PARSING THE PLAINS: PLACING EMPORIA, KANSAS IN THE GREAT PLAINS MIDWEST

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Abstract

This thesis examines the formation of a region that can be called the Great Plains Midwest. It shows this formation through the city of Emporia, Kansas, which grew in tandem with the region. The thesis also examines Emporia as a case study of the cycle of birth, growth, and stagnation visible across the Great Plains between the 1850s and 1910s. This era traces Emporia from its humble beginnings to a period of population stagnation that followed the Panic of 1893. Three chapters cover Emporia's agriculture, railroads, and colleges and universities, comparing each to the same elsewhere in both the midwestern and western portions of the Great Plains. An epilogue reflects on Emporia's legacy from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the rise of the Great Plains Midwest. The thesis argues that history, geography, and human-development rather than political or state boundaries, played the largest roles in creating distinctions between the midwestern and western portions of the Great Plains.

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Introduction

Parsing the Plains:

Placing Emporia, Kansas in the Great Plains Midwest

This is not a story of failure but of a city's birth, growth, and stagnation in the Great Plains portion of the United States Middle West. Founded in 1857, the city of Emporia lies in eastern Kansas between the Cottonwood and Neosho Rivers, about halfway between what is today the largest city in Kansas, Wichita, and the state's capital, Topeka. Emporia, a college town, railroad hub, and agricultural center, seemed on the verge of evolving into a dominant urban area. Instead by the late nineteenth century, it was relegated to the status of a small city like many of its neighbors. In many ways, Emporia exemplifies the history of other small cities of the Great Plains. In what the U.S. Census Bureau now calls the Midwest, many cities, like Emporia, were born out of capitalist enterprise that contributed paradoxically to their growth as much as to their stagnation.[1] The influx of industry, the growth of agriculture, and the coming of the railroad in the late nineteenth century shaped urban spaces like Emporia.[2] Perceptions of the Great Plains as a place of open prairies and inviting landscapes attracted large numbers of mostly white people who hoped to transform the Plains into productive fields and glistening cities. Some

[1] The region known as the Middle West, or Midwest, is currently defined by the United States Census Bureau as including the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The region is further divided into two subregions: the East North Central and the West North Central. The latter includes all midwestern states west of the Mississippi River excluding Minnesota. Prior to 1984, the Census Bureau referred to what it now calls the Midwest the North Central Region. See Geography Division of the U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Regions and Divisions of the United States," U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, 1985, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf.

[2] According to Thomas Wilson and P. W. S. Andrews an industry "consists of all businesses which operate processes of a sufficiently similar kind (which implies the possession of substantially similar technical resources) and possessing sufficiently similar backgrounds of experience and knowledge so that each of them could produce the particular commodity under consideration, and would do so if it were sufficiently attractive." See Thomas Wilson and P. W. S. Andrews, *Oxford Studies in the Price Mechanism* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1951), 168; and John Nightingale, "On the Definition of 'Industry' and 'Market,'" *Journal of Industrial Economics,* 27, no. 1 (1978): 31-40, esp. 32.

midwestern Plains cities, such as Wichita, Omaha, and Kansas City, boomed in the nineteenth century and became important urban centers. However, other cities that experienced similar booms failed to sustain this growth. Too few historians have examined this differential development or explored the roles these small cities played in developing what we now consider the Midwest.[3]

Emporia only represents part of this history. In this thesis, I examine the formation of the Great Plains portion of the Midwest and define characteristics that separate it from the western Great Plains. Four Great Plains states—North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas—straddle the line that divides the Great Plains. The 98th meridian roughly demarcates the boundary between the midwestern and western parts of the Plains. This division marks different environmental characteristics, most notably defined by line of semiaridity, west of which fewer than twenty inches of rain fall per year. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this divide grew due to differential human development on either side. First, disparities in annual rainfall meant that agriculture was more successful and profitable in the midwestern portion of the Great Plains, east of the 98th meridian, than in the western portion. Farmers and ranchers later adapted their efforts in the western Great Plains, allowing for greater agricultural success. Second, the railroad played a disproportionate role in the urbanization of the midwestern section of the Great Plains, so that by the 1890s, the railroad had a far greater presence in the eastern half of the Plains states than the western. Third, the distribution of higher education institutions across the Great Plains shows an overwhelming majority in the midwestern section of the Plains states. These attributes —early agricultural success, the railroad's looming

[3] James R. Shortridge, "The Emergence of 'Middle West' as an American Regional Label," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74, no. 2 (1984): 209–20.

presence, and the development of higher education institutions— became markers of the Great Plains Midwest.

This thesis is a community study of Emporia as well as an examination of birth, growth, and stagnation across the Great Plains Midwest between 1857 and 1910, a period that covers Emporia from its humble beginnings to an era of demographic stagnation that followed the Panic of 1893.[4] The chronological focus is specific to Emporia, as other Great Plains cities experienced their cycles of birth, growth, and stagnation differently in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, Emporia's cycle closely follows the era of the birth of the Great Plains portion of the Midwest. In this period, Emporia, like the comparable cities of Hays, Wichita, and Fremont, underwent a 100 percent increase in population during at least one decade. In addition, each of these cities developed along a major line of transportation, either an overland trail, canal, or railroad. These commonalities allow for a systematic analysis of their economic development over time. Such analysis demonstrates how agriculture, railroads, and universities contributed to the growth and, in most cases, the eventual plateau of cities like Emporia.[5] The process of stagnation began as early as the 1890s, as settlers and industry flocked to more prosperous cities

[4] Though recent community studies are few, several nonetheless inform the methodologies of this thesis: Thomas C. Cox's *Blacks in Topeka Kansas, 1865–1915* argues that the stark rise in Topeka's African American population following the Great Exodus of the 1870s allowed African Americans to organize and establish their own communities and organizations within the city. By 1915, Topeka's African American community had been fully established despite discrimination from the city's white residents and disadvantageous federal policy. *Blacks in Topeka Kansas, 1865–1915* exemplifies how a community study of a single urban area can contribute meaningfully to the history of the Great Plains. See Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). Similarly, Russell L. Johnson's *Warriors into Workers: The Civil War and the Formation of Urban-Industrial Society in a Northern City* is a social and labor history set in Dubuque, Iowa, in the mid and late nineteenth century. Johnson identifies the industrializing economy's role in the transformation of pre- and post-war Dubuque and shows how this forced residents, predominantly soldiers, to adapt. See Russell L. Johnson, *Warriors into Workers: The Civil War and the Formation of Urban-Industrial Society in a Northern City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

[5] O. W. Bidwell defines agriculture as "the interaction of solar soil, and water with plants whose parts provide fiber, or food for man or food for animals, which in turn supply meat, dairy and poultry products." See O. W. Bidwell, "Geology and Agriculture," *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science* 67, no. 2 (1964), 337-342, esp. 337.

like Wichita. The growth and stagnation of places like Emporia begs the question: how does their status square with their potential in the mid-nineteenth century? Emporia can serve as a case study in this regard. As United States urban areas continue to evolve, historians can illuminate how both the environment and capitalism shaped cities of the Great Plains and how those cities shaped the greater Midwest.

The definition of "urban" is not constant, nor is it universal. Since 1880, the U.S. Census Bureau has adjusted its definitions of urban spaces. The minimum criteria for a city to be considered urban shrank considerably, from 8,000 residents in 1880 to 4,000 in 1890. In 1900, this definition changed again to define cities as communities with a minimum population of 2,500.[6] Emporia reached 2,500 residents by 1880, 23 years after its founding, and by 1900 far surpassed the minimum population to be considered an urban center. Due to the variability in definition across both time and space, this thesis uses the most recent census definition to reflect the realities of urbanization across the Midwest. Urban growth in the Midwest led to smaller cities than in the east. The economic and social pressures that small cities like Emporia faced made them different from larger urban spaces. In "The Small City in American History," Timothy R. Mahoney argues that small cities blended the roles of regional and national urban centers, featuring rapid and steady expansion. They became pivotal to the emergence of the modern U.S., while acting as regional and local economic centers.[7] Historically small cities retained their own urban institutions, services, and cultural centers, but remained lower in population than large cities.[8]

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[6] *Geographic Areas Reference Manual* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census 1994), 2.

[7] Timothy R. Mahoney, "The Small City in American History," *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no. 4 (December 2003): 311–30.

[8] Mahoney, "The Small City in American History," 311–30, esp. 313-316, and 328-330.

Mahoney argues that during the nineteenth century, urban economy, society, and culture were built around a "booster ethos," born between 1800 and 1840. According to Mahoney "This social and cultural construct posited an orderly society rooted in middle-size towns whose modest scale supported an organic social order sustained by a mix of cooperative and individualistic economic activity."[9] An essential value of the booster ethos was a strong entrepreneurial spirit, which Mahoney argues set midwestern towns apart from those further east. Boosters often over-invested in the construction of regional railroads and other local improvements. Many small cities east of the Mississippi River witnessed stagnating populations after the Panic of 1857. Something similar happened further west in the Plains states in the 1890s.

This thesis is concerned with regional identity and how it has developed and changed over time. Historian Katherine G. Morrissey, in *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire,* explores the abstract concept of region through a place once known as the Inland Empire, centered around Spokane, Washington. Early twentieth-century white residents of the Inland Empire regarded it as a clearly defined space with natural geographic borders. Morrissey explains that the actual boundaries of this region are far from simple. The non-central position of Spokane, shifting claims over the region's reach, and diverse inhabitants, especially the Indigenous peoples who pre-dated the conceptualization of the region, complicate definitions of this place. Especially helpful for this thesis is Morrissey's emphasis on how material culture,

[9] Mahoney, "The Small City in American History," 316.

maps, and institutions, can reveal people's perceptions of the place they live and its relation to other places over time.[10]

The geographic and cultural landscape known as the Midwest has confounded scholars for decades. In addition, it has risen in and receded from scholarly focus since the 1960s.[11] This thesis places Emporia at the center of this regional quandary, as Emporia's early experience mirrors that of many midwestern and Great Plains cities. The borders of the Great Plains and the Midwest are not synonymous with those of the American West. Neither do they adhere to national or state lines.[12] Rather, the Great Plains and Midwest are regions formed by history, geography, climate, and human activity.

James R. Shortridge explores the complicated nature of what he calls "the Middle West" in his 1989 book, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*.[13] Shortridge employs cultural sources from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth century to illustrate the

[10] Katherine G. Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3 & 8-19. Regional formation is also discussed in Genevieve Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

[11] Jon K. Lauck's *The Lost Region: Toward A Revival of Midwestern History* discusses the disappearance of the Midwest from historical scholarship. Though Lauk's work is indispensable to this thesis and the study of the Midwest, I will not mirror his usage of the "prairie Midwest" to refer to Kansas and other Plains states. His use of a "prairie Midwest" refers to distinct environmental elements of this region, but does not capture the way Kansas residents identified their region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Jon Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), esp. 8-11.

[12] Many Plains states are characterized by internal divides due to differing geographical features and climates in different parts of the states. The divide is especially noteworthy between eastern and western Kansas, as the line of semiaridity cuts Kansas into two halves. West of the line of semitaridity, average annual rainfall drops to a level where agricultural practices that proved successful further east faltered. Western Kansas often struggled to develop agriculturally and demographically compared to eastern Kansas in the nineteenth century, which show a much higher annual rainfall per year. Eastern Kansas has thus enjoyed a more traditional development that centered around agriculture, whereas western Kansas became a site of struggle and experimentation. For example, the famed Dodge City, located in western Kansas, is often culturally associated with the American West, rather than the Midwest, for its gunfighting and commercial endeavors and its role in popular culture. See Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase, *Historical Atlas of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), esp 3; Robert R. Dykstra and Jo Ann Manfra, *Dodge City and the Birth of the Wild West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), esp 5; and H. Craig Miner, *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890-1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), esp. xvii, 9-10, and 37-39.

[13] See James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

paradoxical nature of this region. He ties the identity of the Middle West to pastoralism, and argues that this tie is how the paradox of the Middle West began. Shortridge defines pastoralism as any form of agriculture other than crop cultivation. The Middle West emerged as a region in the nineteenth century at a time when American definitions of pastoralism became regionalized from a practice of the far western yeoman farmer to the organized agricultural borderlands between the urban East and the wilderness. Therefore, according to Shortridge, the Middle West's essence was already in flux, and it never solidified in American culture.[14] Shortridge's geographical definition of the Middle West aligns with the U.S. Census Bureau's Midwest. However, he is clear on the cultural and lifestyle differences between states like Ohio and Kansas. This leads to another aspect of the Middle West's paradox: its association with agriculture despite its many industrial hubs. Shortridge recognizes eastern Middle West cities like Cleveland and Detroit as well as entire states where agriculture has never been the central economic force, like Michigan. Shortridge includes Emporia in his coverage of Middle Western industrial cities. Thus Emporia, founded on agriculture but increasingly an industrial city, contributes to this Middle Western paradox.[15]

Though Shortridge creates a blueprint for geographical and cultural studies of the Middle West, scholars identify several other subregions that complicate his story. The Great Plains is a subregion with an identity tied to the natural environment. It is essential to recognize the varied experiences within these subregions to understand the history of the greater Midwest. This thesis focuses on the Great Plains subregion, which stretches from Texas to North Dakota, and Canada. In his book on midwestern agriculture in the nineteenth century, R. Douglas Hurt limits his

[14] Shortridge, *The Middle West,* 6-7.

[15] Shortridge, *The Middle West,* 9-12.

definition of the Midwest to states east of the Mississippi River, adding only Minnesota and Iowa west of the river. Hurt says he excludes the Great Plains Midwest states because of their "differences in crop and livestock production, soils, and precipitation, among other environmental and historical considerations west and south of the Missouri River."[16] For similar reasons, this thesis separates the Great Plains portion of the Midwest from the eastern Midwest.

Emporia's settlement and early growth occurred during the westward migration of white Americans and was part of the process of settler colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century. The Emporia Town Company purchased the land on which Emporia was built from the Wyandot people for $1,800. The Wyandot, who previously inhabited the eastern Great Lakes region, were amid a century of forced removal and dissolution. The U.S. government pushed the Wyandot westward after several broken treaty promises. Their first major westward relocation came when the U.S. forced the Wyandot to sign a treaty in 1842 without the promise of a new location, though eventually, the government allocated 148,000 acres in Ohio.[17] In the early 1850s, the Wyandot, who were rapidly declining in population, were again relocated to Kansas. Another treaty followed in 1855, which legally terminated the Wyandot tribe, and the remaining members of the group moved once again to what became the state of Oklahoma.[18] Following this 1855 treaty, the Wyandot sold their lands in Kansas, from which the Emporia Town Company made its purchase.[19] Emporia, like other Great Plains cities, was founded on the displacement of Indigenous peoples for the acquisition of land, so it is part of the larger process of U.S. settler

[16] R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture in the Midwest, 1815-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), xii.

[17] Lloyd E. Divine discusses a the history of the Wyandot and Huron people in *On the Back of a Turtle: A Narrative of the Huron-Wyandot People* (Columbus, Ohio: Trillium, 2020), 218.

[18] Divine, *On the Back of a Turtle*, 268-270 & xv.

[19] Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia Gazette Print 1929), 1-4.

colonialism.[20] Emporia's settler colonial legacy continued long after the purchase of this land. An example of this is Senator and Emporia founder Preston B. Plumb's 1890 resolution to sell valuable land around Kansas City, which was the site of a Wyandot cemetery.[21]

Though this thesis identifies Emporia as a midwestern Great Plains city, at its founding in 1857, most Americans considered Kansas part of a region they called the Great West.[22] The term Middle West, later shortened to Midwest, was not in widespread use until the 1880s.[23] Most residents of the Plains states considered themselves westerners rather than midwesterners even in the 1880s, with a distinctive "midwestern" identity forming over a longer period. As the nation continued to expand westward in the 1880s, Emporia's regional identity became less associated with the disappearing Great West and more with the newly developing Midwest and Great Plains regions.[24] Further settler advances eventually positioned Kansas in the center of the United States rather than along its western border.

Capitalism played a central role in shaping Emporia, like the experience of other U.S. cities in this era. Emporia's capitalist experience is not unique; rather, it ties Emporia's experience to that of other cities throughout the Great Plains. The openness of government officials, city boosters, and entrepreneurs to capitalist enterprises in cities like Emporia

[20] Kelly Lytle Hernandez defines settler colonialism by setting it apart from other forms of colonialism. Settler colonialism focuses on land acquisition rather than acquiring resources or labor, though these may occur in a settler-colonial system. Settlers in this system aim to create a society separate from the Indigenous population, which is often removed or eliminated in the process. See Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), esp 7.

[21] Divine, *On the Back of a Turtle*, 307.

[22] William Cronon defines the Great West as a region understood in the nineteenth century as extending from Lake Michigan or the Ohio River to, at its farthest point, the Pacific Ocean. See William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), xvi.

[23] Shortridge, "The Emergence of 'Middle West' as an American Regional Label," 209.

[24] Shortridge, *The Middle West*, 13-26.

encouraged development. Emporia thus became another Great Plains city dominated by capitalist enterprises. When these enterprises stalled or failed in the late nineteenth century, Emporia suffered accordingly. This thesis examines how capitalism spurred and hindered the development of cities of the Great Plains.

Historians have not neglected Emporia, but the city has rarely been at the center of scholarly analysis. Nonetheless, an array of Kansas, midwestern, and Great Plains regional studies and urban, environmental, and business historiographies underpin this thesis. One important source is in one sense primary, but in another, secondary: Laura Margaret French's *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas,* published in 1929.[25] French has methodically detailed Emporia's history from 1857 to 1929. Her book covers those residents whom French perceived as key figures and those organizations she thought shaped Emporia. French details specific events such as John Brown's visit to Emporia, Bleeding Kansas's effect on the city, and what she thought was Emporia's first wedding. French also covers the development of Lyon County (Emporia is the seat of Lyon County) throughout this period, and she discusses Emporians' perception of greater Kansas. French's pride in Emporia is evident in her work; she views Emporia's history as a story of success. French provides foundational information about Emporia's origins and growth into a city and insight into how Emporians thought about their homeplace. But she was also a city booster, and that boosterism shaped her perspective.

More than any other work, James R. Shortridge's *Cities on The Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* serves as a foundational source for this thesis. Shortridge traces the evolution of urban Kansas, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. He identifies many of Emporia's geographical advantages and argues that in the 1860s, with the addition of a railroad, Emporia

[25] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County*.

was poised to become the transportation center of east-central Kansas.[26] Shortridge provides statistical analysis of Kansas cities, which allows comparison of cities like Emporia with others across the state. The difference between Shortridge's work and this thesis lies in the specificity of my research. Shortridge's analysis ranges across all of Kansas, and although he demonstrates the importance of Emporia to the state, he does not compare cities like Emporia to other Great Plains cities.

A study used in *Cities on The Plains* is also critical to my thesis. I draw on Shortridge's usage of the Meyer-Wyckoff model, and apply it to the city of Emporia. David R. Meyer introduced the main ideas of the Meyer-Wyckoff model, and William K. Wyckoff later added modifications in a 1988 case study about Denver, Colorado.[27] The model examines the linkages between older, more established, eastern U.S. cities and their newly established frontier counterparts in three stages. The first stage traces the initial phases of a city's development, in which connections between the new and old cities are few. In the second stage, the connections between the cities strengthen with improved transportation. In the third stage, older, eastern cities change as these previous urban giants begin to fade due to economic and demographic shifts. In addition, the model shows how smaller cities act as suppliers for westward urbanization. Upon their founding, these small cities have a strong connection to a newly established city along a frontier. However, as a new urban center grows and builds stronger connections with eastern cities, such small cities either must specialize or cease to exist.[28] Throughout this thesis, I explore

[26] James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 88.

[27] David Ralph Meyer, "A Dynamic Model of the Integration of Frontier Urban Places into the United States System of Cities," *Economic Geography* 56, no. 2 (1980): 120–40; and William Wyckoff, "Revising The Meyer Model: Denver And The National Urban System, 1859-1879," *Urban Geography* 9, no. 1 (1988): 1–18.

[28] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 5-6.

where Emporia lies within this model, asking whether Emporia was a city connecting metropolises of the East to the West, or rather a supplier of westward urbanization that specialized to survive. Emporia's position in the urban scheme of Kansas thus reveals the city's place in the broader landscape of the Great Plains and Midwest. I also examine the growth of Kansas cities as demonstrated in Shortridge's table of the populations of cites in Kansas from decade to decade, which he has derived from U.S. census data.[29]

Capitalist development is central to this thesis. Capitalism was well-established in the U.S. by the mid-nineteenth century, but it was shifting away from an earlier mercantile form into later industrial capitalism. Capitalism refers to a system in which private actors, or capitalists, produce commodities that create a profit for the producer. Under industrial capitalism, a large laboring class sells their labor to capitalists to facilitate this profit. Capitalism has taken different forms over the centuries, but, in the U.S. economy, capitalism's dynamism has only grown since the nation's founding. Industrialization, market expansion, the commercialization of agriculture, economic competition, and government regulation facilitated and constituted this growth, mostly driving out communal, independent, slave, and feudal economies in North America by the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Capitalism's growth also led to the creation of new markets and industries in the U.S., as capitalists searched for inexpensive raw materials and cheap labor.[30] This is how capitalism gripped North America's interior and Great Plains' cities. Western cities drew capital investment to enable business, access resources, and create linkages to the American East.[31] Emporia's growth followed the westward movement of capitalism, as Emporia

[29] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382-387.

[30] David F. Ruccio, "Capitalism," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies,* ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 37-40.

[31] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 52-53.

provided new resources and markets and created a link between the Great Plains and the older Midwest.[32]

In a 1999 article, William Robbins analyzes the state of global capitalism in the West in the late twentieth century. Robbins examines unregulated and free-flowing sources of money, which mainly benefited capitalist actors, to draw parallels between past and present in the West. He states, "It is important to realize that capitalism is much more than an economic system; it is a mode of production, a particular take on the world that attaches ultimate significance to material effects and their transformation for purposes of acquiring wealth."[33] This way of thinking shapes my analysis of Emporia's history.

In a much earlier article, Earl Pomeroy describes "large-sized economic units or aggregations" that, at times, drove the West to be more capitalistic than the East.[34] Corporations and businessmen sought to expand capitalist enterprises in the West on a large scale, often doing so through and in western cities. Over time, western cities developed large commercial sectors and increased class stratification. Given the vast geographic space and harsh environments of the West, settlers flocked to urban areas. Western cities grew around their diverse professional classes and industries inclusive of the upper and lower classes, especially in professions like mining and cattle ranching, which morphed into commerce and industry-driven capitalist

[32] Scholars have studied the history of capitalism for several decades. Nan Enstad's "The "Sonorous Summons" of the New History of Capitalism, Or, What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Economy?" critically reviews a wide variety of literature on the history of capitalism that informs my study. Enstad wrote the article to voice her dissent towards the New History of Capitalism. See Nan Enstad, 'The "Sonorous Summons' of the New History of Capitalism, Or, What Are We Talking about When We Talk about Economy?" *Modern American History* 2, no. 1 (2019): 83–95.

[33] William G. Robbins, "In Pursuit of Historical Explanation: Capitalism as a Conceptual Tool for Knowing the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 30 (Autumn, 1999): 277-293, esp. 281.

[34] Earl Pomeroy, "Toward a Reorientation of Western History: Continuity and Environment," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41 (March 1954): 579-600, esp. 588.

institutions.[35] Pomeroy's analysis, though dated, demonstrates that studies of the urban West and capitalism are inseparable.

Bernard DeVoto, writing two decades before Pomeroy, makes related points, arguing that the economic institutions of the East often used exploitative strategies to extract wealth and resources from the West in the nineteenth century. DeVoto uses the California Gold Rush as an example, showing how most western laborers who mined the gold saw none of the profits. Profits instead found their way to the East Coast. DeVoto states: "Very early the West memorialized a moral: the wealth of a country belongs to its owners, and the owners are not the residents or even the stockholders but the manipulators."[36] Though DeVoto does not often use the term capitalism, his arguments center around what he sees as the capitalist exploitation of the West, or what he calls "the plundered province."[37]

Just as the history of capitalism is central to this study, so too is the historiography of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Kansas. Craig Miner's two books, *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890-1940,* and *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890,* inform this project in several ways.[38] Though this thesis focuses on the cities of eastern Kansas, Miner's work on western Kansas provides points of comparison and contrast. Miner argues that the harsh environments and sparse human populations of western Kansas created a lifestyle of adaptation. Eastern Kansas, however, enjoyed abundant resources and larger settler populations, which gave rise to dissimilar experiences. These different experiences

[35] Pomeroy, "Toward a Reorientation of Western History," 579-588.

[36] DeVoto, Bernard. "The West: A Plundered Province," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 169, no. 1011 (1934): 355-364.

[37] DeVoto, "The West: A Plundered Province," 355.

[38] Miner, *Next Year Country*, and H. Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988).

contributed to an eastern Kansas elitism. Authors, newspapers, and politicians in eastern Kansas in the late nineteenth century attempted to divorce eastern Kansas's reputation and political aspirations from those of western Kansas.[39] Emporia's location in eastern Kansas, its founders' connection to industries rooted in the eastern U.S., and its rapid agricultural success played into elitist cultural attitudes in the mid and late nineteenth century. Miner's *West of Wichita* allows me to analyze Emporia alongside cities and settlements in western Kansas. Miner's work on Wichita, the largest urban area in the state, is especially useful in this regard. The geographical proximity of Emporia and Wichita and their access to similar resources permits further analysis of why the two cities took shape differently in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

The disparate environments of eastern and western Kansas suggest how important the environment is to the history of Emporia. Environmental history reveals the role of natural and human-made environments to Emporia's successes and failures. Although no environmental history of Emporia has yet been written, scholars working on other cities have established an urban-environmental historiography that lends methods and theories to this thesis.[40] William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and Great West* particularly guides this project. Cronon employs an environmental and economic lens, tracing Chicago and its surrounding hinterlands through the movement of resources like grain, meat, and lumber in and out of the city. Cronon's emphasis on this movement and the role of technology in overcoming obstacles in city-building informs my thesis. Though Emporia was not an industrial shipping giant like Chicago, Emporia

[39] Miner, *Next Year Country,* 10, 222, and 240.

[40] Amahia Mallea's *A River in the City of Fountains: An Environmental History of Kansas City and the Missouri River* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018) examines the relationship between the settlements that comprise the "Kansas Cities" and the Missouri River. Works like Mallea's show the city as both a part of and in relationship to the natural environment rather than as separate from nature. Emporia has had a similar relationship with the Neosho and Cottonwood Rivers since the city's inception. Other notable works in this field include Char Miller, ed., *Cities and Nature in the American West* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010); and Theodore Steinberg, *Gotham Unbound: The Ecological History of Greater New York* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

provided similar regional services to its neighboring communities, acting as a railhead and depot for farmers and ranchers. In this sense, just as the environment fundamentally defined Chicago, Emporia's environment allowed not only for its success but for its position in the larger system of Kansas and the Great Plains.[41]

To describe the formation of the Great Plains portion of the Midwest, I have employed a variety of sources. I use four different kinds of primary sources throughout this thesis. These include histories and maps published from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, government publications such as congressional acts and census data, state agricultural and financial reports, and newspaper articles. I have used the sources to show how different environments, human-made developments, and opportunities separated the Great Plains portion of the Midwest from its western counterpart. This range of primary sources highlights individual communities, institutions, and industries that brought this region into existence. For that reason, the sources range from national and regional government reports to individual town newspapers.

The largest body of sources I use in my thesis are state, county, and local histories written just before and after the turn of the twentieth century. I rely on Laura Margaret French's 1929 The *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas*, a detailed account of Emporia from an author who was enthusiastic about the city's progress. French was an editor for the *Emporia Gazette* who was eager to show her love of and pride in the city. Her book includes an introduction by famous journalist William Allen White, an entry on public perception of Emporia, and a list of distinguished citizens, all of which echo praise for the city.[42] An unabashed Emporia booster, French nonetheless allows me to see how far the city had come in the late nineteenth and early

[41] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

[42] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas.*

twentieth centuries, the impression the city made on its own residents, and what made Emporia both like and unlike other Great Plains cities. This text encouraged me to research local histories of other places in the region and eventually led me to see the eastern Great Plains in new ways.

Histories of places published so close to the time they describe by people invested in and uncritical of those places pose interpretive problems. These texts were often composed by town boosters. In the case of the *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas: Past and Present, Including an Account of the Cities, Towns and Villages of the County*, the author, Orsemus Hills Bently, was both a local politician and founder of Bently, a town within Sedgwick County.[43] Histories like these often embrace or are uncritical of settler colonialism and capitalist enterprises and they gloss over racial inequities. Statements like "Kansas is richer in historic lore than any other region of the Great West" capture this boosterism.[44] This quote is from the preface of William G. Cutler's 1883 *History of the State of Kansas*. Histories such as Bently's and Cutler's nonetheless provide crucial evidence of the formation of the Great Plains section of the Midwest.

Maps and surveys compose another substantial group of sources and present different issues of interpretation. All maps make an argument, though some are more explicit and intentional than others. Maps visualize the unfolding Great Plains portion of the Midwest over time. For example, the *Official Railroad Map of Kansas 1899* (Figure 9 in Chapter Two), shows where railroads had, and had not, spread in Kansas by 1899. Other maps include accompanying statistics. This is seen in a 1918 bulletin from Kansas's Agricultural Experiment Station,

[43] Frank W. Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, etc. ... With a Supplementary Volume Devoted to Selected Personal History and Reminiscence*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 1139-1140.

[44] William G. Cutler, "Preface," in *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883), n.p.

Growing Wheat in Kansas, which includes a map indicating the average acreage of wheat grown in Kansas between 1905 and 1915 (Figure 3 in Chapter One). [45] The map shows regional disparities like those in the *Official Railroad Map of Kansas 1899,* however, with an emphasis on statistical data in addition to a visual representation. Other maps used in this study are topographical. For example, Nevin M. Fenneman, in his 1917 article "Physiographic Subdivision of The United States," includes a map to make his case for a new way of seeing U.S. regions (Figure 2 in Chapter One). His article and map promoted the term "the Great Plains" as a regional label, and thus helped to fix that regional distinction in readers' minds in the early twentieth century.[46] Prior to Fenneman's study, and others like it, the public viewed the Great Plains as part of a more homogenized Great West despite obvious environmental differences. Fenneman's findings in 1917 asserted different sub-regions within the Great Plains as well, dividing the region roughly along the line of semiaridity.

Many of the maps used in this thesis were created by private companies, but a significant number came from the U.S. Census Bureau. Census Bureau maps and data are crucial for studying change over time in the Great Plains portion of the Midwest, as well as in individual counties and cities. This data suggests the rate at which various places in the Great Plains grew and reveals the contrasts between the western and midwestern portions of the region. Other government sources, such as the Morrill Act of 1862, show how national legislation affected regional formation.[47] The Morrill Act paved the way for the region's first public higher

[45] Agricultural Experiment Station Kansas State Agricultural College, 1918, *Growing Wheat in Kansas* (Manhattan, Kansas: Kansas State Printing Plant, W.R. Smith State Printer, 1918), 9-10

[46] Nevin M. Fenneman, "Physiographic Subdivision of the United States," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 3, no. 1 (January 1917): 17–22.

[47] "An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts," Act of July 2, 1862, 37th U.S. Congress, 7 U.S.C. 301 (1862).

education institutions, which became defining elements of the Great Plains Midwest.State reports, chiefly from the Kansas State Board of Agriculture, further show differences between the eastern and western Great Plains. These bulletins display crop types, yields, and profits in Kansas counties from year to year. Such data reveals agricultural differences east and west of the line of semiaridity.

Newspapers reveal less about the divide between the eastern and western sections of the Plains and more about individual localities. Two main newspapers used in this thesis are *The Emporia News* and *The Emporia Gazette. The Emporia News* provides glimpses into Emporia's early days dating back to its founding in 1859. Articles from *The Emporia News* also give insight into local perceptions of events and institutions in the city's early history. In contrast, the *Gazette* began as a Populist paper in the 1890s, but shifted orientation toward the Republican Party when William Allen White purchased it in 1895.[48] Many of the *Gazette* articles referenced were written by White himself, and they often make claims about Emporia as a city. White composed several other editorials during this era, the most famous of which was "What's The Matter With Kansas?" published in 1896. This editorial began his journey as a political author and outspoken town booster. His early twentieth-century writings further his Republican political ideals but also speak to Emporia's regional location and public perception.

Using these sources, this thesis tracks developments that separated the midwestern and western portions of the Great Plains alongside Emporia's growth. In the first chapter, I discuss the significance of first and second nature in and around Emporia, especially in Emporia's early years as a settlement. Cronon defines first nature as "original, prehuman nature," or the natural

[48] William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), 257.

environment and geography. Second nature, Cronon states, is "the artificial nature that people erect atop first nature."[49] This kind of nature alters the natural environment, often for economic purposes. Chapter One focuses on comparing agriculture east and west of the line of semiaridity. The second chapter examines the establishment of railroads, among other transportation routes, throughout the Great Plains. These capitalist enterprises swiftly built up cities like Emporia. However, reliance on this infrastructure also left these cities struggling during the financial crises of the 1890s. The final chapter explores the development of higher education institutions throughout the Great Plains. Though both states and private entities founded higher education institutions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fewer of these institutions were located in the western regions of Plains states. Emporia's Kansas State Normal School, now known as Emporia State University, and its effects on the community are the central point of this chapter. Following the economic turmoil of the 1890s, Kansas State Normal School became the most important institution in maintaining Emporia's status as a small city. Throughout this thesis, I examine a variety of other regional cities to demonstrate Emporia's role in the formation of the Great Plains portion of the Midwest, as Emporia's history parallels that of many other small cities that all helped to create the Great Plains Midwest.

Beginning in 1857, Emporia and the Great Plains portion of the Midwest began to take shape as town and region, respectively. These locations began through the processes of settler colonialism and were maintained by capitalist enterprises. But capitalism also ended Emporia's economic and demographic boom in the late nineteenth century. Agriculture, the railroad, and the university are the three most prominent factors that brought Emporia and the Great Plains Midwest into existence. While few residents of Emporia and the eastern Plains states referred to

[49] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* xvii-xix.

themselves as “Great Plains Midwesterners,” they acknowledged that they lived in a region distinct from an older, fading Great West.

Chapter 1:
Growing the Region

Both first and second nature are vital to Emporia's history. Simply put, the natural environment brought settlers and capital, and the built environment kept them. This chapter explores Emporia's first and second nature in the context of its agricultural development. It examines how Emporia compares to another Great Plains city in this context, how Emporia's environmental history has affected and been affected by the residents' perception of the Great Plains, and how that place is characterized by topographical and climatological differences moving east to west. Though the western portion of the Great Plains became agriculturally successful by the early twentieth century, the early success of the region's eastern portion set the two sections apart from one another.

The Great Plains is a vast region, the eastern boundary of which roughly follows between the North Dakota and South Dakota-Minnesota state line, between the Nebraska-Iowa state line, and between the Kansas-Missouri state line. The Plains stretch west into Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado, but only a section of the Great Plains is considered within the Midwest (Figure 1). The Great Plains portion of the Midwest region is much smaller. The geographical feature that divides the Great Plains states between the eastern area, which is part of the Midwest, and the western area, which is part of the West, is the north-south running line of semiaridity. Lands west of the line receive less than twenty inches of rainfall per year.[1] I define the Great Plains portion of the Midwest as the land that stretches from the eastern state lines of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas and the line of semiaridity to the west. Numerous lifestyle

[1] Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase, *Historical Atlas of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 3.

and cultural differences have arisen east and west of the line of semiaridity due to the gradual shift in precipitation. Though the effects of the line of semiaridity have existed for centuries, how settlers reacted to the difference in precipitation prompted the divergence between these two regions. For those who lived west of the line in the nineteenth century, farming methods effective further east did not suffice, and residents had to adopt methods more suited to their arid environment. Therefore, the line of semiaridity is the best indicator for the border between the Great Plains Midwest and Great Plains West.

Figure 1. Map of the Great Plains. Center for the Great Plains, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Several environmental factors make the Great Plains a distinctive region. Aridity and semi-aridity define most of this region, with only the wettest portions of the Great Plains

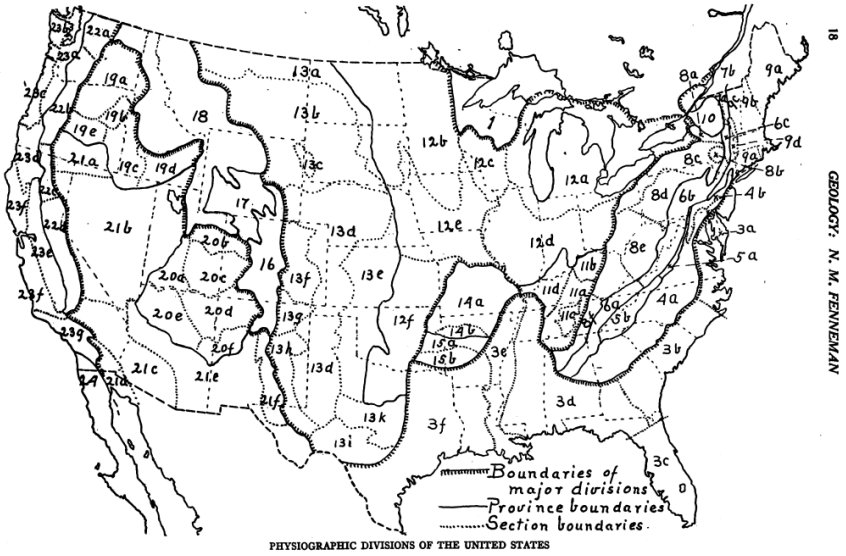
receiving around 20 or more inches of annual rainfall. The Plains are also elevated between 2,000 to 6,000 feet above sea level. This, coupled with a lack of dense forests, allows for strong sunshine, which creates the region's semiarid environment.[2] Though the region's environment differed from the most its neighbors, the term the Great Plains became widely used only in the twentieth century. Geographer and geologist Nevin Fenneman was an early proponent of the term and promoted the idea of the Great Plains as a separate region in his 1917 article "Physiographic Subdivision of the United States."[3] In the map Fenneman created to accompany his article, the region he labels as the Great Plains does not correspond exactly to the current U.S. government definition (Figure 2, Section 13). Rather, he refers to the eastern portion of the Great Plains as "the Central Lowland."[4] It is important to recognize Fenneman's observations and the time in which he made them, as residents of this region would not consider themselves residents of the Great Plains until well into the future.

[2] Donald E. Trimble, *The Geologic Story of the Great Plains: A Nontechnical Description of the Origin and Evolution of the Landscape of the Great Plains* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, 1980).

[3] Nevin M. Fenneman, "Physiographic Subdivision of the United States," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 3, no. 1 (January 1917): 17–22.

[4] Fenneman, "Physiographic Subdivision of the United States," 18 and 21.

Figure 2. Physiographic Subdivision of the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, January 1917.



Before addressing the agricultural differences between the western and midwestern portions of the Great Plains, I will discuss Emporia's early history as a typical agricultural settlement of the eastern Plains. Emporia's founding in 1857 predated Kansas's statehood in 1861. Emporia was established on big dreams and bigger expectations. George W. Brown, president of the Emporia Town Company, selected Emporia as the name for the town after the famed Carthaginian city. Brown quoted the ancient historian Polybius: "The revenue that arose from Emporia was so considerable that nearly all of the Carthaginian hopes were founded on it."[5] Though Emporia, Kansas, may not have rivaled the ancient city, it certainly carried the hopes of many a resident and investor. From 1857 to 1910, Emporia became a railhead twice over, an industrial and agricultural center, and a supplier of the surrounding cities and communities of

[5] Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia Gazette Print 1929), 1-2.

Lyon County. Despite its quick rise to prominence, Emporia's progress stalled during the fateful decade of the 1890s. Though it remained the dominant city of Lyon County and its county seat, Emporia did not experience the larger urban evolution seen in other cities during the twentieth century. Despite the dreams of Emporia's growth, it never matched its Carthaginian namesake.

The founders of Emporia knew the value of the land where they placed their city. It drew speculators interested in the especially fertile soil between the Cottonwood and Neosho Rivers and an abundance of timber from local forests.[6] The land speculators who founded the town were associated with the Republican Party, and thus, Emporia grew to be a majority Republican settlement.[7] Though its founders may not have realized it, Emporia was also positioned east of the line of semiaridity that bisected Kansas. Emporia's location east of this line meant that it was gifted with ample annual rainfall compared to western Kansas.[8] However, the rivers and well-watered soils alone were insufficient to make Emporia attractive to businesses and settlers. Other settlers in Lyon County situated their towns near these waterways and enjoyed only a fraction of Emporia's success. Emporia and Lyon County struggled with water shortages despite the rivers and the rain. Between 1859 and 1860, eastern Kansas experienced a drought.[9] The drought left Emporia especially vulnerable, as the community only housed 541 residents at the time.[10] As harvests began to falter, Emporia's agriculture, which had initially lured settlers to the area, was now in question.

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[6] Carolyn B. Berneking, "The Welsh Settlers of Emporia: A Cultural History," *Kansas Historical Quarterly 37,* no. 3 (1971): 269-282.

[7] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas*, 229-234.

[8] Beck and Haase, *Historical Atlas of the American West,* 3.

[9] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 19 May 1860.

[10] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas,* 10.

Early farming in and around Emporia and Lyon County was unsuccessful. During the drought of 1859 and 1860, Emporia's 340 acres of farmland yielded only one bushel of corn per acre. Years later, in 1874, when the county's agriculture had rebounded, it averaged 42 bushels of corn per acre.[11] In addition, Texas cattle fever reached local Lyon County livestock in 1860, killing around 300 cattle. But a heavy snowfall in January 1861 broke the drought, restoring hopes in the fields surrounding Emporia.[12] A second drought began just after the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. Many of Emporia's young men enlisted in the Union army and went east.[13] This created a labor shortage in Emporia and Lyon County, perpetuating the harsh conditions set in motion by the drought years.

The lack of transportation methods and routes between Emporia and other cities accentuated the harsh conditions of the droughts. Few roads existed between Emporia and its neighbors, and no railroad at all. Suppliers were forced to rely on the Santa Fe Trail and other overland routes to journey to and from Emporia.[14] As Emporia's agriculture suffered, so did the value of its property, as the community attracted few new residents. In 1861, the year following the drought, Emporia's total taxable property value fell by $87,011.[15]

Emporia's fertile landscape, so sought after by the Emporia Town Company, appeared to have failed the youthful town, if only temporarily. Town founders, as well as farmers and businessmen, worked to ensure the city's survival through the 1860s. Despite setbacks, Emporia asserted itself as the dominant settlement in Lyon County. Emporia initially competed for the

[11] Kansas State Board of Agriculture, and State Board of Centennial Managers, *Centennial Edition of the Fourth Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas For the Year Ending November 30, 1875* (Topeka, Kansas: Geo. W. Martin Public Printer), 183.

[12] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 21

[13] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas,* 22-23.

[14] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 10.

[15] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 05 Oct. 1861.

Lyon County seat with the neighboring town of Americus, but by 1860, Emporia won the competition, and Americus became dependent on Emporia.[16] Though it took Emporia until 1870 to gain city status, and the 1859 drought had set back local agriculture, Emporia had begun three decades of economic and demographic growth.[17]

During the 1860s, farming began to stabilize in Emporia and became the profitable industry its founders had hoped it would be. Emporia's soil was the most fertile in the region and once again served as an asset to the city. Many of those who came to Emporia for other economic opportunities also engaged in agriculture. For example, Calvin Hood initially moved to Emporia from Michigan in 1871 to prospect in cattle and banking, but he soon began to farm just outside the city.[18] After engaging in the cattle industry in the 1870s, Hood took a position with the Emporia National Bank, where he worked until 1905. A devout Presbyterian, Hood also served on the board of trustees for the College of Emporia, an education institution associated with the same denomination.[19] Hood represents a wealthy capitalist class that focused Emporia's environment on various profitable ventures.

Following the end of the Civil War and the return of Lyon County's youthful male residents, the cattle industry boomed. In 1866, $80,000 worth of cattle were exchanged in Lyon County alone.[20] Emporia's business elite sought to capitalize on this opportunity. Preston B. Plumb and Calvin Hood partnered to position Emporia among the growing number of Kansas

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[16] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 129 and 230.

[17] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 41.

[18] Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County: Historical Incidents of the First Quarter of a Century, 1857 to 1882* (Emporia, Kansas: n.p., 1898), 18-19.

[19] Frank W. Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc. ... With a Supplementary Volume Devoted to Selected Personal History and Reminiscence,* Vol. 3 (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 1049-1051.

[20] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 32-33; and Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County,* 63.

cities that became destinations for Texas cattle. The bluestem grass indigenous to Emporia was central to this endeavor, as cattle could feed on the grass and remain healthy without other nutrients.[21] This kept down the cost of raising cattle, and many lower-income residents of Emporia involved themselves in this lucrative industry. The rise of the livestock industry caused a rift between the farmers and ranchers of Emporia due to the lack of fences to prevent wandering cattle from consuming crops. With time, however, fences were raised, and by the 1870s, farming and cattle ranching coexisted in Emporia.[22]

Emporia's economy might have never stabilized without Welsh settlers. Welsh settlements had sprung up in South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. These communities formed mainly around Presbyterian or Congregational churches, though many dispersed in the twentieth century.[23] In Emporia, however, Welsh businesses and cultural institutions persisted well into the twentieth century. Welsh settlers there influenced the city's development. The first Welsh settlers arrived in Emporia in 1857, the year of the city's founding. Emporia needed settlers to sustain itself during the drought of 1859-1860. Early laws in Emporia prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol as well as gambling, which appealed to the Welsh. A vast majority of them were religious, and drinking and gambling were outside the tenets of their faith. Most Welsh settlers purchased land around Emporia to become cattle ranchers, as many of them had raised livestock prior to immigrating to the U.S. Their success, combined with the railroads' arrival, allowed Emporia to become a market for cattle. Welsh immigrants also opened some of Emporia's first commercial institutions. For example, David T. Morris opened Emporia's first shoemaking shop in 1857. By 1870, around 600 Welsh people

[21] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 9-10.

[22] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 32-33.

[23] Berneking, "The Welsh Settlers of Emporia."

lived in or around Emporia. Some of these settlers went on to hold influential positions in town. Farmer Thomas Evans, who moved to Emporia when he was ten, worked for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe and as a sheriff from 1892 to 1896, for instance. In an effort to continue this agricultural and demographic growth, Preston B. Plumb praised the Welsh residents in *The Emporia News* and encouraged Welsh settlers to find homes nearby.[24] Welsh settlement was part of a larger movement of Welsh immigrants to Kansas. In 1870, around 1,750 Welsh resided in Kansas, and by 1900, their number had increased to 5,728.[25]

Immigration and cattle ranching were not the only ways that Emporia's aspirations blossomed in the late nineteenth century. The acreage of field crops in Lyon County drastically increased during the 1870s, rising from 63,043 acres in 1874 to 118,690 acres in 1880. During this time, wheat grew in most of Lyon County's fields.[26] Meanwhile, for the second decade in a row, Emporia's population grew by over 100 percent, beginning the decade with 2,168 residents and ending with 4,631.[27]

In the 1880s, farming and ranching continued to grow in Emporia and Lyon County. In 1888, Lyon County's crop yield had increased to $1,883,647 in total value and ranked sixteenth in the state. Most of this value came from corn, which became Emporia's lead crop during the 1880s, as wheat was found to grow better in the western portion of Kansas.[28] Lyon County also boasted $1,445,300 in total cattle value, ranking eighth in the state, down from third in the state

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1881, *Second Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas For the Years 1879-80* (Topeka, Kansas: Geo. W. Martin Kansas Publishing House), 173.

[27] James R. Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 382.

[28] Agricultural Experiment Station, Kansas State Agricultural College, *Growing Wheat In Kansas* (Manhattan: Kansas State Printing Plant, W.R. Smith State Printer, 1918), 9-10

the year prior.[29] Raising horses also became a profitable endeavor. In 1890, the total value of horses in Lyon County tallied $931,875, and accounted for just under half of Emporia's total livestock value.[30] Though Emporia's population did not double as it had in the prior two decades, it did grow to 7,551 residents, a 60 percent increase.[31] In 1890, 287,977 acres of Lyon County grew crops, more than double the acreage from the previous decade.[32] There was no argument that Emporia had succeeded in becoming the farming-based community its founders had envisioned. This success allowed Emporia to rest on a productive agricultural foundation during the taxing decade to come.

The 1890s brought challenges to Emporia. Agricultural yields no longer grew as they had in previous years. By 1900, Emporia had just 8,223 residents, only a 9 percent increase from the previous decade.[33] In 1900, the total valuation of crop yields stood at $1,489,221, significantly less than a decade before. The value of horses fell to $513,850, despite little change in the total livestock value compared to ten years prior. The local cattle industry did increase to $1,806,856 and remained a large portion of Lyon County's agricultural output.[34] Overall, the 1890s were fraught with economic struggles for Emporia, such as the Panic of 1893, a devastating fire in the same year, and the closure of the First National Bank of Emporia. The 1893 fire tore through Emporia's downtown, burning a stable, killing twenty-five horses, and causing $75,000 in

[29] Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Eleventh Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas For the Years 1897-98* (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture, 1899), 655-657.

[30] Kansas State Board of Agriculture, *Seventh Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas For the Years 1889-90* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House: Clifford C. Baker, State Printer, 1891), 146.

[31] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382.

[32] Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1891, *Seventh Biennial Report*, 145-146.

[33] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382.

[34] Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1901, *Twelfth Biennial Report of the State Board of Agriculture to the Legislature of the State of Kansas For the Years 1899-1900* (Topeka: Kansas Department of Agriculture), 772.

property damage. This event captures the 1890s for Emporia, as the capitalist enterprise that had swept through the hopeful settlement met a destructive fury just shy of forty years later.[35] Though Emporia would ultimately recover from the fire, and from the Panic of 1893, it would never loom as large as it had in the previous decades. It would face the future as a small city. However, Emporia's natural environment and agricultural endeavors guided it through economic turmoil. Though crop yields and livestock profits varied from year to year and did not continually expand, agriculture remained profitable. The fields of Lyon County protected Emporia from its failed industries and investments.

Comparing Emporia to another city from the western Great Plains helps capture what is regionally distinct about Emporia's environment and identity. Other plains cities, such as Hays, demonstrate that the line of semiaridity measures more than precipitation; it also measures the trajectory of a city. Emporia can be usefully contrasted with Hays, Kansas, as the city, though founded for different reasons than Emporia, grew using the same three principles: agriculture, the railroad, and a higher education institution. However, Hays developed differently than Emporia. Hays is 200 miles west of Emporia and it borders on the line of semiaridity. Its history is geographically, economically, and historically distinct from that of Emporia, which shows the regional difference between the Great Plains Midwest and the Great Plains West.

Unlike those in Emporia, Hays's boosters and settlers did not initially seek agricultural fortune. Instead, Hays both adapted to and adapted its environment to prosper agriculturally and survive as a town. In the late 1880s, the Kansas state government moved to convert an old military installation in Hays to a college and research institute. Visionaries hoped to use Fort Hays to encourage agricultural practices more suited to the semi-arid landscape of western

[35] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas*, 68.

Kansas. Among the supporters of this legislation were journalist William Allen White and Emporia founder Preston B. Plumb. Both thought that the reorganization of Hays and other cities in western Kansas could lead to the kind of success Emporia had enjoyed.[36] White argued that Hays should look to Emporia for guidance, and believed that a higher educational institution would assist the area's agricultural developments. The project stalled in the 1890s, amid the decade's economic downturn and dry landscapes. The project, then, did not come to fruition until the early twentieth century. Despite his earlier advocacy, White criticized western Kansas in the 1890s following the agricultural slump there. He referred to the environmental struggles of the 1890s in western Kansas as a "black-eye," and he suggested that the identity of eastern and western Kansas should be divorced from one another, adding to the growing regional divide.[37] Though White's words may have seemed harsh, pointing as they did to factors out of the control of western Kansas residents, eastern and western Kansas's identities grew further apart as time passed. Hays, in many ways, mirrored Emporia's development as a city. However, Hays also reflected the regional differences between the two cities.

Hays was founded one decade after Emporia, in 1867, two years after the construction of Fort Hays. The town's location and reliance on the fort initially drew few settlers to the region. But much like Emporia, Hays transformed in the 1870s and 1880s. Though the population of Hays fell to around 370 in the 1870s, after the rail terminus moved west to Sheridan in 1868, Hays rebounded in the 1880s, reaching around 850.[38] Hays became the seat of Ellis County in

[36] H. Craig Miner, *Next Year Country: Dust to Dust in Western Kansas, 1890-1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 51-53.

[37] William Allen White, Russell Humke Fitzgibbon, and Frank C. Clough, *Forty Years on Main Street: Illustrated With Photographs* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc, 1937). 73-75.

[38] William G. Cutler, "Ellis County," in *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883).

1870, securing its position as a regional supplier for surrounding settlements.[39] Though Hays did not have the 2,500 residents needed to reach city status until the 1920s, it served as a regional center for Ellis County, similar to Emporia in Lyon County.[40] During the 1870s, many ethnic Germans residing in Russia immigrated to Hays. Similar to the Welsh of Emporia, these immigrants helped develop Hays's fields through their knowledge of wheat cultivation.[41] In addition, during the 1880s, the Kansas State Board of Agriculture identified Hays and Ellis County as ideal locations to grow wheat (Figure 3). Thus, in the 1870s and 1880s, wheat production in Kansas shifted westward to towns like Hays.[42] As wheat cultivation increased, Hays became an agricultural settlement that no longer depended on the military fort. Following Fort Hays's closure in 1889, Kansas state legislators attempted to parcel off fort land for public institutions, including an agricultural institute and a public university. However, the land stood vacant until 1900, when it was allocated for the agricultural research center and the western branch of Kansas State Normal School, known today as Fort Hays State University.[43] The university and research center became essential to Hays's growth and survival, much as the State Normal School was for Emporia. The college and research center secured state funding for Hays and gave its residents access to cutting-edge agricultural research.

[39] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 132.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Norman E. Saul, "The Migration of the Russian-Germans to Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly 40*, no. 1 (1974): 38-62.

[42] Agricultural Experiment Station, Kansas State Agricultural College, *Growing Wheat In Kansas*, 9-10.

[43] Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History*, Vol. 3, 661 and 758-761; and Miner, *Next Year Country*, 51-53.

Figure 3. Where to Grow Wheat. *Growing Wheat in Kansas*, 1918.

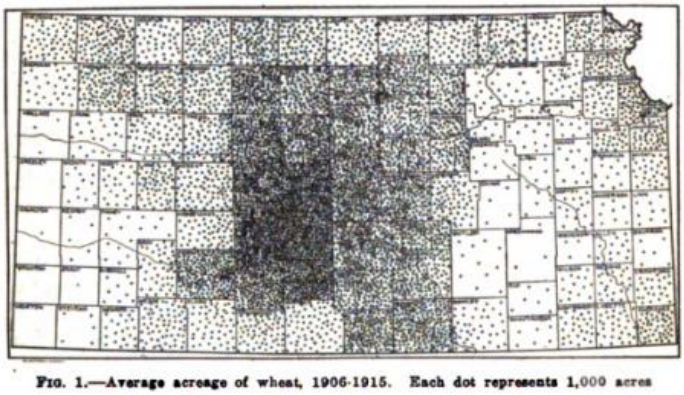


FIG. 1.—Average acreage of wheat, 1906-1915. Each dot represents 1,000 acres

Though Hays became a successful agricultural settlement, like Emporia did, the process in each place was different. Hays began as a military installation and grew further when the railroad arrived. Hays was connected to the Kansas Pacific Railroad by 1867 and served as a railhead for a time, though the railhead moved further west in the 1870s.[44] Hays then developed into a farming community to supplement the loss of the rail terminus and fort in the 1870s and 1880s. In the 1890s Hays experienced similar effects of the Panic of 1893 as Emporia had, as well as a disastrous fire that temporarily decimated the town. This was coupled with financial struggles that saw Hays's population decline from 1,242 to 1,136 between 1890 and 1900.[45] Though Hays developed into a prosperous agricultural community by the end of the nineteenth century, it did not rival Emporia in size until well into the twentieth century.

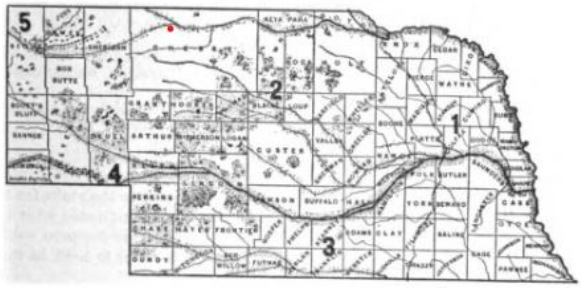
The agricultural patterns of Emporia and Hays in the nineteenth century were replicated across the Great Plains. Research studies demonstrated differences in climate and environment in

[44] I will discuss the effects of the railroad on Hays in comparison to Emporia in the following chapter. The Kansas Pacific Railroad consolidated with the Union Pacific in 1880. See William R. Petrowski, "The Kansas Pacific Railroad in the Southwest," *Arizona and the West* 11, no. 2 (1969): 129-146.

[45] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382.

the Plains states along the line of semiaridity. Erwin Hinckley Barbour researched Nebraska's soil and its fertility and the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture published his findings in 1896. Barbour's research indicated that five proposed soil regions existed in Nebraska, and the high content of fine sand and low content of clay indicated that the soil was arable for crops in all regions. Barbour even found that the soil in his proposed fourth region, which he referred to as the "Western Loess," was especially fine and deep, indicating a highly productive farming environment. However, Barbour remarked that the only hurdle keeping this land from its farming potential was the lack of precipitation, a problem throughout western Nebraska, including the Western Loess region. Barbour concluded that no soil in Nebraska was poor for growing crops, but the amount of precipitation was key (Figure 4).[46]

Figure 4. A Preliminary Soil Map of the State, Showing the Broader Soil Region. *Annual Report Nebraska State Board of Agriculture For the Year 1896*, 1896.

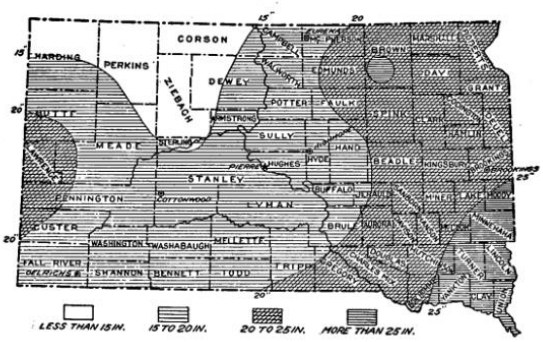


The problem of aridity lingered across the Great Plains. In 1914, South Dakota's Agricultural Experiment Station released an article on growing winter grains in the state. The bulletin provided a map displaying the average annual rainfall in South Dakota taken from a U.S.

[46] Nebraska State Board of Agriculture, 1897, *Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture For the Years 1896*, prepared by Robert W. Furnas (Lincoln, Nebraska: Jacob North & Company Printers), 157-159.

Department of Agriculture bulletin completed the same year. In addition, the Agricultural Research Station measured annual rainfall at five different research stations throughout the state. These findings reflected Barbour's conclusions about Nebraska, as rainfall averages fell drastically from east to west across the state. The article also discussed South Dakota's soil quality though with far less specificity than Barbour's research in Nebraska. Finally, the article detailed research on experimental crop trials throughout the state.[47] South Dakota agriculturalists looked for crops that could flourish best in each part of the state. These experiments hoped to bring the agricultural productivity of the western portions of the state in line with those of the wetter east (Figure 5). Not only in Kansas, but throughout the Plains, the difference in agricultural endeavors east and west of the line of semiaridity caused divergences among settlement patterns and perpetuated them into the twentieth century. Emporia benefited from its location east of that line.

Figure 5. Map of South Dakota Showing the Average Annual Precipitation in Inches and the Location of the Agricultural Experiment Station and Substation. Agricultural Experiment Station, South Dakota State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, 1914



[47] Agricultural Experiment Station, South Dakota State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, *Trials With Sweet Clover As A Field Crop In South Dakota* (Mitchell, South Dakota: Mitchell Publishing Company, 1918), 228-230.

The Great Plains, of course, had always been part of North America's geography, even when called by different names. Its distinct climate and environment initially drew many settlers to the area for agricultural purposes. Despite the seemingly arable land of the Plains, the varying annual rainfall caused early setbacks for farmers and towns in the western portions of the Plains states. Towns in the eastern regions, like Emporia, enjoyed steady agricultural production, which drew more settlers to the area. States eventually employed agricultural research to develop new agricultural methods in their western portions, which proved mostly successful by the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, this delayed development set the two halves of the Great Plains on different developmental trajectories. The midwestern Plains' early success drew industries like the railroad, which sought to transport the region's agricultural products, whereas the western Plains received far less attention. Emporia's fortunes would rise accordingly.

Chapter 2:
Connecting The Region

"Railroads are the arteries and veins of modern commerce, and when the trains stop running, business will generally stop."[1] These words from *The Emporia News* in 1877 reflected the mindset that entrenched the railroads into the economy and society of small cities in the Great Plains portion of the Midwest. They also foreshadowed what was to come for the industry and the region in the following decades. There is no debate that railroads drove commerce throughout the U.S. in the nineteenth century. Along the expanding U.S. empire, cities and settlements lived and died by the railroad. Railroads gave Emporia the financial and demographic growth needed to grow into a city, and wove Emporia into the greater fabric of the Great Plains Midwest and the U.S. broadly. Emporia's status as a railroad city, then, is not unique. Railroads established and sustained many cities of the Great Plains, just as they erased others. The railroad connected and disconnected many cities to transportation networks vital to urban survival in the nineteenth century. However, some Great Plains cities predated the arrival of railroads. This chapter explores the railroads' role in shaping the Great Plains Midwest, but also addresses how earlier transportation networks played a role in settlement-building. Though railroads may not have been the sole reason for a city's birth, they, along with other transportation links, ensured urban survival in the Great Plains Midwest. Previous scholarship has explored Emporia's relationship to the railroads in the Great Plains and Midwest. I rely on this secondary literature and concentrate my own analysis on comparing Emporia's experience

[1] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 27 July 1877.

with the railroad and other transportation routes to the experiences of other Great Plains and Midwest cities.[2]

Prior to the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (the Katy), and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (A.T.S.F.) railroads, overland trails connected Emporia to cities and settlements near and far. The undeveloped state of these overland routes hampered Emporia's growth, especially during the early drought. However, overland trails were crucial to urban survival before the railroad. Council Grove, Kansas, located about 25 miles northwest of Emporia in Morris County, was settled as a waystation along the Santa Fe Trail in 1849.[3] Though the town was connected to the railroad in the 1880s, Council Grove thrived on commerce from the trail alone for the first three decades of its existence. Between 1849 and 1854, Council Grove emerged as the westernmost supply point along the Santa Fe Trail's 700-mile trek, and it grew accordingly. In 1850, the town attracted government funding to construct a building to house grain supplies, and a federal postal building followed in 1855.[4] The construction of government structures led workers to populate the town.[5] The drought of the late 1850s and early 1860s plagued Council Grove just as it did Emporia. Council Grove, however, also rebounded and grew significant in the next two decades, all before the railroad arrived.[6] In 1860, fewer than 600 people populated all of Morris County, but by 1870, Council Grove alone had reached 712 residents. A decade later, this number had

[2] Emporia's railroads were the subject of a previous master's thesis. I have used this thesis to inform my own, and as guidance to focus my work on other aspects of Emporia's railroad history. See Clayton Callahan, "Intertwined Legacies: Emporia and its Railroads: 1857-1900" (M.A. Thesis, Emporia State University, 2018).

[3] Lalla Maloy Brigham, *The Story of Council Grove on the Santa Fe Trail* (Council Grove, Kansas: Morris County Historical Society, 1921), 11.

[4] Ibid, 11 & 15.

[5] Ibid, 11.

[6] Ibid, 19.

grown to 1,042.[7] Council Grove never reached the 2,500 residents needed for city status, but it maintained itself as an established community with extensive demographic growth throughout its early decades without the presence of a railroad.

Though government institutions certainly enhanced Council Grove's early growth, they were not enough to sustain a town without a major line of transportation, even on the fertile plains of eastern Kansas. For example, Columbia was founded during the 1850s three miles southeast of Emporia along the Cottonwood River. By 1857, Columbia, the now-defunct Madison County's seat, had the only established post office in the region. Madison County was just south of Lyon County, which later subsumed it. By late 1857, Columbia's post office had moved to Emporia, as Columbia showed little signs of growth. With the post office gone, the postmaster, his wife, and their fifteen children all moved to Emporia, and Columbia ceased to exist by the end of the decade.[8] Many Emporians intentionally worked to move the post office. They were aligned with Republican anti-slavery beliefs, and they sought to undercut the mail route through Columbia because an official in Madison County had identified himself as pro-slavery.[9] Emporia opted to have mail sent in privately from the anti-slavery community of Lawrence rather than through Columbia by way of Council Grove.[10] The post office and overland connection to Council Grove were not enough to keep Columbia alive, especially not with competition from the Republican-aligned town of Emporia.

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[7] Ibid, 19, and James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 382.

[8] Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia Gazette Print 1929), 9-10.

[9] Jacob Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County: Historical Incidents of the First Quarter of a Century, 1857 to 1882* (Emporia, Kansas: n.p., 1898) 16.

[10] Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County.* 15.

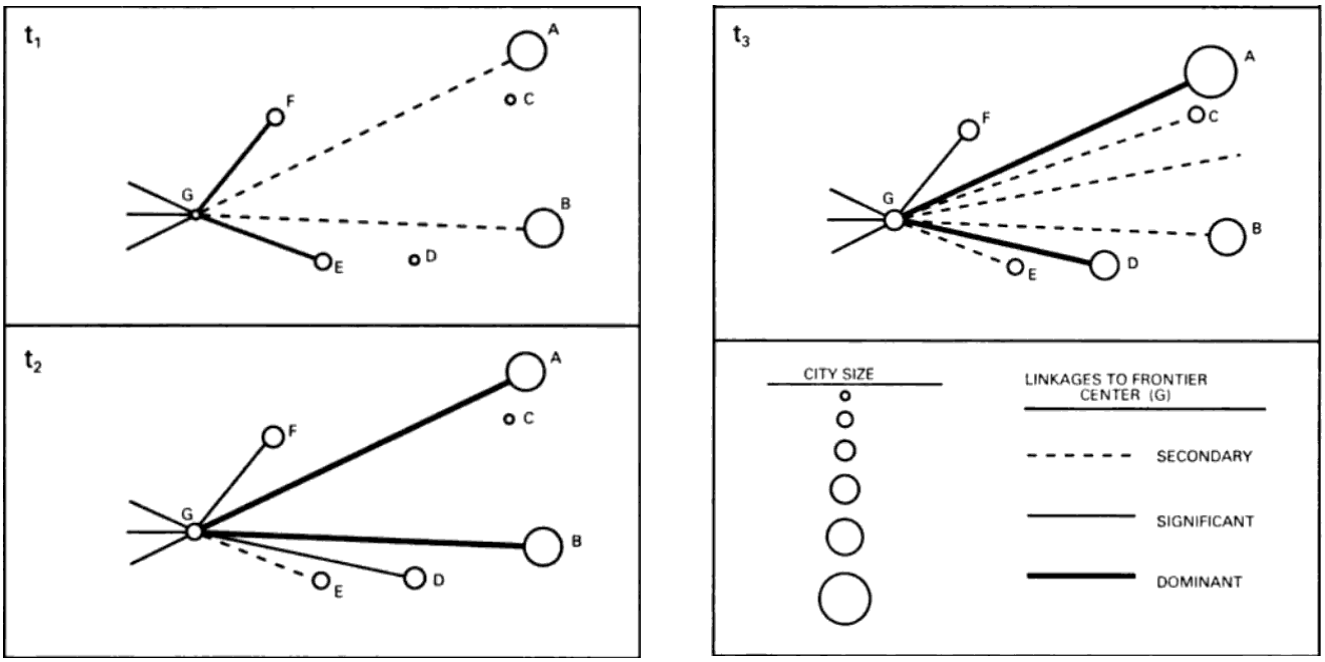
In the 1860s, a new era of transportation dawned on the Great Plains with the railroad. Early railroads, such as the first transcontinental (the joint Union Pacific-Central Pacific venture) cut across Nebraska in hopes of connecting the eastern and western U.S. more reliably. Their effects were immediately visible. Fremont, in eastern Nebraska, about 45 miles northwest of Omaha, was founded in 1856. Pinney, Barnard & Company laid out Fremont on fertile land, but the financial struggles of the late 1850s hindered the town's early development.[11] Though a post office was built in 1857, little else was constructed for the next decade. Nonetheless, the Union Pacific reached Fremont in 1866, and the town began to expand. Within a year, Fremont had its first bank and newspaper.[12] By 1870, the population of Fremont was 1,195; by 1880, it had grown to 3,013 residents.[13] Fremont's location between the Elkhorn and Platte valleys, coupled with the arrival of other railroads in the coming decades, allowed the city to become an industrial and agricultural hub in the region. Fremont and Emporia were similar in significant ways, and Fremont's success foreshadowed that of Emporia and many other midwestern Great Plains cities.

[11] Thomas T. Osterman and William Henry Buss, *History of Dodge and Washington Counties, Nebraska, and Their People* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921), 219.

[12] Osterman and Buss, *History of Dodge and Washington Counties*, 220.

[13] David Drozd and Jerry Deichert, *Nebraska Historical Populations* (Omaha: University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2018), 28.

Figure 6. Theoretical Linkages Between a Frontier City and Its National Urban System (The Meyer Wyckoff Model). *Cities on The Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas*, 2004.



Emporia's place in the network of Great Plains cities is crucial to explaining its pattern of development. Emporia's growth as an urban area and as Lyon County's seat can be explained using the Meyer-Wyckoff model, which James Shortridge employs in *Cities on The Plains* (Figure 6).[14] Emporia represents the first stage of the model in the late 1850s and early 1860s (Figure 6, with G representing an Emporia-like city). There were few and low-quality transportation connections to other urban areas of Kansas and the United States. Thus, during the drought of 1859, regional supplies failed to reach Emporia. The second stage models a

[14] David Ralph Meyer, "A Dynamic Model of the Integration of Frontier Urban Places into the United States System of Cities," *Economic Geography* 56, no. 2 (1980): 120–40; Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 8; and William Wyckoff, "Revising The Meyer Model: Dener And The National Urban System, 1859-1879," *Urban Geography* 9, no. 1 (1988): 1–18.

strengthened link between other urban centers and Emporia, which coincided with the arrival of the railroads in the 1860s and 1870s. Business elites like Preston B. Plumb and Calvin Hood positioned Emporia as a place that welcomed capitalist ventures like cattle ranching. In the third stage of this model, cities like Emporia and surrounding settlements demonstrate further distinctions. Now becoming dependent on the railroad, Emporia continued to produce crops and maintained itself as a railroad-servicing community, operating regional maintenance facilities and a roundhouse for the Katy and A.T.S.F. But some surrounding towns (Figure 6, with E representing such towns) had not grown and they were bypassed by the railroad. A town like this was Plum Grove, which the Missouri Pacific Railroad bypassed; it ceased to exist as a settlement.[15] The Meyer-Wyckoff model reflects Emporia's nineteenth-century experience. It shows how a city like Emporia shifted over time from a settlement on the western edge of the U.S. to a city within the urban network of eastern Kansas.

From its earliest days, Emporia was known as a place friendly to businessmen. These businessmen, exemplified by Plumb and journalist William Allen White, aligned themselves in positions of power in Emporia and the state of Kansas. Though White is best known as an author, his ownership of the *Emporia Gazette* also made him a businessman. Plumb became a member of the Kansas House of Representatives and later the U.S. Senate. Historical actors like Plumb and White intertwined Emporia's fate with that of capitalist ventures in the late nineteenth-century West. So Emporia's fortunes rose and on the capitalist market economy. Hardships such as the drought of 1859 and the Panic of 1893 did not destroy the city, but lack of diversification eventually did relegate Emporia to small city status.[16]

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[15] Nancy Burns, *The Collapse of Small Towns on the Great Plains: A Bibliography,* (Emporia, Kansas: School of Graduate and Professional Studies of the Emporia State University, 1982), 5-9.

[16] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 41.

Railroads anchored Emporia as an essential city in eastern Kansas and the Great Plains Midwest, but they did not appear naturally. As early as 1857, Emporia's prominent citizens and founders sought to attract a railroad to cement Emporia as a transportation and business hub. The first gathering to discuss a potential railroad was held July 21, 1857. Entrepreneurs like C.K. Holliday of the Topeka and St. Joseph Railroad were present at the meeting and showed great interest in Emporia as a possible railroad hub.[17] At the meeting, boosters proclaimed:

> Emporia, by its central position in Kansas, offers all the advantages for a point of general radiation, as well as a point of termination for the roads entering the Territory from the east, north and south, and to unite and extend onward toward the setting sun, as that proposed from the Kansas River to the Gulf of Mexico will undoubtedly pass down the Neosho Valley, and that from Jefferson City…will also terminate here, or, passing through, terminate in Santa Fe; and that now being constructed from Hannibal to St. Joe, and from thence to Topeka, will, in all probability, be continued to this point, thus opening the heart of Kansas--which is the heart of the country--to the wealth and commerce of the world.[18]

Preston B. Plumb further advocated for a railroad between 1857 and 1859 through his newspaper, *The Kansas News*.[19] Likewise, in the 1860s, articles in *The Emporia News* discussed the potential benefits of a railroad to Emporia and surrounding communities. On March 12, 1864, *The Emporia News* called for town meetings to discuss an amendment to a recently passed

[17] William G. Cutler, "Lyon County," in *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1883).

[18] Ibid.

[19] Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County*, 4.

Kansas railroad bill that could make Emporia the terminus of the Lawrence and Fort Gibson Railroad. The article argued that this would bring railroad transport to the entire Neosho Valley.[20] Indeed, Emporia did become the terminus and crossing point over the Neosho River for the new railroad.[21] In his 1883 book the *History of the State of Kansas*, William G. Cutler documented the crusade of Emporia's founders and boosters for this railroad. Cutler claimed that founders had always envisioned Emporia as a rail hub. Meanwhile, railroad entrepreneurs sought to connect Emporia via railroad lines with other cities in eastern Kansas.[22] Given Emporia's desirable natural features, earnest boosters, and vocal media, it was only a matter of time before Emporia attracted a railroad line.

Finally, in 1869, after years of advocacy and political action, the southern branch of the Union Pacific Railroad, later known as the Katy, reached Emporia. The very next year, in 1870, the A.T.S.F. did the same.[23] These railroads secured Emporia's growth and inserted the city into the larger fabric of midwestern urbanization. The Katy and A.T.S.F. brought significant outside investments to Emporia during the 1860s, causing property values to skyrocket. In 1867, town lots in Emporia totaled $125,903, and by 1871, this value increased to $560,025.[24]

Once the Katy arrived in 1869, Emporia began to emerge as an urban center. The population increased and the city expanded. For example, between 1868 and 1872, the number of schools in Lyon County grew from 29 to 62. By 1879, Emporia had around 3,400 residents. In the same year, 184 new buildings were constructed to serve the city's swelling population. In 1880,

[20] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 12 March 1864.

[21] Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County*, 62.

[22] Cutler, "Lyon County," in *History of the State of Kansas.*

[23] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas*, 37.

[24] Edwards Brothers, *Historical Atlas of Lyon County, Kansas* (Philadelphia: Edwards Brothers, 1878), 9.

Emporia's first waterworks were opened to access more water from the Cottonwood River.[25] The same year, the first gas light was introduced to Emporia. The next year, the city council approved a street railway, the city formed a board of trade, and a telephone company was established. In 1887, the A.T.S.F. built local stockyards.[26] By the end of the 1880s, Emporia had become an urban center of eastern Kansas and a hub of commerce and agriculture run by prominent businessmen in the state.

As Emporia expanded physically because of the railroads, the population followed suit. The Katy and the A.T.S.F. promoted settlement in Emporia by offering reduced fares for visitors. The railroads targeted immigrants and farmers and used Emporia's newspapers to announce the area's virtues.[27] These early efforts were fruitful, and by 1870, Emporia had over 2,000 residents, more than twice its population in 1860.[28] Ranchers and farmers settled near Emporia for easy access to the railroad.[29] Between the emerging cattle industry of the late 1860s and the area's lush soil, Emporia evolved into a center of agriculture and transportation.

During the 1870s and 1880s, the A.T.S.F. and the Katy increased their operations in Emporia. The investments made over the course of the previous decade provided the infrastructure for these railroads to service locomotives and store necessary maintenance materials. With the arrival of the A.T.S.F., the railroad efforts to increase Emporia's population and industrial output doubled. Wealthy Emporians reciprocated, generating as much as $400,000 in bonds in support

[25] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 43-50.

[26] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas,* 58-61.

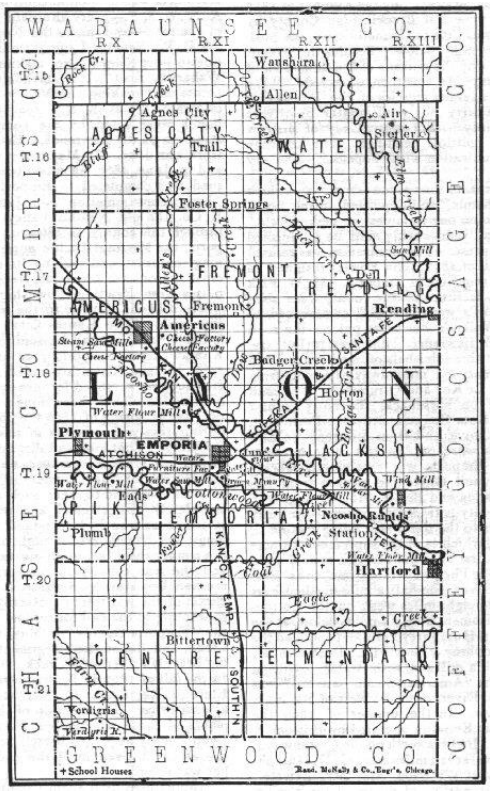
[27] Keith L. Bryant, *History of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 67.

[28] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 382.

[29] Robert William Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964), 207-19.

of these railroads.[30] The railroads established new facilities as Emporia grew into a rail hub, which drew more workers to the city. The A.T.S.F. led these improvements with the establishment of a roundhouse and other major installations.[31] Emporia's population increased accordingly, totaling over 4,000 by the end of the decade.[32] During the 1880s, a third railroad reached Emporia: the Kansas City, Emporia, and Southwestern Railroad. This new railroad line did not succeed the way that the A.T.S.F. or the Katy did, however, and in 1899, it was absorbed by the A.T.S.F.[33]

Figure 7. Map of Lyon County. History of the State of Kansas, 1883.



[30] Stotler, *Annals of Emporia and Lyon County*, 68.

[31] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 18 April 1879.

[32] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382.

[33] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 18 April 1879.

The 1890s were not as fruitful as the previous three decades. The decade was punctuated by unfortunate events for Emporia. The death of senator, booster, and founder Preston B. Plumb, who died in December 1891, symbolized the troubled times.[34] Meanwhile, various national and local economic disasters placed the railroads and Emporia in financial danger. The Panic of 1893, which loomed large over the indebted A.T.S.F., alarmed Emporia's residents, many of whom had become dependent on the jobs and services the railroad provided. The A.T.S.F. financially restructured to maintain its operations.[35] Emporia's population continued to grow but at a far slower pace. In 1898, the First National Bank closed, costing many locals their savings.[36] For the first time, the adverse effects of Emporia's business-friendly orientation began to show. Though the financial worries of the 1890s eventually eased, Emporia never again saw the growth it had in the previous decades.

Emporia's experience during the 1890s reveals distinctions between cities like Emporia and Chicago. Though Emporia had significant natural resources and experienced thirty years of urban development, it was never able to distinguish itself as a gateway even to western Kansas, to say nothing of the greater West. Emporia's industries supported Emporians and corporate entities such as the A.T.S.F. and the Katy. Chicago, however, positioned itself as a gateway of resources for resources moving in and out of the Great West. Though both cities became hubs for resource movement, Chicago diversified and brokered transportation on a national scale.[37]

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[34] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas*, 62.

[35] John F. Stover and Mark C. Carnes, *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads: Routledge Atlases of American History* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 48.

[36] French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas*, 70.

[37] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 62-63.

Emporia, by contrast, was controlled by the corporations that built it, and when those corporations faltered, the city faced an inescapable stagnation. By the turn of the twentieth century, Emporia had around 8,000 residents, and the city had reached its peak dominance over the surrounding towns of Lyon County, but it would no longer compete to be a dominant urban center of Kansas.[38]

In other parts of the Great Plains, the railroads allowed the growth of cattle towns, which emerged during the era of cattle drives from the 1860s to the 1880s. Historian Robert R. Dykstra defines a cattle town as an interior market facility that sat at a railroad intersection and a Texas cattle trail. At these towns, cattle drivers sold cattle, which then moved to market via the railroad. Dykstra argues that cattle towns did not depend on local agriculture, but rather on commerce from these drives.[39] Cowboys drove Texas cattle north to five major cattle towns in Kansas: Abilene, Caldwell, Dodge City, Ellsworth, and Wichita. The conflict between a growing population of local cattle ranchers and the new technology of the fence ended cattle drives and diminished cattle towns in the late 1880s.[40] Though their time as cattle towns was short, these settlements were built by the railroad in a different way and faced economic difficulties as the cattle drives shifted westward.

It was the nearby city of Wichita, founded in 1868, eleven years after Emporia, that cemented itself as the region's dominant city, and the gap widened in the 1890s. Wichita was about 90 miles southwest of Emporia. It took only a few years for Wichita to overtake Emporia economically and demographically. The city was well situated along the Arkansas River and the Chisolm Trail, which was used for cattle drives. This allowed Wichita to support the cattle

[38] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 382.

[39] Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York: Knopf, 1968), 6.

[40] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 219-220.

industry and become a significant Kansas cow town. Wichita's location and its population, around 24,000 by the end of the 1890s, allowed it to move far more cattle than Emporia.[41] Wichita's development, like Emporia's, benefited from the railroad, which arrived in 1872. But Wichita became the region's transportation hub by the early 1900s, eclipsing Emporia. By 1910, Wichita was the city Emporia had wished to be, and due to their proximity, Wichita's growth sealed Emporia's fate. For a time, Wichita became the major cattle town and population center of eastern-central Kansas, dwarfing Emporia.[42] However, even as the cattle drives moved westward, Wichita's growth remained steady. Land speculation still boomed in and around the city. Wichita continued its industrial development and emerged as part of the Kansas oil industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, Wichita was built on similar foundations as Emporia; industries such as the railroad, farming, and livestock spurred the city's development, though Emporia had focused more on cattle raising than cattle drives. Unlike Emporia, however, Wichita never stopped growing. It became the largest city in Kansas by 1950.[43]

Despite Emporia's small city status following the economic struggles of the 1890s, it endured, unlike some other area towns. The most ephemeral of these were known as "paper towns." Throughout the Great Plains, many planned settlements suffered the fate of the so-called paper town, a settlement imagined in anticipation of a railroad that existed only on paper, rarely coming into physical existence. Businessmen who were looking to buy land cheaply and sell it at an increased rate created the illusion of a settlement to attract buyers. Newspapers of the day,

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[41] Orsemus Hills Bently, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas: Past and Present, Including an Account of the Cities, Towns and Villages of the County* (Alexandria, Virginia: C.F. Cooper & Company, 1910), 18; and Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 386.

[42] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 143 and 386.

[43] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 383 and 387.

including the *Los Angeles Daily Herald,* described paper towns and explained how they took shape with the expansion of the railroad (in this case, in southern California).[44]Another kind of town created in the late nineteenth century was the "end-of-track community," a town that depended on servicing railroads. End-of-track communities provided supplies and services for passing trains. Workers populated these towns, but when workers departed, their populations were severely diminished. When railroads moved further west and improvements, such as the diesel locomotive, emerged, such communities lost their identity and livelihood.[45]

Despite its struggles in the1890s, Emporia took advantage of the railroads to become a service center and retained that status well into the twentieth century. By contrast, Ellsworth narrowly escaped the fate of an end-of-track community. Ellsworth was founded in 1867 in anticipation of the railroad. Settlers and businessmen acted too fast for Ellsworth to exist only on paper; construction of the town began in 1867 before the entire plot was surveyed. Nonetheless, Ellsworth was nearly eliminated as the railhead moved on to another town further west in 1868, at one point reaching as few as 50 residents.[46] A host of businessmen had settled in Ellsworth, but they also moved west with the railhead. Ellsworth did rebound, however, and became one of the premier cow towns of Kansas.[47] Though Ellsworth never became an end-of-track community, it demonstrated the fragility that railroads created as operations moved from place to place.

Further west, Hays also became entangled with the railroad. The Kansas Pacific reached Hays in 1867, its founding year. Hays then acted as the western terminus for the line, and saw its population soar above 1,000 residents. However, this great boom was cut short as the terminus

[44] *Los Angeles Daily Herald* , 1 Sept. 1888.

[45] Nancy Burns, *The Collapse of Small Towns on the Great Plains,* 5-9.

[46] Cutler, "Ellsworth County," in *History of the State of Kansas.*

[47] Ibid.

moved west to Sheridan, Kansas, in 1868. This nearly devastated Hays. By 1870, only 320 residents remained there.[48] Ellsworth had retained over 2,000 residents following its end as the railroad's terminus.[49] Hays struggled to survive and remain connected to Kansas's commercial network. It took nearly twenty years for the town to regain the population it had lost. It did so by specializing in wheat cultivation. Emporia, too, had been a railroad terminus until it moved further down the line. However, Emporia's rapid expansion, advantageous location, and business-friendly environment kept the railroads there, investing throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Emporia's status as a hub for the A.T.S.F and Katy and its continuous production of crops and livestock kept it a transportation hub well into the 1890s. Though Hays remained on a rail line, it never enjoyed the wealth that Emporia did and thus remained a waystation between larger Kansas hubs, such as Dodge City to the west.

By the end of the nineteenth century, railroads had become a human-made marker for the border between the Great Plains West and Midwest. Railroads marked the divide between these regions with the uneven presence of tracks laid throughout the Plains states. Railroads developed unevenly in the Great Plains to broker the movement of resources from the fertile midwestern farms that had emerged in the previous several decades. Great Plains territory and state maps from this era show the growing disparity of railroads from east to west, with more lines crisscrossing eastern than western areas (Figures 8, 9, and 10). The north-south running divide roughly follows the line of semiaridity and the 98th meridian, the divergent average annual rainfall totals across these regions. With more established railroad tracks, residents of the Great Plains Midwest had better access to transportation and capital from far-reaching markets than

[48] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains,* 382.

[49] Cutler, "Ellis County," in *History of the State of Kansas*.

their western counterparts. Railroads also helped the region's population grow faster, so more urban centers emerged in the midwestern portions of the Plains states in the late nineteenth century. Though the environment and agriculture began the differentiation between the Great Plains West and Midwest, the railroads expedited the divide.

Figure 8. Railway Map of Nebraska Issued by State Board of Transportation 1889. Library of Congress.

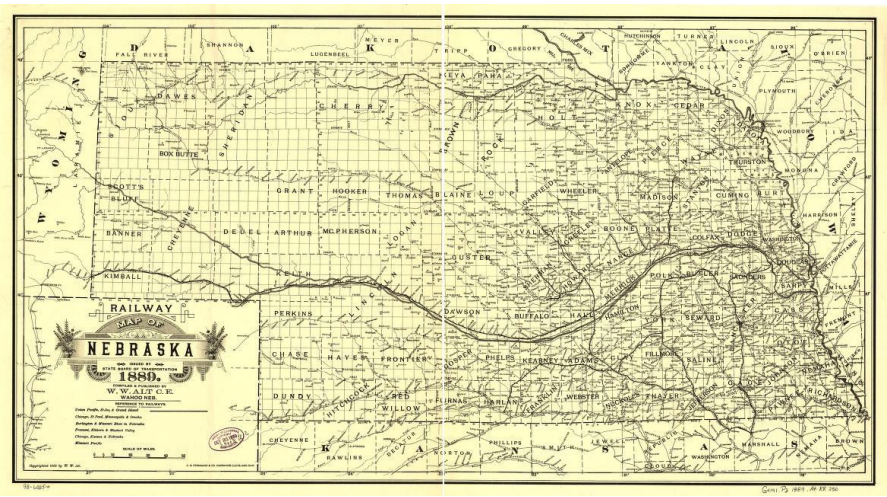


Figure 9. Official Railroad Map of Kansas 1899. Matthews-Northrup Company. Kansas State Historical Society.

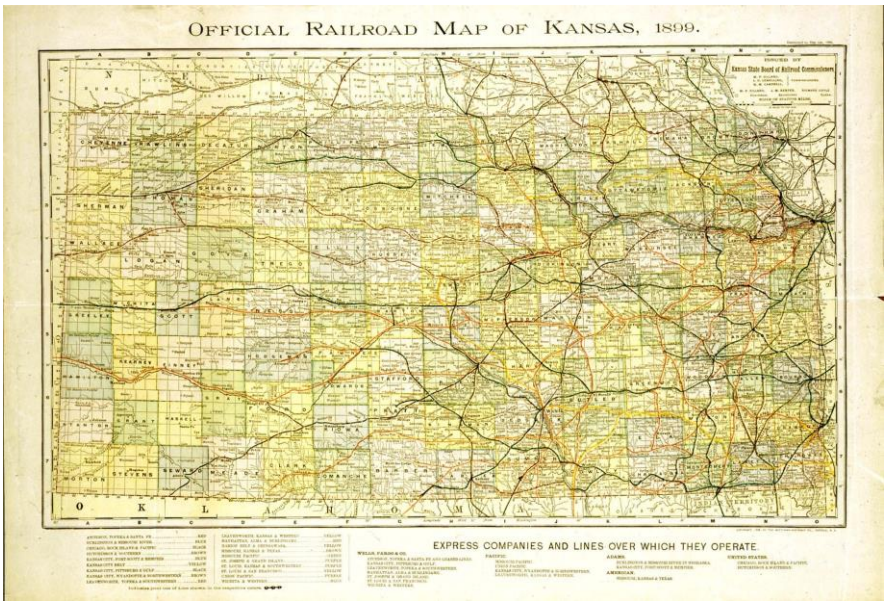
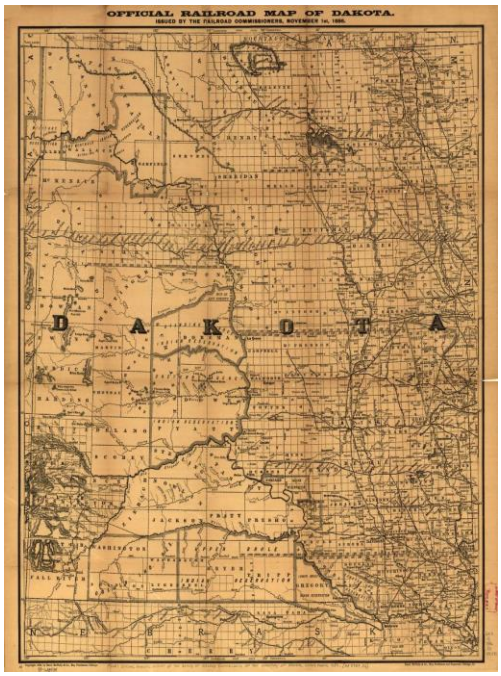


Figure 10. Official Railroad Map of Dakota Issued by the Railroad Commissioners, November 1st, 1886. Rand, McNally & Company. Library of Congress.



For all its success in the late nineteenth century, by 1900, Emporia's growth stagnated, and Wichita emerged as the region's dominant city. Emporia became a node in a larger transportation network, no longer one of the larger Kansas cities. But Emporia continued to broker resource movement for Lyon County and the surrounding Neosho Valley. The story of towns and cities hitching their fates to that of the railroads was a common one in the nineteenth century, and one that often ended in different degrees of catastrophe. The unluckiest settlements ceased to exist. However, all these towns and cities relied on the railroad, from the northern to the southern border of the Great Plains Midwest. They depended on a connection to the railroad to continue their commitment to agriculture. The railroad thus deepened the Great Plains Midwest's connection to farming, as local crops sought distant markets and relied on railroads to reach them. Following the arrival of the railroad, other settlements in Lyon County depended on Emporia to move and sell their crops. In his book, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*, James Shortridge argues that American definitions of pastoralism changed over time. Pastoralism started as an ideal of the Far West and became a tenet for a "Middle Kingdom," between the U.S. East and the frontier West.[50] His argument is well supported and rings true in light of the railroads. However, railroads offered consistency apart from changing American perceptions of agriculture. Railroads, no matter what crop or livestock was being transported, were necessary to transport these resources to market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The railroad helped tie the Great Plains Midwest's core identity to agriculture as the region came into being.

[50] James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 6-7.

Railroads, and the previous overland trail routes, sewed the fabric of the Great Plains Midwest together. They anchored small cities like Emporia to transportation networks that allowed them to attract new residents and market their agricultural products. Yet, railroads also decimated and erased towns they bypassed, as well as towns that lost their status as railroad termini. As railroads rushed to connect Great Plains midwestern cities like Emporia to their network, while simultaneously avoiding most cities of the Great Plains West, they created something larger than markets. Railroads, having laid far more track in the eastern Plains states, created the human-built borders between the Great Plains Midwest and West.

Chapter 3:
Teaching the Region

In the nineteenth century, higher education became both a defining attribute and a lifeblood of the Great Plains portion of the Midwest. Emporia's own Kansas State Normal School helped secure residents and funding for Emporia during and following the dark decade of the 1890s when other industries stalled. Once again, Emporia's story is not unique, though it is essential, as other cities and towns throughout the Great Plains Midwest secured themselves through higher education institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though many larger cities in the Great Plains Midwest hosted universities, these larger urban areas often did not depend on universities to generate demographic, physical, and financial growth the way that small cities like Emporia did. This chapter examines the role of higher education in the distinction between the Great Plains Midwest and the rest of the West, as well as how colleges and universities guided many small cities out of downturns, thereby proving themselves to be as important as the railroad.

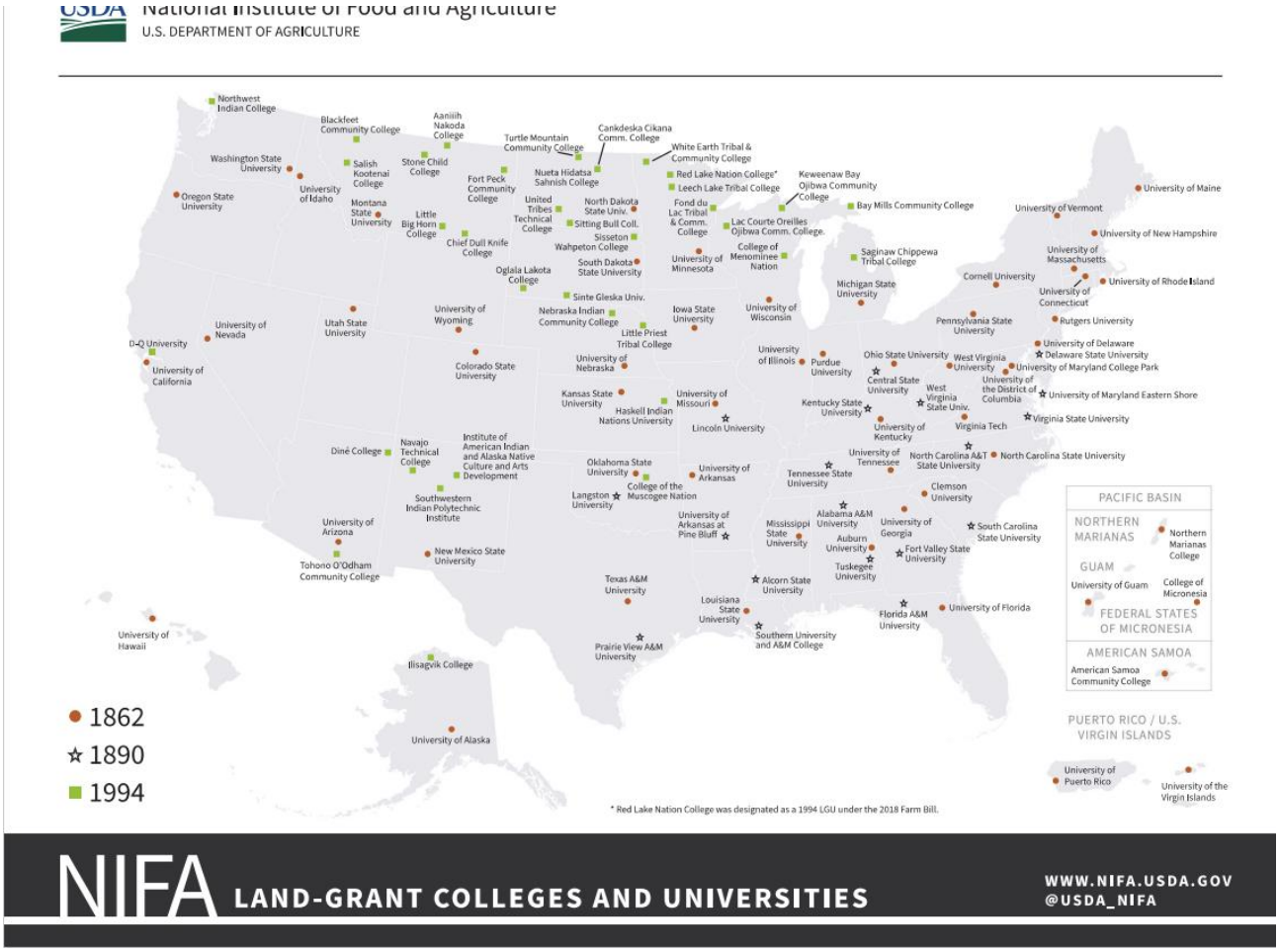
First, I will consider the origins of universities in this region. Many of the earliest public universities of the Great Plains Midwest were founded as part of the Morrill Act of 1862, which allowed states to use profits from federal land sales to create land grant institutions.[1] In recent years, many of these institutions have been labeled "land grab" universities because they were built on and funded through the sale of stolen Indigenous lands.[2] In the Great Plains states, all

[1] "An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories Which May Provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts," Act of July 2, 1862, 37th U.S. Congress, 7 U.S.C. 301 (1862).

[2] Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, "Land-Grab Universities: Expropriated Indigenous Land Is the Foundation of the Land-Grant University System," *High Country News*, March 30, 2020; and Meredith Alberta Palmer, "Good Intentions Are Not Good Relations," *Departures, Arrivals, and Encounters: Feminist Understandings of Borders and Human Im/Mobilities* 22, no. 4 (October 2023): 1239–57, esp. 1242-1245.

original six land grant universities were placed east of the line of semiaridity (Figure 11). In 1890, North Dakota State University became the last land grant university established in these states. The eastern halves of the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas boasted much larger populations than their western halves, agriculture was more successful and in the eastern regions of these states due to the higher annual rainfall.[3]

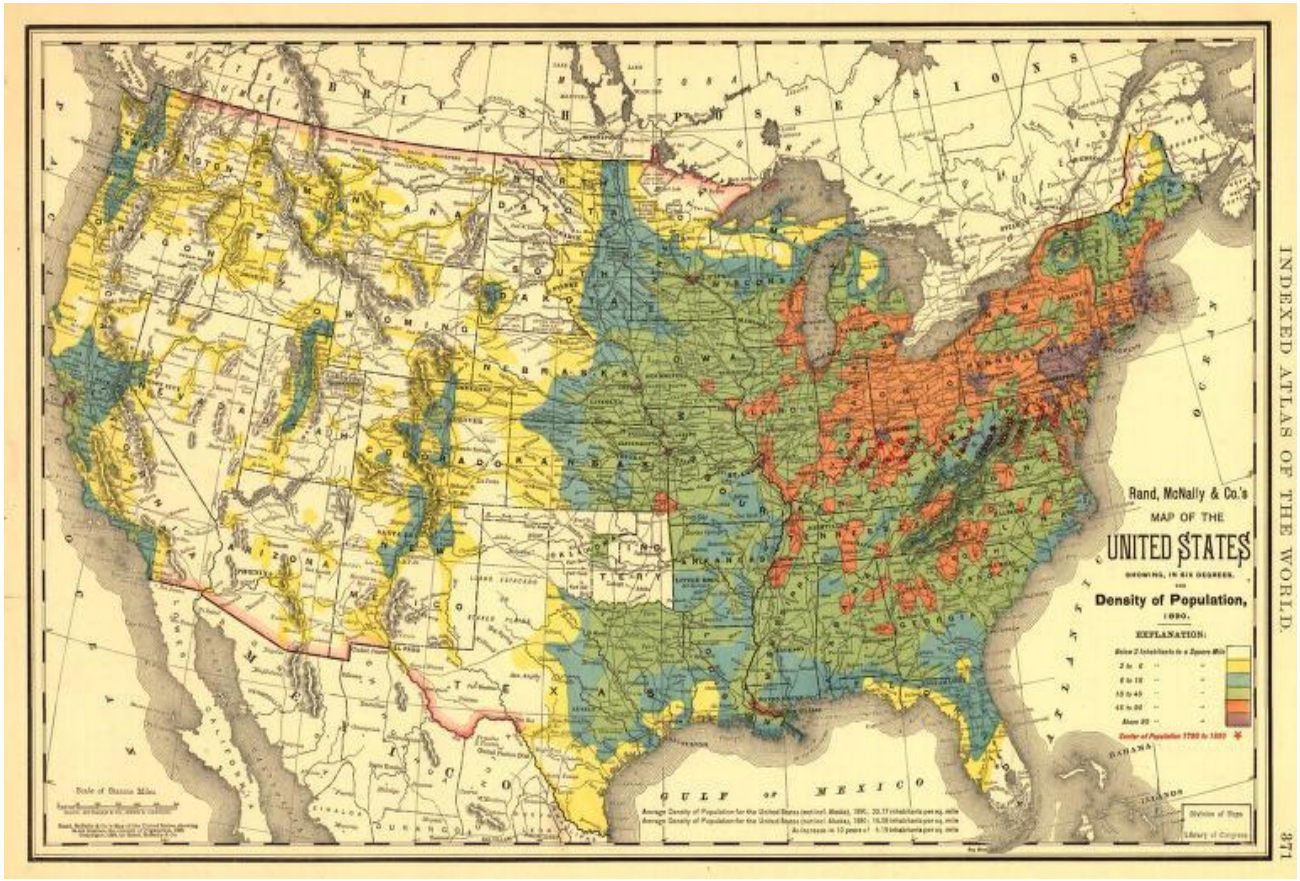
Figure 11. NIFA Land-Grant Colleges and Universities. National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, June, 2022.



[3] Warren A. Beck and Ynez D. Haase, *Historical Atlas of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 3.

However, higher education institutions founded in the Great Plains states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries expanded beyond these six land grant institutions. What most of these universities had in common, whether public or private, was that they were founded east of the line of semiaridity, in the eastern half of their respective states. Overwhelmingly, colleges and universities were built in the midwestern portion of the Great Plains rather than the western portion. Unbalanced population distributions, the eastern placement of state capitals, and more abundant resources all contributed to the placement of higher education institutions in the east (Figure 12). Towns often had to explain why they should host a state university. This left midwestern places with more people and greater economic resources better prepared to market themselves than the sparsely populated settlements to the west. The unequal distribution of these schools in the Great Plains states speaks to how these two regions developed differently.

Figure 12. Rand, McNally & Company's Map of the United States Showing, in Six Degrees, the Density of Population. Rand, McNally & Company, 1890. Library of Congress.



Many universities in the Great Plains were established quickly following the passage of the Morrill Act once and territories gained statehood. However, financial crises, especially those in the 1890s, often threatened state institutions. North Dakota's first university came before the north-south division of the territory and before statehood in 1883. A territorial legislature made provisions for the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks, among other state institutions, in the same year. The legislature also sited an agricultural college in Fargo and a normal school in Minto with no firm plans to construct the colleges; indeed, the school in Minto never

materialized. In 1889, the year North Dakota achieved statehood, the locations of several educational institutions were set in the state's constitution. The constitution reaffirmed the University of North Dakota's location while placing the School of Mines at Grand Forks. It also confirmed the location of the agricultural college in Fargo and declared the location of two normal schools, one in Valley City and one in Mayville.[4] In 1883, a private school, the University of Jamestown, was founded in the town of the same name.[5] All of these early North Dakota institutions were located in the eastern portion of the state. A later amendment to the state constitution established another normal school in Minot, which became the first college in western North Dakota.[6] The planned agricultural college in Fargo was temporarily overlooked in favor of a similar college at Brookings, South Dakota, during the territorial period.[7] North Dakota, like the rest of the nation, saw major financial struggles in the 1890s. In 1895, the Valley City school had its appropriations cut from $24,000 to $4,600; the school in Mayville from $24,860 to $7,760; the Agricultural College from $19,000 to $11,250; and the University of North Dakota from $63,000 to $15,980. Some feared the closure of the University of North Dakota, given such severe budget cuts. However, faculty members, Grand Forks citizens, and others raised $25,622 to keep the university in operation.[8]

Although still geographically concentrated in its placement of higher education institutions, South Dakota's colleges and universities were the most equally spread of the Great Plains states. According to a 1912 history of the state by Frank L. Ransom, this distribution was

[4] *State of North Dakota Legislative Manuel* (Bismark, North Dakota: Tribune, State Printers and Binders, 1905), 120.

[5] Clement A. Lounsberry, *Early History of North Dakota: Essential Outlines of American History* (Washington D.C: Liberty Press, 1919), 619.

[6] Ibid, 416.

[7] Ibid, 370 and 373.

[8] Ibid, 567-568.

intentional. South Dakota spread the roles of different institutions across the state. All private universities in the state before 1912 were located east of the Missouri River and the line of semiaridity.[9] The University of South Dakota, located in Vermillion, in the far southeastern corner of the state, hosted arts and sciences, law, medicine, engineering, and music. Brookings, also in the east, hosted the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts and an experimental research station. Aberdeen, Madison, Spearfish, and Springfield all gained normal schools, and Rapid City gained the School of Mines.[10] Only Rapid City and Spearfish are west of the line of semiaridity, towards the state's western border. By 1880, Spearfish had a population of 678, one of the largest in the region, and by 1900, it had grown to 1,166.[11] The School of Mines at Rapid City was conveniently placed in the Black Hills, the site of a gold rush in the 1860s and of ongoing mining.[12] Still, the agricultural and flagship universities were located in the state's far eastern portion, along with most other public institutions.

In the Great Plains Midwest, there was and is a difference between cities and towns that depended on institutions of higher education for their survival and those that benefitted from their presence but did not depend on them. Emporia became a town beholden to its university, but it did not start out that way. At first, Kansas State Normal School provided little of Emporia's population, though the city eventually became a college town. Blake Gumprecht defines college towns in his 2008 monograph, *The American College Town*.[13] Gumprecht argues that if a town's population is made up of at least 20 percent college students and remains below

[9] Frank Leslie Ransom, *The Sunshine State: A History of South Dakota* (Mitchell, South Dakota: Educator School Supply Co., 1912), 136.

[10] Ibid, 135-136.

[11] U.S. Census Bureau, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Census Bulletin No. 23: Population of South Dakota By Minor Civil Divisions* (Washington D.C., 1900), 9.

[12] Ransom, *The Sunshine State*, 73-75 and 136.

[13] Blake Gumprecht, *The American College Town* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

the threshold of 350,000 residents, it qualifies as a college town. Gumprecht identifies other traits of college towns as having a young population, as well as highly educated residents that work in better-paying white-collar jobs, high costs of living, more apartment and rental-based housing, a high quality of life, and other characteristics including cosmopolitanism.[14] Gumprecht writes about contemporary college towns, but his conclusions are helpful in gauging the effect of higher education on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century towns in the Great Plains Midwest, as these characteristics can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Only one contemporary college town identified by Gumprecht is in the Great Plains West, whereas eight are in the Great Plains Midwest.[15] According to Gumprecht, a notable college town in this region includes Manhattan, Kansas, which is the site of the state's land grant university founded in the mid-nineteenth century. Emporia never attained all the characteristics Gumprecht identifies. However, Emporia's residents continued to invest in the college into the twentieth century. The Normal School became a focus of Emporia's boosters going forward to keep steady economic and demographic growth.

Though the railroad caused Emporia's population and economy to skyrocket, the State Normal School offered a delayed contribution to the city. The Normal School, now known as Emporia State University, was established in 1863 and opened in 1865.[16] This institution, Kansas's third university, came into being largely on speculation and salesmanship. Speculators knew of Emporia's fertile soil and flowing rivers and thus expected that railroads and agricultural growth would follow. In preparation for this boom, the Kansas state legislature

[14] Ibid, 2, and 4-15.

[15] Ibid, 6.

[16] James R. Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 89.

approved building a Normal School in Emporia nearly unanimously in 1863. The school was then established separate from the Morrill Act, and lands and funds were allocated at the state level.[17] Like all normal schools, the institution specialized in education to meet Kansas's growing need for teachers. This created another draw for Emporia, attracting both new residents and new funding, which was especially crucial during Emporia's early days. Just as Emporia began its swift development, the school, too, grew quickly to become and remain one of the largest in the state.

During the nineteenth century, Lyon County saw two more educational institutions built, one of which was also in Emporia. Though the State Normal School came to assist in Emporia's development, educational institutions alone could not carry a city to success, as the history of nearby Harford shows. Hartford was the site of a branch of Baker University, known as the Hartford Collegiate Institute, a college preparatory school. The institute closed in 1877 due to lack of funding.[18] Though located just 15 miles from Emporia within the fertile Neosho Valley, Hartford never reached the 2,500 residents needed for city status and eventually became dependent on Emporia for urban amenities. A second Lyon County school was built in Emporia in 1882. An annual gathering of Presbyterians decided to lay the groundwork for a new institution, which would come to be called the College of Emporia. Local Emporians donated 38 acres of land and $40,000 for the construction of the campus. Though the school did not open until 1886, classes began in 1883, held in various downtown buildings.[19] Famous journalist

[17] *A History of the State Normal School of Kansas: For the First Twenty-Five Years* (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1889), 13.

[18] Richard D. Pankratz, "Hartford Collegiate Institute," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971), #72000512.

[19] Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia Gazette Print, 1929), 52.

William Allen White attended the college without attaining a degree.[20] The College of Emporia was the culmination of several developments in the city. First, the growth of the Welsh immigrant population had prompted the expansion of the local Presbyterian church, making the city more friendly to a Presbyterian college. Second, the city was also education-friendly, given the success of the State Normal School. Though the private College of Emporia did not draw state funding like the Normal School, it nonetheless helped transform Emporia's population and built environment.

Even with another college up the street, Kansas State Normal School remained Emporia's core educational institution, creating new avenues for government funds to enter the city. The State Normal School's first building, which opened in 1866, cost $10,000 and was paid for entirely by state funds.[21] In June of the following year, the school celebrated its first commencement ceremony with two graduating students.[22] In 1873, the state legislature approved $50,000 to construct a new building for the college. The school hit a rough patch, however, when the state legislature approved the Miscellaneous Appropriations Bill of 1876, which closed the state's other normal schools at Concordia (founded in 1874) and Leavenworth (founded in 1870).[23] Though this bill made Emporia's State Normal School the center of teaching education in Kansas once again, enrollment dropped drastically from 345 to 130 students between 1876 and 1878.[24] The reasons for this drop in enrollment are unknown. The school remained Kansas's

[20] William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), 40-41 and 81-82.

[21] *A History of the State Normal School of Kansas*, 17.

[22] *A Brief History of Emporia State University* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia State University, 1989), 4.

[23] Ibid, 4; and Geo. W. Martin, ed., *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1897-1900, Together with Addresses at Annual Meetings, Memorials, and Miscellaneous Papers. Also, A Catalog of Kansas Constitutions, and Territorial and State Documents in the Historical Society Library*, Vol. 6 (Topeka, Kansas: W.Y. Morgan, State Printer, 1900), 116.

[24] *A Brief History of Emporia State University*, 4.

only normal school until 1902, when a new branch was opened in Hays. Another branch followed in Pittsburgh the next year.[25]

As Emporia grew, so did the State Normal School's enrollment. In 1865, the school counted just 78 students; by 1876, the school's enrollment totaled 345.[26] This dwarfed the city of Manhattan's Kansas State Agricultural College, known today as Kansas State University, which had only 103 students in 1876.[27] By 1889, the gap between the State Normal School and other institutions in Kansas only increased. The State Normal School counted 908 students, looming over the State Agricultural College's 514 students and the University of Kansas's 508 students.[28] In 1893, the Kansas state legislature passed a bill for contractors to bid on the construction of a new wing and assembly room for the State Normal School.[29] The school was even able to expand during the financially difficult 1890s when Emporia's other prospects diminished. This would only continue in the years to come as the State Normal School grew well into the decades after Emporia's boom period. With the school's success, Emporia was able to market itself as a university town deserving of investment by the Kansas state legislature.

Authors, students and Emporians alike celebrated Kansas State Normal School, though the school often incurred great expenses. In 1878, when the building constructed in 1873 burned down, the school quickly procured funds to rebuild the structure, as the foundation remained intact. The new building was dedicated in 1880.[30] In spite of such expenditures, the school

[25] Ibid, 5.

[26] Ibid, 4.

[27] Kansas State University, Data, Assessment, and Institutional Research, "Kansas State University Fall Enrollments 1863-Present," Manhattan, Kansas, 2023.

[28] *A Brief History of Emporia State University*, 4-5.

[29] *The Advocate and Topeka Tribune* (Topeka, Kansas), 8 November 1893.

[30] *The Kansas State Normal School, Souvenir, 1865-1909* (Topeka, Kansas: State Printing Office, 1909), 2.

garnered respect from media outlets across the state. *The Emporia News,* as well as other papers, such as *The Abilene Reflector,* hailed the school's progress and encouraged residents to attend.[31] In a 1913 article published by the *Emporia Gazette,* Charles Hughes Johnson named Kansas State Normal School a core educational institution of Kansas. Johnson, a Kansas author and professor of education at the University of Kansas, reflected on the development and expense of Kansas colleges and universities since statehood. His pamphlet, "Shall Kansas Have a Mill-Tax?," argued that education had become a core government function in the United States and that if Kansas wanted to fund its own higher education institutions adequately, it should impose a mill tax on its citizens.[32] A souvenir book published by the State Normal School four years earlier celebrated the expansion of the university between 1865 and 1909, including images and depictions of the school's growth.[33] Though the Normal School got off to a slow start, it soon became a beacon for new Emporia residents and a way to guarantee state funding, especially during the turbulent 1890s. William Allen White remarked in a 1920 editorial that he thought the two colleges in Emporia encouraged local education, noting that a large percentage of the city's high school graduates attended college. Though he did not present statistics to support his claim, White's assertion aligns with Gumprecht's observations that residents of college towns tend to be more educated. Given the disproportionate location of colleges and universities in the Great Plains Midwest, residents of the eastern Great Plains were afforded more local opportunities for higher education and were less likely to have to relocate to go to school.

[31] *The Abilene Reflector* (Abilene, Kansas), 7 April 1887, and *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 22 November 1872.

[32] Charles Hughes Johnston and Homer Walker Josselyn, *Shall Kansas Have a Mill-Tax?* (Emporia, Kansas: The Emporia Gazette, January 9, 1913).

[33] *The Kansas State Normal School, 2*.

Nonetheless, in 1902, a new campus of the State Normal School opened in Hays, now known as Fort Hays State University, in addition to an agricultural research station.[34] By the turn of the century, the western town of Hays had not yet reached city status, with just 1,136 residents, and had struggled following the economic crises of the 1890s.[35] Similar to Emporia, the college at Hays allowed new avenues for state funding, procuring $100,000 in state funds for new buildings and supplies between 1904 and 1912.[36] Unlike Emporia's campus, however, the Hays school enrollment immediately blossomed. In 1902, it opened with 23 students, and by 1910, this number increased to 996.[37] In the same decade, Hays's population increased to 1,961.[38] Despite its semi-arid environment, Hays's success in wheat cultivation had made it a desirable agricultural community. Yet it still lacked steady population growth.

The establishment of the State Normal School's new western branch, along with the new agricultural research station there, represents the growing disparity between the Great Plains West and Midwest. The western branch of the State Normal School was founded nearly 40 years later than the original campus, after two failed attempts at other normal schools in eastern Kansas cities. There were also a small number of institutions founded in western Kansas before the turn of the century that did not survive. This speaks to the lack of educational development in western Kansas. To this day, Fort Hays State University remains the only public university and one of only two four-year institutions in western Kansas. This disparity is mirrored across the Great Plains states, as similarly small numbers of colleges and universities were established in the

[34] Frank W. Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, Etc… With a Supplementary Volume Devoted to Selected Personal History and Reminiscence*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: Standard Publishing Company, 1912), 758-761.

[35] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382.

[36] Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History*, Vol. 3, 758-761.

[37] Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History*, Vol. 3, 758-761.

[38] Shortridge, *Cities on The Plains*, 382.

Great Plains West in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, access to education within a more densely populated landscape became a characteristic that distinguished the Great Plains Midwest from its western counterpart.

Southwest of Emporia, the city of Wichita represents yet another pattern, that of a city with two universities that did not become a college town. Wichita was Kansas's commercial hub by 1890 and the site of two institutions of higher education. These institutions were smaller and less instrumental to the growth of Wichita than the normal schools had been in Emporia and Hays. Wichita's Fairmount College, a private school later purchased by the city and eventually known as Wichita State University, was founded in 1886. Due to financial struggles, the main building was not completed until 1892. Originally intended as a college for women, the college was reorganized in 1895 and began offering classes to both men and women. The 1912 book *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History* notes that Fairmount College's endowment came from "the citizens of Wichita and people in the east."[39] This suggests that funding for higher education in eastern Kansas came from eastern Kansas (and points east) and stayed there. By 1910, Fairmount enrolled 341 students, compared to 996 students at the State Normal School and 2,407 students at the State Agricultural School.[40] Meanwhile, Friends University was founded in 1898 by Quakers after over twenty years of earlier attempts.[41] By 1910, the liberal arts college enrolled around 400 students, making it Wichita's largest institution.[42] Though the total population of Wichita's universities by 1910 was relatively small, it was even smaller in

[39] Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History,* Vol. 3, 620.

[40] Ibid, 758-761; Kansas State University, Data, Assessment, and Institutional Research, "Kansas State University Fall Enrollments 1863-Present," Manhattan, Kansas, 2023; Orsemus Hills Bently, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas: Past and Present, Including an Account of the Cities, Towns and Villages of the County*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: C.F. Cooper & Company, 1910), 326-327.

[41] Blackmar, ed., *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History,* Vol. 3, 697-700.

[42] Bently, *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County, Kansas*, Vol. 1, 325-326.

comparison to Wichita's overall population of 52,450 residents.[43] Wichita valued and supported these higher education institutions, but it was not a city that depended on colleges and universities for funding, population, or reputation.

I have demonstrated stark differences between the Great Plains West and Midwest, but there are counterexamples to my argument. For example, Dickinson, North Dakota, is in western North Dakota and geographically within the Great Plains West. However, Dickinson's trajectory as a small city resembles that of Emporia and thus exemplifies the difficulties of defining regions. Dickinson was founded around 1880 during the expansion of the Northern Pacific Railroad.[44] Settlers came to the area in anticipation of the railroad, but, as in Emporia, for the rich soil as well. Dickinson's soils were nurtured by the nearby Edward Arthur Patterson Lake and Heart River. The city experienced a population boom between 1890 and 1900, increasing from 897 to 2,076 residents.[45] It became a cattle town and agricultural transportation hub for southwestern North Dakota in the early 1900s. German-Russian immigrants moved to the area to take advantage of inexpensive land on which they could continue agricultural practices they had developed in their homeland.[46] Though it was not established until 1918, Dickinson State College met the demands of training teachers in southwestern North Dakota. The school secured state investments, beginning with a female dormitory that cost $100,000. The school also brought new students and professors to the town, which added to the city's growth and

[43] Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains*, 382.

[44] Eugene Virgil Smalley, *History of the Northern Pacific Railroad*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 291.

[45] Dana Durant ed., U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910: Statistics for North Dakota, Containing Statistics of Population Agriculture, Manufactures, and Mining for the State Counties, Cities, and Other Divisions* (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Commerce and Labor, 1913), 585.

[46] Louis Pfaller, *A History of Stark County* (n.p., n.d.). https://schs.omeka.net/items/show/4644.

diversification.[47] Dickinson's initial growth was tied to agriculture and the railroad. However, the city's subsequent growth depended on new residents to expand these industries, many of whom were lured in by the state college. Dickinson's stagnation was not as stark as Emporia's. However, Dickinson never again saw the rates of growth experienced between 1890 and 1900. In the end, however, exceptions like Dickinson prove the larger rule about differences between the Great Plains Midwest and West.

Education is a resource in and of itself, and the disparate access to education across the Great Plains speaks to the increasing divide between the western and midwestern sections of this broad region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Few higher education institutions existed in the Great Plains West, initially, and only a few have been established since. The case of Emporia shows that higher education was instrumental in developing towns and cities in the Great Plains Midwest, helping them to retain population and funding in financially turbulent times. The distribution of higher education institutions in the Great Plains Midwest also increased educational access for those living in the eastern Plains. The few universities in the Great Plains West followed on preexisting populations, as in the case of Spearfish; were located in advantageous places like Rapid City; or put down roots in places that grew to be population centers for their region, as in the case of Dickinson. Though railroads brought many newcomers to the Great Plains Midwest and spurred industrial and agricultural development, higher education institutions granted long-term benefits that flowed well past the late nineteenth-century railroad boom. By 1910, colleges and universities solidified the divide between the Great Plains West and Midwest, as midwestern parts of the Plains states harnessed

[47] Eva Wienbergen, *Dickinson State College 1918-1977* (n.p., 1977). https://schs.omeka.net/items/show/4647.

larger populations, more urban centers, and wider railroad networks. By 1910, the line of semiaridity marked a differential among constructed institutions that determined the border between the eastern and western Great Plains.

Epilogue
Behold, the Region

The 1890s brought stagnation and financial crisis to the previously booming Great Plains portion of the Midwest, but by the turn of the century, the crisis subsided, and the Great Plains Midwest entered a period of stability. The 1910 census showed the culmination of fifty years of divergence between the two halves of the Great Plains. Though this thesis ends in 1910, Emporia and the Great Plains Midwest, of course, continued. Here, I will explore how Emporians reflected on their history in the decades following this study's chronological endpoint. The way that Emporians expressed their local history has been crucial to this thesis, as it led to the city's well-preserved past. I examine when the regional perception of Emporia shifted and became midwestern rather than western. This shift is best seen through the writings of William Allen White, who came to prominence just before the turn of the century. White's writings speak to Emporia's history in the early twentieth century, and to changing regional perceptions in this era.

Indeed, Emporia cannot be explained apart from William Allen White. From the moment he purchased the *Gazette* in 1895 to this day, White looms large over the city. Buildings and institutions retain his name, and his house is preserved as a museum.[1] White's early twentieth-century publications illuminate Emporia's place within the Great Plains portion of the Midwest and demonstrate where residents of this region believed they lived.

White was born in Emporia in 1868, just a decade after the city's founding. However, his family quickly relocated to El Dorado, Kansas, as his father thought that Emporia, with about

[1] Frederick A. Klein, Rachel Leibowitz, and Marton Lenard, "William Allen White House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971), #71000318.

500 residents, was too big.[2] White returned to Emporia to attend the College of Emporia but never earned a degree. He later attended the University of Kansas with the same outcome. Despite not having a degree, White worked as an editor for various Kansas newspapers in the 1880s and early 1890s.

In the mid-1890s, White and his wife Sallie began looking for a Kansas newspaper to purchase. White remarked that he wished to live in a college town among educated, upper middle-class residents. After attempting to buy several newspapers that proved too expensive, he turned to his old hometown, Emporia.[3] The two local newspapers there, in White's words, were "slowly starving to death in Emporia in the hard times of the middle nineties."[4] The first of these, the *Daily Republican,* formerly known as the *Emporia News,* was established in 1859. The second, the *Emporia Gazette,* was established in 1890. Populists founded the *Emporia Gazette* and later sold the paper to W.Y. Morgan, an old associate of White. In 1895, Morgan agreed to sell the *Gazette* to White for $3,000. White borrowed money from Governor Edmund N. Morrill, George Plumb, and W.Y. Morgan to finance his purchase. In addition, White borrowed money from Preston B. Plumb's estate, as White's father was a friend of the late Plumb, and White himself was a friend of Plumb's son, A.H. Plumb. The transaction was carried out through Major Calvin Hood of the Emporia National Bank.[5] The purchase involved almost all of Emporia's most prominent business figures. Following the transaction, White built a platform that made him an advocate not just of Emporia but of Kansas and of the Great Plains Midwest.

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[2] William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), 1.

[3] Ibid, 256.

[4] Ibid, 256-257.

[5] Ibid, 257.

In his 1896 editorial, "What's the Matter With Kansas?" White, a progressive Republican, criticized the Democratic and Populist leadership in Kansas over the previous six years, blaming them for that state's demographic and economic stagnation. His editorial was important for several reasons. It garnered White national attention as a political author and placed Emporia in the national spotlight. Following the publication of "What's the Matter With Kansas?" the Republican National Committee reprinted and circulated the column during William McKinley's presidential campaign.[6] For the purpose of this thesis, however, what is also striking from this editorial is that White labels Kansas, along with other places in the Midwest and Great Plains, as "the West." Furthermore, he groups Kansas and other Plains states together with states like Oklahoma and Colorado.[7] White did not yet see these places as part of a place called the Midwest or Great Plains, but rather as a part of the broader West. Later, his regional thinking would change.

As White's fame grew, a national audience came to see Emporia as the city that so often appeared in his writings. Ten years after he wrote "What's the Matter With Kansas?" White juxtaposed Emporia with New York City in *Emporia and New York*. In this pamphlet, White also cites Emporia as part of the West, though regional identity is not his focus. [8] He looks at Emporia's relationship to other places in Lyon County–for example, Americus, which never grew beyond several hundred residents and was dependent on Emporia for urban amenities. According to White, in Americus, residents viewed Emporia as a place of urban vices: "Americus people regard Emporia as an awful place, where the men stay out until all hours of

[6] Ibid, 284-285.

[7] William Allen White, "What's the Matter With Kansas?" *The Emporia Gazette* (Emporia, Kansas), August 16, 1896.

[8] William Allen White, *Emporia and New York* (New York: Phillips Publishing Company, 1906), 15.

the night, and many of the women are really no better than they should be. Americus people come to Emporia to have a good time because they believe they are lost in the great city."[9] Emporia, which dwarfed all other towns in Lyon County, stood as the county's urban center, both in function and perception. White then describes the experiences of a *Gazette* reporter who vacationed in New York City and returned with a negative opinion of the metropolis, like the opinion Americus residents held of Emporia. White is, of course, aware of the fundamental differences between a great metropolis like New York and a small city like Emporia. But he sees parallels nonetheless. Though White thought highly of his hometown, he realizes Emporians held a lesser view of Americus residents, just as residents of New York or even Kansas City looked down on Emporians.[10] White's argument is that Emporians behave distinctly and fit into a larger hierarchy of U.S. urban society. Therefore, despite his classification of Emporia and Kansas as locations in the West, he does assert the emergence of a distinct culture in his hometown.

Although many of White's late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century publications refer to eastern Kansas as part of a broader American West, the terms "Middle West" and "Midwest" had begun to circulate in the nineteenth century, especially in the 1880s.[11] *The Emporia News* even used such terminology in 1860, referencing the "Mid-West" in a discussion of railroads in Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Iowa. The article states, "millions of acres not worth owning a few years since are being settled and cultivated; and the Mid-West is advancing with measured but steady steps to the full development of her unequal resources."[12] Though this entry was not

[9] White, *Emporia and New York*, 5-6.

[10] White, *Emporia and New York*, 10.

[11] Carl Ubbelohde, "History and the Midwest as a Region," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 78, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 35–47; and James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 16-19.

[12] *The Emporia News* (Emporia, Kansas), 10 March 1860.

written about Kansas, it would ring true there decades in the future. From scattered references like this, by 1910, the Midwest region was emerging in literature across the country, and soon, Kansas and the other Plains states began to be included in definitions of the Midwest.

Other scholars, including James R. Shortridge and Carl Ubbelohde, have analyzed the origins of the terms "midwestern" and "Midwest" and their growing usage in the twentieth century, and thus, that is not my project here.[13] Rather, I am analyzing when the midwestern portion of the Great Plains grew into itself and became distinct from its western portion. However, Shortridge and Ubbelohde have identified a piece of literature that is important to this study, a 1902 article from *Harper's Magazine* by Booth Tarkington. Entitled "The Middle West," this article discusses the emergence of a place called the Middle West and those who inhabit it. Much like White's *Emporia and New York,* the piece is concerned with culture, manners, and lifestyle. Tarkington compares those who live in the Middle West to residents of the East Coast. Both White and Tarkington see the lifestyle of those who inhabit the midcontinent as nuanced but charming, just as they both reject eastern elitism. Tarkington mentions a plethora of midwestern cities, ranging from Indianapolis to Omaha, suggesting that a place like Emporia fit into what he considered the Middle West.[14] Given that White in 1906 still referenced Emporia as "western" rather than midwestern, when did a region we might call the Great Plains Midwest emerge?

As we have seen, the Great Plains Midwest had long been home to a larger population than the Great Plains West. In addition, the largest cities and the capitals of both Kansas and Nebraska also reside in the midwestern portion of these states. By 1910, the urban landscape of

[13] Ubbelohde, "History and the Midwest as a Region," 35–47; and Shortridge, *The Middle West,* 16-19.

[14] Booth Tarkington, "The Middle West," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 106 (December 1902): 75-83

the Plains states had taken shape. In North Dakota, the state's two largest cities, Fargo and Grand Forks, are along the state's eastern border with Minnesota. North Dakota's capital, Bismarck, is in the central part of the state.[15] In South Dakota, four of the state's five largest cities sit in the eastern half of the state. As in North Dakota, South Dakota's largest city, Sioux Falls, is positioned along the state's eastern border, although South Dakota's capital, Pierre, is in the state's central region.[16] In Nebraska, the contrast is even more stark. In 1910, the six largest cities in Nebraska were in the midwestern section of the state. This included Nebraska's largest city, Omaha, also located on the far eastern border of the state, and Lincoln, the state's capital.[17] In Kansas, Wichita, located in the state's southeastern section, maintained its growth, and remained the largest city in Kansas throughout the twentieth century. Though the cattle industry had moved further west in the previous decades, oil, railroad, and manufacturing industries helped the city extend its boom well into the twentieth century.[18] Other urban areas in Kansas followed suit, and six of the state's most populous cities are in the east, including the capital, Topeka.[19] Urban centers stayed east and reflected the uneven placement of railroads throughout the Great Plains (Figure 13). Like the population density of the Plains states, urban centers displayed the contrast between the Great Plains West and Midwest: the midwestern region was far more urbanized.

[15] U.S. Census Bureau, *1910 Census: Volume 3, Population, Reports by States, with Statistics for Counties, Cities, and Other Civil Divisions: Nebraska-Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii, and Porto Rico* (Washington D.C., 1910), 318.

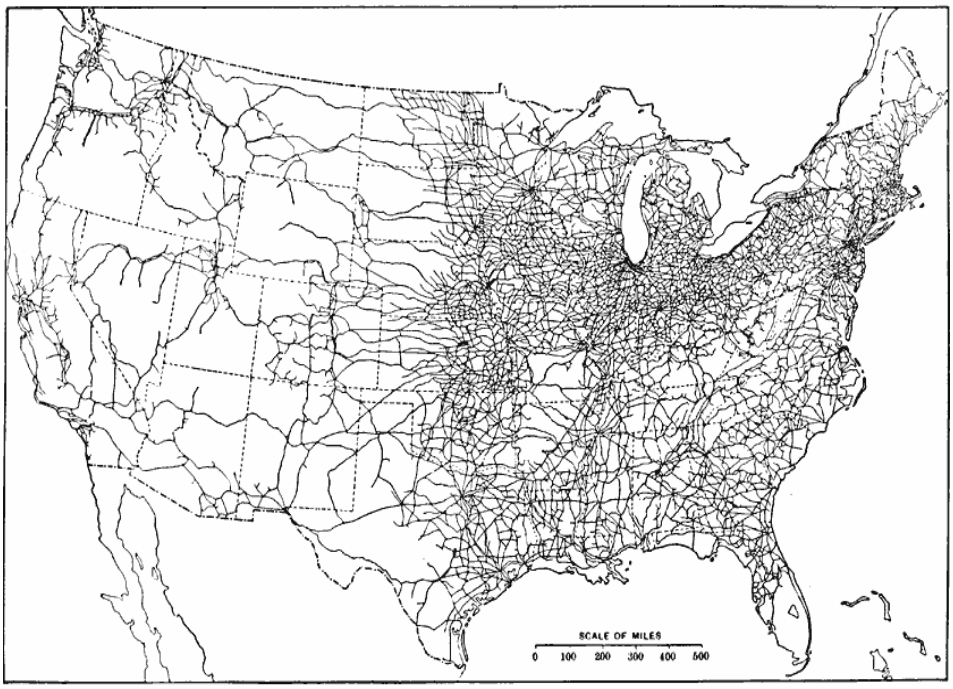
[16] U.S. Census Bureau, *1910 Census: Volume 3*, 672.

[17] U.S. Census Bureau, *1910 Census: Volume 3*, 19.

[18] U.S. Census Bureau. *1910 Census: Volume 2, Population, Reports by States, with Statistics for Counties, Cities, and Other Civil Divisions: Alabama-Montana* (Washington D.C., 1910), 645.

[19] U.S. Census Bureau. *1910 Census: Volume 2*, 645.

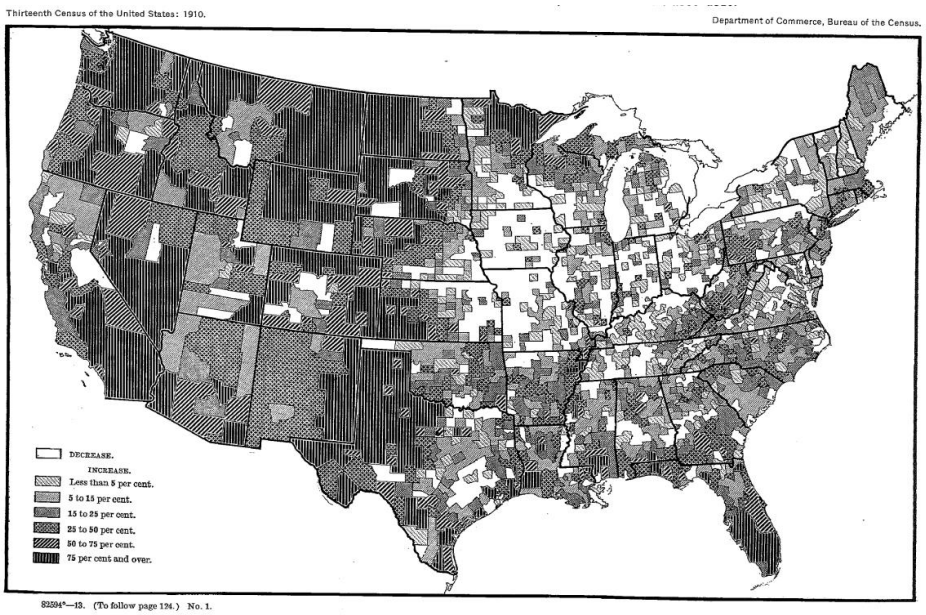
Figure 13. Railroads of the United States. American Book Company, 1916.



Nonetheless, the 1910 Census saw the start of a new era on the Great Plains, when the region's western portion grew faster than the midwestern portion. Counties further west in the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas grew at faster rates than their eastern counterparts (Figure 13). Though the eastern portions of these states maintained larger populations, they did not experience economic and demographic booms as they had in previous decades. Between 1900 and 1910, the population of Hays, Kansas, grew to 1,961, a 72 percent increase from the previous decade. Further west, Garden City, Kansas, saw a 99 percent increase, with a total of 3,171 residents by the end of the decade. Meanwhile, Emporia's population increased to 9,058

residents, only a 10 percent growth.[20] This slower but sustained growth, coupled with the unequal distribution of railroads, higher education institutions, and agricultural assets, separated the two regions and literally put the Great Plains Midwest on the map.

Figure 14. Percentage of Increase in Total Population, By Counties: 1900-1910. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the U.S. Census, 1910.



An editorial by William Allen White in 1920 aptly summarized Emporia's progress over the previous half-century. White reflected on the city of Wichita and how, in many ways, it had made greater strides than Emporia. However, White characteristically criticizes Wichita's big city shortcomings, such as overcrowding, high crime rates, and a less educated population. White

[20] James R. Shortridge, *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 382.

then praises Emporia's amenities and achievements, highlighting its modern attributes, including the city's waterworks, homes with telephones and electricity, municipal trash collection, public schools, an under-construction sewage plant, and hospitals, as well as institutions like the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A and a municipal band. He also notes that few of Emporia's residents live in apartments, unlike larger cities, as only three apartment buildings existed in Emporia at the time.[21] Overall, White paints an image of a prosperous community that may not be booming but is content. For the purposes of this study, however, White's flattering description of Emporia in 1920 is not the most important part of his editorial. In his discussion comparing big cities like Wichita to small cities like Emporia, White calls Emporia "a typical Midwestern town."

> For it seems to us Midwesterners that our towns have developed a type of civilization just as commendable as the civilization developed in the larger centers. So in cataloging what seem to be the worthy things in this community the Emporian in the New Republic wished not to be thought a pharisee, thanking God that Emporia is not like other towns, but instead called attention to the fact that most of the things for which we are thankful in Emporia are the things which other Midwestern towns and many American small towns in every section of the country enjoy.[22]

The spokesperson of middle America now characterized Emporia as midwestern, and even more as a typical midwestern town. With White as our guide, it appears that though it took decades,

[21] William Allen White, "Ever See Emporia?" *The Emporia Gazette* (Emporia, Kansas) May 24, 1920.

[22] Ibid.

Emporians' perceptions of their place in the Midwest followed the trends that had shaped the Plains states over the last half-century.

Emporia's story is not unique; rather, its history aligns closely with that of many other small cities throughout the Great Plains Midwest. These small cities were the building blocks of the region. They gave farmers and businessmen places to market their products; provided railroads with service stations, customers, and switching yards; and housed colleges and universities, all of which became essential and distinct characteristics of this region. This is not to say that Emporia was without unique attributes. Though all small cities across the Great Plains Midwest had boosters and advocates, few had someone as prolific as William Allen White, who, in turn, became an advocate for the entire region. Emporia also housed multiple colleges, railroads, and agricultural assets; it was not built or sustained by one company, school, or crop. But all small cities in this region possessed something unique, and their stories are no less important than Emporia's, only perhaps less documented. The history of small cities in the Great Plains is essential to the history of the U.S. West and Midwest, and of the nation. Small towns and cities across the U.S. have histories of their own, and can help to tell the histories of other places as well.

It is crucial to analyze as well how residents of Emporia remember their early years, just as it is important to acknowledge that Emporia's story did not end in 1910. Even before William Allen White emerged in the early twentieth century, Emporia's residents celebrated their local history. Laura Margaret French's *History of Emporia and Lyon County Kansas* was published in 1929.[23] Other local authors and organizations have released histories over the years, such as *Our*

[23] Laura M. French, *History of Emporia and Lyon County, Kansas* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia Gazette Print 1929).

Land, A History of Lyon County Kansas, which was written during the U.S. bicentennial, and *Black Emporia: The African American Experience Through the Lives of Emporians,* published in 2001.[24] *Black Emporia* details the history of many African American Emporians in the twentieth century and explains their struggle to carve out a community and a way of life during this time. In 1937, the Lyon County Historical Society was established in Emporia and remains in the city's downtown to this day. The society maintains a museum with a collection of artifacts dating back to Emporia's founding. In 1971, the house of William Allen White, also known as Red Rocks, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.[25] Sixteen other properties, including Emporia's historic downtown and the house of Preston B. Plumb's wife, have also been placed on the National Register.[26] For all that has been remembered by Emporians from their early years and how helpful it has been to authors like myself, there are many more communities and industries whose stories have not yet been told.

Though this thesis is focused on the emergence of the Great Plains Midwest, it also tells part of the history of the North American West. The Great Plains Midwest and the industries, cities, and people it was founded upon represent the workings of settler colonialism. Following the violent removal of Indigenous peoples from their homelands, capitalist enterprises quickly bolstered the new white settlements that spread across the Plains and shaped them to capitalist advantage. In this sense, the emergence of the Great Plains Midwest is part of the larger U.S.

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[24] Nellie Essex, Elizabeth Williams, and Carol F. Marshall, *Black Emporia: The African-American Experience Through the Lives of Emporians* (Emporia, Kansas: Chester Press, 2001); and Ted F. McDaniel and Alberta Brinkman, eds., *Our Land, A History of Lyon County Kansas* (Emporia, Kansas: Emporia State Press, 1976).

[25] Klein, Leibowitz, and Lenard, "William Allen White House."

[26] "Emporia Downtown Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1978), #12000249; and Richard J. Cawthon, "Mrs. Preston B. Plumb House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984), #84000011.

conquest of the West. This Great Plains Midwest's development across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of a continuing process of settler colonialism. Capitalist enterprises like the railroad gained control over the region's future and created an environment friendly to wealthy elites. These wealthy elites then composed the state and local histories that celebrated this settler-colonial and capitalist history. In the process, they white-washed the history of what became their home place.

Regions are difficult to define and fraught with exceptions, imprecision, and change over time. This is true of the Great Plains Midwest as of any other region. Nonetheless, history, geography, climate, and human-made developments all point to the distinct features of the Great Plains Midwest that separate it from the Great Plains West. The Great Plains Midwest is not a region beholden to political and state borders, nor does it conform to the regions identified by the U.S. Census Bureau. By roughly following the line of semiaridty, which in turn roughly follows the 98th meridian, one can trace the border between the Great Plains West and Midwest. But there is more than just a climate-based line that separates these two regions. The Great Plains Midwest is environmentally distinct, gathering many more inches of rainfall per year than the lands to the west. It was quickly developed into a vast network of railroads, and its cities built maintenance centers, station houses, and stockyards to support this industry. Finally, residents of the Great Plains Midwest had easier access to higher education, as more colleges and universities were placed in the eastern halves of the Plains states. Emporia displays all these attributes, just as the town's tale of birth, growth, and stagnation follows closely on that of its greater region. Emporia's journey to small city status mirrors the formation of the Great Plains Midwest, both thematically and temporally.

Regions are created and exist only within human minds. However, the processes that create regions, their environments, and those who inhabit them are observable. Though no residents of the Great Plains Midwest referred to their region as such, they believed the place where they lived was distinct. Emporia is but one city that contributed to this region's formation. But, it is representative of many cities that contributed to the changes that made this region unique. Regions may exist only in the mind, but they are manifested historically by the human activities that constitute them

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV

Master of Arts in History, Minor in Public History, 3.9 GPA

Fall 2022- Anticipated Spring 2024

University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

Bachelor of Arts in History and Secondary Social Studies Education, Minor in Geography, 3.66 GPA; Dean's List Fall and Spring Semesters 2019, 2020, and Spring 2021; Magna Cum Laude

Departmental Honors in History

August 2018- May 2022

TEACHING AND MENTORING EXPERIENCE

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, Teaching Assistant, August 2022- May 2024

WORK EXPERIENCE

University of Kentucky, Documenting Racial Violence in Kentucky Intern, September 2021-May 2022

Lombard Historical Society, Intern, June-August 2023

Bolingbrook Historic Preservation Commission, Intern, June-August 2023

Independent Historical Researcher, October 2023-Present

Journal of the West, Volunteer Reviewer, December 2023-Present

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Eagle Scout, Boy Scouts of America (2018)

KDP Education Honors Society (Inducted Fall of 2020)

University of Nevada, Las Vegas Department of History Tribute Scholarship (2023)

Western History Association Master's Research Panel Presenter (2023)

SKILLS

Proficient in CatelogIt and PastPerfect software