

Wyandotte Gazette, December 22, 1882

MRS. C. I. H. NICHOL'S LETTER

Quindaro Continued



The "Brewery", 1932
Photo Courtesy of Kansan

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 III of the series. Part I was in the Wyandotte Gazette of March 31, 1882. Part II was in the Wyandotte Gazette of June 16, 1882. Part IV was in the Wyandotte Gazette of December 29, 1882.

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

What a blessed leveler is poverty to the vulgar demoralizing pride that seeks position through false pretence of superabundant means. In the impecuniosity of that grand collapse of the city of Quindaro, we extended our empty hands warm with human sympathy, and eyes smiled into eyes that lighted with a glad sense of brave companionship. No man or woman was ashamed to confess the honest shifts compelled by circumstances pressing alike on all. In that time of lean larders and collapsed purses, woman's wit and woman's thrift and sympathy were factors of some account in the general summing up. We counseled together in our straits; congratulated and imparted to each other the inventive skill which made the best of what we had - "made something out of nothing," as the saying is and trimmed it with our ingenuity, and were dimly conscious of enrichment in the growth of moral independence, and courageous endurance.

We of the feminine gender turned our Sunday skirts - frayed and faded - wrong side out and topside down. We repaired the masculine wardrobe; binding the worn cuffs and in the worn places of coat body and sleeves, inserting new; reseating the pants and cutting off and turning the legs before the knees quite came through, - thus saving the expense of a new outfit; I should have said averting the rags and nudity which befell many a scoffer at yankee economy. I have not forgotten that such repairing was not a new thing under the sun, and that it is still practiced, as I hope it will long be, by good housewives. Indeed I find it quite impossible to dissociate such repairs from good housewifery.

But not then, as in our "better days," were there better suits hanging in our closets to fall back upon for Sunday and holiday wear. Not now as then, when a citizen of the district is sent to represent his fellow citizens in the Legislature, does his clothing represent his wife's ability to make garments "good as new" of soiled and worn ones. Neighbor B--, firmer than the city bluffs which *could* cave upon occasion - would rather have gone coatless than to have appeared among his political compeers in a turned one. And I am not sure that discreet wife ever enlightened him as to the vest,

a fine cassimere that, turned, washed and pressed, completed his very respectable outfit for a place in that august body.

But scant as were our wardrobes, money in hand was equally rare as proved by our friend W.W.D.--, in his preparation to take neighbor B's place in the succeeding Legislature. His credit was good, as is always the case with those who make no debts to disappoint when pay day comes, - but not a man in all Quindaro could spare him the price of a stage ride to the Capital!

It was a genial face - it could in no circumstances have been otherwise - which met me in my kitchen the evening prior to his contemplated journey, and a somewhat embarrassed utterance that apologized for an "untimely call." He had been to every man where there was hope of raising the necessary three dollars, and his mother, as a last resort, had sent him to me. "She knew if Mrs. Nichols had it she would lend it to him." "O, woman, great is thy faith," said our Savior. And the faith may be great though the subject matter of it be ever so small. And it took the faith of two women in that day, to extract the last cent, though only three dollars, from a purse whose mains were all cut off. True indeed were they who could draw on my faith like W.W.D.-- then; and now, when two decades have passed, he and his are remembered as among the truest and best. It is in our need, whether of sympathy or counsel or means, that life long friendships are sealed.

I hardly need say that at this time, speculation which at an earlier day had made fortunes and sacrificed competence, was cornered; and without money nobody could "turn and honest penny," for credit there was none, and hands and brains were idle for lack of work that would command bread. There was demand; the difficulty was wherewith to pay. Another neighbor, had negotiated for a load of Col. Park's apples, which he would sell in Lawrence, if only he could borrow the purchase money. He had tried and failed. If I had it to spare till his return from Lawrence he would divide to me half his profits. I had become so accustomed - indeed so expectant of loss, that the suddenly presented idea of unearned gain was quite unsettling. So I substituted a trifling business commission and secured the enjoyment of my neighbor's successful venture.

But why am I telling these simple tales? Ah, tell me why memory has stored them among her treasures? -- why hung such simple pictures in the best light to catch the sunset glow? Perhaps because they are among the most satisfactory financial transactions of that sharp pioneer experience; or perhaps like halflights, they tone the shadows, and brighten the surroundings. In such trifles as these are chronicled the dead, financial calm of the two years immediately proceeding the winter of '62, when the 2d Kansas Regt. quartered in the vacated buildings among the bluffs, spiced with a pungent variety the outer and inner circles of Quindaro life.

'57 and '58, had been full of stirring interest for the immigrants. In the first of these years a hundred buildings - many of them of stone and brick - including hotels, Dry Goods, Hardware and Grocery stores, a Church and School house, had been built. Substantial private residences with cellars walled in cement, and conveniences of the eastern pattern, astonished our Missouri border neighbors.

The year '58, saw many substantial additions and improvements, notwithstanding the checks on business which had already made an impression on the more cautious and experienced of the population and decimated the speculators, whose funds and

victims were less ready to their hands. In all the excitement of changed conditions and inflated hopes, the great moral and social questions were not left in the rear.

Temperance and freedom eagle-eyed sentineled the town, and when either sounded its call, there was an immediate and effective rally. The town Company was pledged against liquor license; and that pledge had been the inducement to many immigrants, especially women to prefer the City on the Bluff to the more smooth inviting location of Wyandotte.

The first onslaught of the temperance police, if I recollect aright, was caused by vagaries of hidden whisky in the hollow west of the Quindaro House. Half a dozen women from that vicinity, led by Mrs. Hugh Gibbons, an intelligent Scotchwoman with whom my after acquaintance ripened into a warm and confidential friendship - entered a complaint at the Company's office, and were referred to me with the suggestion that a petition, regularly got up and presented to the Company, would receive immediate attention. The petition with some 30 names of women only, was formally presented, a meeting called, and before set of sun the obnoxious whisky barrel was hauled from beneath the owner's bed and spilled in the street gutter. Only toward its final breaking up was there any serious effect for the toleration of liquor saloons in Quindaro. Then a meeting was called, at which it transpired that certain empiries in council had decided on a whisky prescription, as a specific for the failing vitality of the doomed city. But all in vain. To its last expiring breath it was never so demented as to consent to the sale of intoxicating liquors within its corporate limits.