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Quindaro ruins
Photo Courtesy of USD #500

OLD QUINDARO

A Second Letter from Mrs. C.I.H. Nichols, Rich with Scraps of History and Anecdote.

Editor's Note: Clarina I.H. Nichols wrote two letters regarding antebellum (pre-Civil War) Quindaro, Kansas to the Wyandotte *Gazette* newspaper. They were divided into a four part series. This is Part II of the series. Part I was in the Wyandotte *Gazette* of March 31, 1882. Part III was in the Wyandotte *Gazette* of December 22, 1882. Part IV was in the Wyandotte *Gazette* of December 29, 1882.

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

FOR THE GAZETTE.

Dear old Quindaro, holding in thy ragged bluffs the open secret of disappointed ambitions, ruined fortunes and dismantled homes who that enjoyed thy bright, fresh morning and participated in thy waning fortunes, would forget thee? Who, of all thy strayed ones, would have thy later prosperity wipe out the remembrance of privations cheerfully shared, - of tender tones and kindly deeds, comforting in sorrows and brightening with hope of a happier to-morrow? Not one who had a friend in his great needs; not one whose small needs, in the day of thy deepest gloom, were sore enough to lighten lighten his heavy heart with gratitude for small favors. And yet I feel sure that not one of the old time castle-builders of that defunct city, would not rejoice to know that those old bluffs - consecrated by many a conquest for temperance and freedom - from which time and the elements and a thoughtless vandalism have removed many a once cherished land mark - were dotted with cottage homes and fruitful vineyards, orchards and gardens, as they surely will be in the thrifty future.

How we toiled up and down those side hill paths, till from the sheer force of habit we would fain have limped on the level highway. But many a brave deed was done there, and many a mean one circumvented, of which the world outside knew nought - many a deed that might "point a moral or adorn a tale" and reflect credit on actors who would perhaps blush to be called by name. And yet will not an old friend be tolerated in touching up the lights and shadows of that fading past by way of refreshment and in contrast with the self sustaining present prospertiy of the new Quindaro - the Quindaro so largely indebted for its bone, sinew, and soul to the dry-nursing of its cremated predecessor? Strange tales and homely - already forgotten by some and never known to the many, yet holding still-life pictures of sweet growths o'er bitter fountains trailed - are whispered by the evening breeze in the

moon-lit gorges of old Quindaro - tales that illustrate the rise and decadence of a city whose founders - his political antipodes - were aptly designated by a pro-slavery lawyer of Wyandotte, long since deceased, as the Philantropists of Quindaro."

Three well defined eras marked the brief existence of Quindaro on the bluffs. In the first era, like mushrooms in a spring rain, snug cottages and some stone castles rushed up at call of men who had come to stay. In the second, unlike the Arabs they left their tents and stole sorrowfully away. Its third and last estate, may be best and quickly told in the significant remark of our old friend Judge Nelson Cobb, now of Kansas City, who had just sold the flooring of the Quindaro House, the siding of which had been stolen little by little for kindlings - I asked the judge if he would sell me the chimney to brick up my cistern. With a twinkle in his eye he replied, "Yes, Mrs. Nichols, if you will steal it."

Doors, windows, casings, everything of its vacated tenements but their stone walls, was fast disappearing from the bluffs. To save a remnant of their property the owners were compelled to remove or sell for removal piece meal, all that could be put to use elsewhere. And so the surrounding country absorbed in its improvements, the depopulated city. What depopulated it? Not one cause but many had conspired to this end. The roughness of the town site and its approaches - too lightly estimated in the cost of building and leveling of the streets - was heavy tax both on the citizens and town company. The unsettled territory in its vicinity and its connections with the interior settlements by roads that encouraged profanity in impious teamsters and cruelty to their animals in pious ones - were serious obstacles to remunerative commerce in that direction, which only an increased population with developed industries could overcome; and for this redeeming future the almost bankrupt population of Quindaro could not wait.

We might have done better for ourselves, but for the menace of our political relations with the Missouri border - scowling on our front - which discouraged industrial ventures of a permanent class, while the value of our commercial relations in that direction was - not inaptly - represented in Mrs. W.-'s sales of the gatherings of her deserted hen's nests to the "the Quindaro Abolitionists." The early restoration of safe conduct to eastern emigration and freights through Missouri landings more acceptable to the settlements, removed the commercial necessity which first originated and then fostered the location as a Kansas river port for the immigration and trade of Free State settlers. The consequent decrease of business through its river connection, followed by the reaction of the money pressure in the east, arrested all business enterprise and forced the citizens to fall back on their reserve funds for subsistence. For such as had expended their all in laying the foundations for permanent residence, there seemed no solution of the situation, but a courageous retreat. And the stampede that marked this conclusion was an additional evidence of Yankee enterprise.

Notwithstanding all these embarrassments the new city might have bided for a time and eventually rounded into a quiet, unpretending and enjoyable maturity but for the unsettling fact of its contested land titles, which discouraged industries possible in the circumstances and suited to the location. With undisputed titles, owners of substantial homes would have improved their holdings for present support, adding the unoccupied lands as opportunity invited - ignoring air lines, bee lines and the suicidal angles of professional street engineers and accommodated public outlets and private inclosures to nature's suggestions; terracing and draping the steeps with

the graceful vine; planting the levels and slopes to vegetables, flowers and fruit - kindred and co-operative industries, - always on the look-out for an opening - would ultimately have contributed the exchanges and supplies of a thriving community. In a ten years occupancy, under great disadvantages and with only a limited area I proved the value of its northern exposure in the culture of fruit. Apples, peaches, cherries, currants, gooseberries and grapes, were never cut off by frost and produced in abundance. I will never cease to regret my Quindaro home, with its mingled memories and defeated possibilities. And I seldom think of it without a humorous reminder of an incident illustrating the rough-and-tumble conditions and grotesque social relations of that free territory experience.

One day in picking my way among the felled trees and rubbish which covered the town site. I came suddenly upon a new settler who was swearing and goading half a dozen yokes of oxen hitched to an immense log, which their non-cooperative efforts were unable to move. As he paused and turned on discovering me, I expressed a doubt as to the "orthodoxy of his cattle," which seemed utterly devoid of any wholesome fear of God or the devil. He broke out with the declaration that, "If it hadn't been for Mrs. Nichols he'd never have been there - that he had heard her lecture in his town, east, about Kansas being such a smooth, level country &c." I would have felt terribly humiliated as well as regretful, but for the humorous outlook or my responsibility in the matter of his choice - he having set his stakes on the ragged edge of the smoothest country in the Union. As he did not pull up stakes, but stayed and "made his pile" he has probably released me from the responsibility of his fortunate location.

My chapter - Mainly introductory - is already too long. Health permitting I will resume my collections of the early days of Kansas in better time.

Clarina I. H. Nichols.
Pomo, Cal. June 6th 1882.