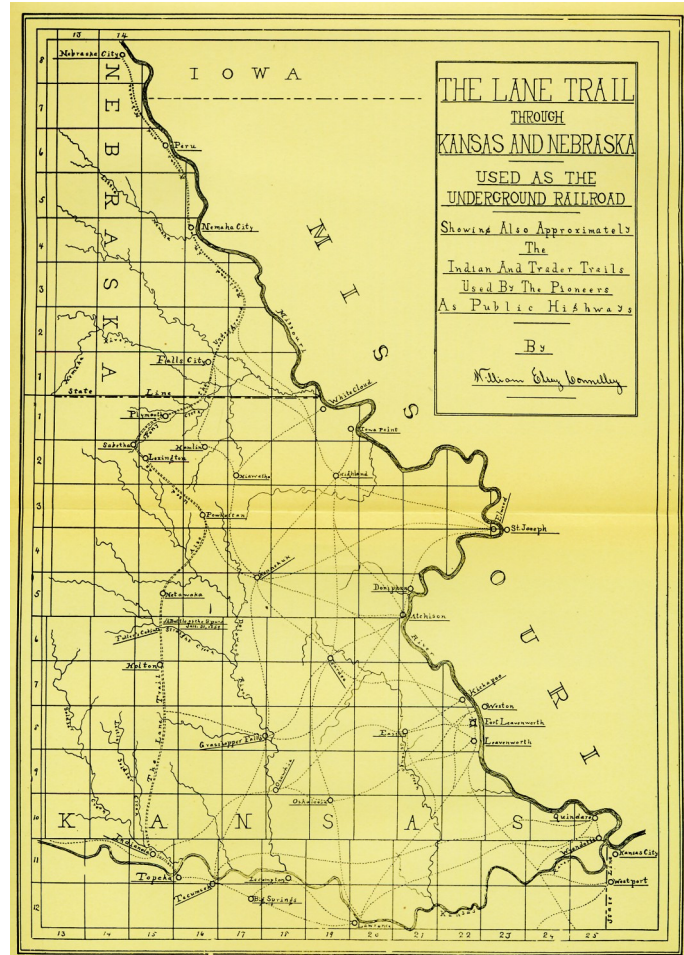


The Lane Trail and Underground Railroad through Kansas

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The Underground Railroad is thought to have existed in the United States as early as the 1700s. It reached its height of operation after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it a federal crime to aid escaping slaves. The Underground Railroad consisted of a series of “trails” with “stations,” or safe houses, that would provide food and shelter to escaping slaves and those who aided them. Operators of stations, or those who aided the escaping slaves, were called Conductors.

Escaping slaves from Missouri and points further south might enter Kansas territory at any of several points. Once in Kansas the problem became avoiding those who might wish to return them to slavery. Thus the Underground Railroad in Kansas evolved to transport the escaped slaves further north. A common destination after leaving Kansas was Canada, where not even the United States Government Fugitive Slave Laws could hinder them. In Kansas, it is said, the organization was known as League Number 40.



The usual journey through Kansas might usually involve the Lane Trail, which stretched from just north of Topeka to the Nebraska border 136 miles away. The Lane Trail had been laid out by James Lane in 1856 to bring abolitionist settlers into Kansas. Kansas was largely unsettled then and the way was marked by piles of rocks called "Lane's Chimneys" in Kansas. Stations and settlements grew up along the way to give protection and aid to the escaping slaves and those assisting them. As the accompanying map shows, the trail wound itself northeast toward Nebraska or southeast from Nebraska to Topeka.

Settlements and points on the Lane Trail in Kansas follow. They are listed in the order in which they might have been encountered in the 1856-1861 period if they had joined the Lane Trail in the Topeka area and proceeded north. The present-day county location is included in parentheses. Present-day US Highway 75, from Topeka to the Nebraska border, generally follows the old route of the Lane Trail.

Settlements along the Lane Trail

- Topeka (Shawnee)
- Indianola (Shawnee)
- Rochester (Shawnee) Southern terminus of Ft. Leavenworth and Ft. Riley Military Road
- Holton (Jackson) The present-day county seat. Originally settled by Free State men from Milwaukee.
- Fullers Cabin (Jackson) Albert Fuller conducted a Safe House here five miles north of Holton near the crossing of Straight Creek. Abolitionist John Brown spent his last night in Kansas here. Nearby occurred the famous Battle of the Spurs, where John Brown charged across a swollen Straight Creek and stampeded a federal posse without a shot being fired. A historical marker concerned with these activities is located at present-day US Highway and 286th Rd.
- Smiths Station (Brown)
- Netawaka (Jackson) Located on the central branch of the old Missouri Pacific line.
- Powhattan (Brown) Extreme southwest corner of the county. Named after the father of Pocahontas. (Not same as present-day town of Powhattan south of Hiawatha.)
- Lexington Station. (Nemaha) Conducted by E.P.Harris at a location two or three miles south of Sabetha. Not the same as present-day town of Lexington.
- Sabetha (Nemaha) Located on the St. Joseph and California Road.
- Plymouth (Brown) Southeast corner of county.
- Albany (Nemaha) Two miles north of Sabetha on the eastern edge of the county. Twelve or more abolitionist families from Painted Post and Castle Creek, NY settled here and aided the Lane Trail-Underground Railroad effort.

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