West Port and The Trails Cont'd

History is full of stories of pioneers going west in search of happiness, success, and a better life. For example, in 1843, approximately 1000 people began the 2000 mile cross-continent trip to Oregon after outfitting in West Port. This trail, along with the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails became the arteries out of West Port for a torrent of settlers on the move. West Port and other western Missouri towns also grew rich from the Mexican War as they were suppliers to the army by way of the Santa Fe Trail. Beginning in 1849, West Port channeled gold-seekers to California with over 20,000 men being outfitted for the trips. In the beginning 5 months of that year, West Port saw over 5000 wagons leave for California, and the 1859 gold rush in Colorado added thousands of more travelers over the trails. West Port and the three trails held dominance in trade and outfitting until the railroad system and the Hannibal Bridge opened in 1869.

~from the Westport Historical Society files

1859 Businesses in Westport

Dry Goods---2
 Merchant tailors---2
 Drug stores---3
 Banking house---1
 Hardware---3
 Confectioner---1
 Hotels---2
 Wagon shops---4
 Carpenter shop---5
 Plow factories---2
 Barber shop---2
 Billiard salon---1
 Lawyers---4
 Real estate agent---1
 Blacksmith shops---3
 Daguerrean room---1
 Tin ware shop---1
 Commission & forwarding offices---3

Clothing---3
 Grocery stores---6
 Printing office---1
 Harness & saddle shops---3
 Bakeries---2
 Jewelers---2
 Livery stables---2
 Lumber yard---1
 Steam mill---1
 Cabinet shop---1
 Saloons---4
 Dentist---1
 Physicians---5
 Insurance company---1
 Millinery---2
 Boot & shoe shops---2
 Female schools---2
 Male schools---2



Pic: Ewing Boone General Store in West Port

The stores advertised everything a person would need in a frontier town, including: bacon, flour, coffee, sardines, oysters, lobsters, tin ware, hardware, calico, silk, ribbon, oranges and lemons and limes, Brussels carpets, and birdcages. Although a western town on the prairie, it was on an excellent river system, and anything available on the east coast could be in West Port in a matter of months.

~from the Westport Historical Society files

Lifetime Members of The Westport Historical Society

- Mayor & Mrs. Richard Berkley
- Ann Creveling
- Ann Duer
- Jim & Caren Hall
- Kelly's Westport Inn
- Collins Westphel & Kelp, Inc.
- Dorine Lowell
- Patricia Cleary Miller
- Allin & Donna Phister
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Disease on the Frontier

In the 19th century, Americans did not yet know of and/or accept the germ theory, so they had many other explanations for disease. One suggestion was that bad air or vapors was the cause of illness; this idea had antecedents as far back as ancient Greece. The thought was that the body had 4 humors: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Each humor had its own quality: hot or cold, moist or dry. When the 4 humors are in balance, a person is well, but dominance of one humor, over the others, makes a person sick. It was often noted that a good housewife opened windows each morning to “change the air.” This theory continued in modified form until the germ theory was accepted in the late 1880’s-1890’s after discovery of viruses and wider publicity of the study of bacteria.

In the early to mid-1800s on the frontier, there were two categories of disease that were, of course, thought to be caused by the disproportions of the humors! Those categories were the epidemic ones like yellow fever and cholera, and the endemic ones like small pox, measles, diphtheria, and malaria. Of course, malaria and cholera were the most destructive.

Malaria, also known as ague, was so common on the western prairie that it was known as the “Missouri chills.” Sometimes in July, August, and September, whole communities might be sick with malaria which was transmitted by mosquitoes. This was not a killer, but a debilitator. The symptoms were yawning, stretching, cold sensations, chills followed by heat, headaches, sweating, and finally a return to a normal state. People arranged their work around their “fits.” When malaria began to decline as a “disease” it was not because of advanced medical practices, but because people moved inland.

In both 1832 and 1849, Missouri was subjected to the strange invader from Europe—Asiatic cholera. It was in Missouri only a few years, but the death toll was high. It was not so much the number of cases nor the high fatality but the mysteriousness and suddenness which caused dread and fear. A person could be in excellent health, then suddenly feel an uneasiness, an inward burning and craving for cold drinks. This was followed by vomiting and general debility, which was followed by total collapse. One’s fate was often decided within a few hours. There was much speculation about the causes: bad airs, insects, comets, and nearly all foods. The proposed cures were as varied and wide-ranging as the causes.

Another disease which was widespread was dysentery or flux. It is an inflammation of the large intestine which is caused by bacteria in water, milk or food, or if the privy drained into the water system. Symptoms were severe diarrhea and bleeding.

Historical Resource Library

The library at the 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum contains many books and files which may be used as reference material for those seeking information on early Westport, the Town of Kansas, and many of the residents who lived and worked in early Kansas and Missouri. If you would like to do research using our sources, please call the museum staff to make an appointment: 816-561-1821.



Looking for the Perfect Gift?

If someone you know is not a member, please consider a membership in the Westport Historical Society for that special gift!

Memberships are \$15.00 for students, \$40.00 for individuals, and \$50.00 for a family.

The membership includes invitations to special events, the society's quarterly newsletter, free guided tour of the museum house, and a 10% discount on gift shop items



Disease on The Frontier Cont'd

During the Civil War, Northerners referred to dysentery as the "Tennessee Quick Step." This was sometimes called "second summer complaint" when it attacked small children who were just beginning to drink cow's milk which was often full of bacteria.

Small pox was another major killer of children. It would sometimes affect an entire community of children at once. Many children also died from the croup or pneumonia. Fleas, bedbugs, flies and mosquitoes in combination with soiled clothing, infrequent bathing, and close contact with germ infected soil were the causes of many diseases.

Medicine in Missouri in the 1850's was in a transitional phase from the old "theory approach" to one concerned with cures and reliable standards of practice. One advance was the use of ether as an anesthesia during surgery.

~from the Westport Historical Society files

By Wagon

A trip across the prairie was not always easy--

"We decided to go West. Our crops had failed for four years in a row and we had nothing to lose. We packed our wagon with bedding, clothes, furniture, organ, and cooking utensils. Our farm equipment was put in another wagon pulled by our farm horses who were large enough to manage the load. Our milk cow was tied to this wagon. Mother drove the oxen, which were employed to pull our wagon, for miles and miles. Mother and I sat on the board seat as my brother and father walked along side the wagon. Each night we would camp and make our evening meal. Sleeping was not always easy as the air was full of unknown noises and foreign smells. One day we came to a very large river, but it had no bridge and we could not see much of a way to cross. Father finally found a ford and thought we might be able to make our way across, if we were careful. Our oxen were of a different mind and thought that crossing the river was not a good idea and balked and refused to venture into the water; even the farm horses agreed.

Father had to wade into the water and whip all to change their minds. We did make the crossing, but everything in the wagon was soaking wet, or at least very damp. Mother had a really big job drying out our belongings. She had been with child for 5 months, so the task was not an easy one. We dried out and rested a few days, then continued on our journey. After ten more days we reached a small settlement where we were able to replenish some supplies, although not as many as we would have liked, but we made do. Mother had packed dried corn. It was fairly good when it was soaked in water and then cooked in a bit of cream or baked with pieces of meat.

Continued on Next page



House Closed for Winter

The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum is closed for the winter season. We will reopen on Friday, March 8, 2019.

The House Museum is still available for group tours, events, and meetings in January and February 2019.



By Wagon Cont'd

My brother and I picked wild berries when we were fortunate to find a patch or a prickly bush. Sometimes, Mother would make a cobbler of the sweet fruit.

On some days we would see Indians. They did not pay much attention to us, but we were afraid and hurried on as fast as possible. Father said the Indians were hunting parties looking for meat for their tribe. We were grateful that they left us be.

Sometimes we found ourselves in wind storms, or rain storms, in scorching hot temperatures, or surrounded by herds of buffalo—what strange creatures, these big curly beasts.

Sometimes, we would pass deserted homesteads. Why had the owners abandoned their properties—illness, lack of water, failed crops, Indians?

Mother was tired and wanted to stop and journey no more. One day, she talked Father into calling the far western Kansas Territory our home, for at least a time past the birth of our sibling. Mother was relieved that the baby would not be born in a wagon, but rather in a farm house abandoned by another family. Mother said, "It will do, for now."

Mother liked the house and father liked the land and after a period of just over a year, Mother convinced Father that we were, indeed, home.

~from the diary of Mary Allen, a pioneer daughter

Museum Exhibits

The museum staff is planning some exciting new exhibits for the 2019 season at the 1855 Harris-Kearney House.

Please check our website, Facebook, and the *Mansion House News* for announcements, dates, and times.



Did You Know?

1. Colonel John C. Fremont, the first republican candidate for president, made a speech at West Port's Union Church in 1848?
2. Four denominations, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Campbellites, worshiped in the Union Church which was located at the northeast corner of West Port Road and Central Street?
3. The Town of West Port was the last outfitting station on the "way West" at the head of the California, Santa Fe, and Oregon Trails.
4. During the 1850's, more than 500,000 emigrants bought their supplies in West Port for the long journey westward?
5. George Caleb Bingham and Charles Esmond Kearney were business associates?
6. From 1854 until the beginning of the Civil War, Pro-Slavery rallies were held in the West Port town square?
7. In 1864, Charles Kearney was elected president of the Kansas City and Cameron Railroad and was also a director of the Kansas City branch of the Union Bank of St. Louis?
8. When John Harris died in 1873, the Harris House Hotel was bequeathed to a son-in-law William Bernard.
9. Henrietta Harris (Mrs. John) was known for her "chess pie and oatmeal cookies" which she served at the Harris House Hotel?
10. The Harris House Hotel, built in 1852, was the first brick hotel in West Port?

Don't Forget to Renew your WHS Membership for 2019!



During the new year, it is most important that we face the challenge of preserving our area's rich heritage and maintaining the character of the beautiful 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum.

The Historical Society is funded entirely by grants and the contributions of its members. In order to continue our work, the Board of Directors would like to encourage you to join the Westport Historical Society.

Your membership dues go a long way toward helping us continue to offer free programs and cover annual operating expenses.

Your Membership is Important!

If you aren't members, we hope you will consider joining. If you are past members, we hope you will consider rejoining. Updated membership info, pricing and forms can be found on our website. You can also pay online at <https://www.westporthistorical.com/join-whs>

If you are current members, thank you for viewing the society and museum as worthy of your financial support.

Finally, we hope everyone (including life members, who, of course, owe nothing in annual dues) might consider a contribution to our "2019 Capital Campaign." Although we are aggressively applying for grants, the foundations which help non-profits want to see evidence of successful local fund-raising.

In essence, the \$25, \$50 or \$200 you might donate to us can unlock the door to thousands more in grant money. If you wish, please combine your membership dues and any donation on one check and mail it to 4000 Baltimore, KCMO, 64111

Thank You!

WHS Membership Levels

INDIVIDUAL
Membership \$40

FAMILY
Membership \$50

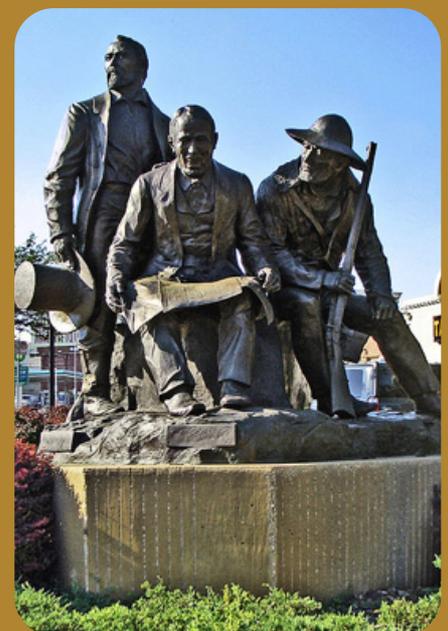
PATRON
Membership \$125

BUSINESS
Membership \$150

SPONSOR
Membership \$300

LIFETIME
Membership \$800*

*May be paid over two years



WHS Needs 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 or talents, we have a place for you!

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



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