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Constitution Hall

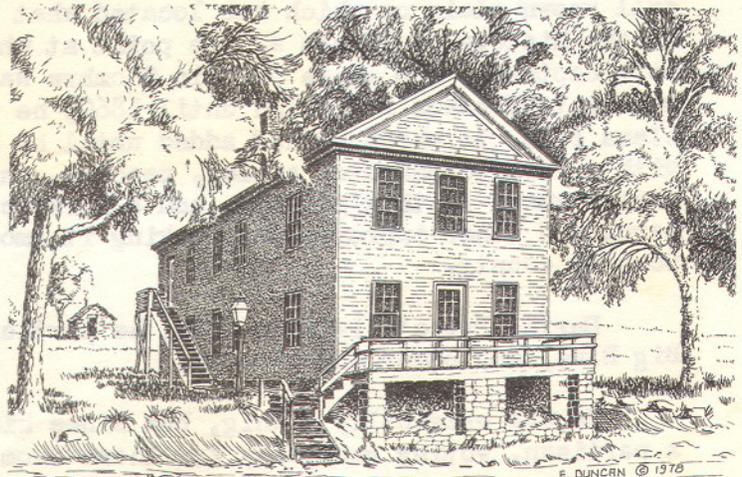
The Kansas Territorial government, unable to find suitable quarters in which to meet, contracted with Col. William Nace in 1855 to erect a building that would meet their needs in the new town of Lecompton, Kansas Territory. The contract stipulated that upon the completion of the building, Col. Nace was to be paid \$1,000 if it was occupied 40 days.

The legislature voted to make Lecompton the official capital of the territory, and also the seat of Douglas County. The building was occupied by the legislature and the territorial officers by 1856. After the freestate people became dominant in the territory, the legislature would convene annually at Lecompton, but immediately vote to re-convene in Lawrence. The county seat was also moved to Lawrence.

Constitution Hall was the site of the Lecompton Constitutional Convention. The convention was called for September, but as the delegates approached the meeting place, they were confronted by several hundred freestate people, led by James Lane. The delegates felt it was unsafe to enter the building, and as the U. S. Cavalry was no longer stationed near by, adjourned to meet in October when the U. S. Army would be available to protect them.

In October, the same delegates reassembled and John Calhoun, the territorial surveyor-general and friend of Abraham Lincoln, was elected chairman of the convention. The constitution was completed and was voted upon and accepted by the majority of the voters; the free state people refused to vote. It was then sent to Washington D. C. to be acted upon by Congress and the president. They were in favor of accepting it, but a report was circulated around Congress that the Kansas Territory vote was fraudulent. As a result, it was sent back to Kansas Territory to be re-submitted to the voters. This time all the people of the territory voted and it was turned down even though it was backed by the U. S. president and Congress.

After the legislature was moved from Lecompton, the furnishings were also moved, and tradition indicates that they were taken to Topeka and are now used in the Senate chamber, but the official documents support-



Constitution Hall Lecompton, Kansas

ing this have not been found.

Constitution Hall has been in continuous service since early 1856. It has housed the territorial legislature and officers, has been used as a dormitory by Lane University, has been a hotel managed by F. B. Hill and has been an apartment building. (Rev. M. T. Clark rented one of the apartments and used it as his family's first residence when he came here in the 1880's. In 1894 the International Order of Odd Fellows bought the building to use as its lodge hall. It is now owned by the Rebekah Lodge and is used when they, the IOOF and the Masons hold their regular meetings. It has been used as a federal, state and city polling place for as long as any local citizen can remember.

The building, for its age, 125 years is fairly well preserved and to Lecomptonites it is one of the most important relics of our period of momentary prominence. In 1975, the Hall was designated a National Historic Landmark, for being significant in the history of the United States. At that time there were only 16 such places in Kansas. The Hall is also on the National register of Historic Places. It is located on the town's main street and is easily viewed.

Written by Sara Walter

WILLIAM MCDOWELL NACE

Our subject who is mentioned as the builder of the Constitutional Hall in another article in this issue of the "Bald Eagle" was born September 19, 1826, in Buchanan, Botetourt county, Virginia, the son of William and Hester C. (Fringer) Nace and the grandson of John C. Nace.

His grandfather John C. Nace was a captain in the War of Independence, and his father, William was a soldier in the War of 1812. Both of them were prominent Virginia farmers. His mother was a well educated, intelligent Christian woman and a member of the Presbyterian church, in which her husband was a ruling elder for many years.

William Nace, our subject, was educated in the schools of Buchanan. In 1848 he entered wholesale grocery and commission house at Richmond, Virginia, where he remained seven years. In 1856, at the solicitation of Honorable Daniel Woodson, secretary of the Territory, he removed to Kansas. On his arrival here, he was at once appointed private secretary to Daniel Woodson, acting governor. As member of the Governor's staff, he was given the rank of colonel, and continued to hold the same rank under the Hugh S. Walsh administration. In the fall of 1856, he purchased from Colonel H. T. Titus the well known claim on which was located what was known as Fort Titus, celebrated in the history of Kansas as the point at which Titus and other pro-slavery men were captured, and where Captain Shombre was killed. While he served as secretary to Woodson and Walsh until 1860, he improved his claim, making a first-class farm, to which he had added until he had six hundred and forty acres--- with a large orchard of apples, peaches, cherries, and all other kinds of fruits known in this climate, and a first-class dwelling, houses for tenants, barns and other improvements, making it among the best homes and farms in Douglas county.

During Price's raid in 1864, he participated in the battles of Westport, Big Blue, and other engagements.

He was originally a Whig, but since his advent into Kansas he was never a partisan, voting generally for those whom he considered the best man.

Mr. Nace always took an active part in the affairs of his times, and at different times held various positions of trust, among them being on the school board for almost a score of years and serving two terms as county commissioner and held the office of township trustee of Lecompton township for four years.

He was reared in the Presbyterian faith. Although never a member of any religious organization, he has always contributed liberally to churches, Sunday schools and religious enterprises generally.

He was married at Lecompton, September 29, 1859 to Miss Mary Amelia Hickox, daughter of Daniel and Polly A. (Yates) Hickox; Mr. Hickox, formerly a prominent member of the New York legislature. Mrs. Mary A. Nace was born December 3, 1844 in Olean, Cattaraugus County, New York and came to Kansas when but a child. She died September 14, 1907. Both are buried in the cemetery west of Lecompton, known as the Maple Grove Cemetery. Their children were William M. Jr., John Palmer, Susie, Mary H., Frederick Henry and Ruth.

Colonel Nace passed away, October 2, 1908 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Leamer. He was remembered for his fifty years of neighborly kindness, his gentlemanly manners, his hospitality, his good cheer, his usefulness as a citizen those many years. He was an old time settler who had served our community and helped make Lecompton a surviving city today.

"The above information taken from the United States Biography Dictionary and news articles from the Lecompton Sun. There are still Nace descendants living in Kansas at this writing." Submitted by—Iona Spencer

Excerpt from Bob Steinmetz" column "Somethin" which appeared in the July 30th issue of the Boynton Beach, Florida NEWS JOURNAL, entitled "No disappointment in going home"

"Last week we got a big kick out of attending our Aunt and Uncle David and Margaret Noe's 50th Wedding Anniversary in Lecompton, Kan. They didn't know we were coming and the look on their faces when we walked into city hall was worth driving to Kansas for.

They say you can never go home. More than 40 years had passed since I had enjoyed a carefree Huck Finn-like youth growing up in the small (200 pop.) village of Lecompton. I fished in the Kaw River, watched the Santa Fe railroad trains go through, rode my sled down the big hill in the center of town and enjoyed it. I didn't figure anyone would remember me after all these years, but surprisingly many did. There were even two of my former grade school teachers in attendance. . . Helen Norwood and Daisy Wingfield.

The old town is very proud of its heritage. Lecompton was the first state capitol of Kansas in 1856. The Historical Society is restoring Lane University to its once proud place in the community. Hundreds of old timers came up to me and said, "You remember me." I usually didn't remember their names, but the faces still looked familiar.

Two older ladies kept looking at me, but kept their distances. Finally, after everyone else had said their "hellos" they approached me. Their names were Opal and Mary Nell Laswell, very pretty sisters. But their remembrance of me was a bit shocking.

"You're the little boy who locked us in the outhouse," they said, smiling. "If it hadn't been for your Aunt Pauline being with us and crawling out the window, we'd still be in there. In fact we have modern plumbing in Lecompton today, but that outhouse is still standing." They waved vaguely toward a nearby yard."

You see, you can go home and it's nice to be remembered in your old home town!"

BALL POINT PENS FOR SALE! And such a bargain -- either 25¢ each or 5 for \$1.00. They come in red, blue, beige or white, and the best part is that they are souvenirs of our Lane project -- and says so in gold lettering

LANE UNIVERSITY
Historic Site - Lecompton, Kansas
1865 -- 1882 -- 1982

Get your order in now, and don't forget your friends and relatives! We have only 1,000 and, of course, any profit goes to the Lane project. Call 887-6431 or write Box 13, Lecompton, Kansas 66050

Now is the time to start thinking about plans to attend the DEDICATION OF LANE UNIVERSITY ceremony on June 26 1982. This ceremony will be coordinated with the festivities of the annual Territorial Day celebration, and will be the culmination of over ten years "labor of love" by Historical Society members. We'll be keeping you informed on events of that day in future "Bald Eagle" issues.

Mrs. Dorothy Baughman has donated a church hymnal titled "Gospel Hymns", dated 1894. On the inside cover the following wording is stamped, "Property of Lane University May 1896". This book belonged to Mrs. Baughman's family members who attended Lane University. We would like to thank Mrs. Baughman for her thoughtful donation.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley French recently donated a complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica to Lane University. The set is titled "A Dictionary of Arts Sciences and General Literature", Ninth Edition. Publication date is 1874. The books originally were property of Stanley's parents, Mr. and Mrs. John French. This will be a great addition to the Historical Library of Lane. We would like to thank Mr. and Mrs. French for their generous donation.

At the Societies' July meeting members were pleasantly surprised with a gift which was presented by Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Holderman. (Mrs. Holderman's maiden name was Mae Everett; Mae attended school in Lecompton.) The gift was a tinted print beautifully framed of the "New Capitol of Kansas, at Lecompton, City." Also beautifully framed, attached with gold chains to the picture is Maturin M. Ballou's description of "view of this fine building". Mr. Ballou was editor and publisher of Ballou's Pictorial. This handsomely framed edition of the Capitol of Kansas as it would have been will be on display when Lane University building is re-dedicated. Thank you Alden and Mae!

OUR CITY

Lecompton is one of the many places in our land that carries with the mention of its name, recollections of severe struggles that were a part of the work necessary to political progression, and is this instance to the liberation of a race long held in bondage. What Lecompton has been in the past is well known. Perhaps it would be equally interesting to know what it is to-day.

For this purpose we started out last Monday evening to view the ground, and take an inventory of its contents.

First we went down to the College Hotel on Elmore street, where we found Mr. and Mrs. Head entertaining their guests, and providing for their refreshment by a good supper. We were invited to partake of the meal, and were truly sorry that a previous engagement of like nature prevented.

Next up the street is the Monitor office which we passed and came to the Post Office. Mrs. Connell is the Post-mistress and her obliging and courteous management of the business has won the esteem of all in our vicinity. In addition to the office, Mrs. Connell keeps a select stock of Stationery, Groceries, Candies &c.

The next building is the Meat Market, which is under the supervision of J. A. Reeder, who knows just what to furnish the eating populace in the way of meats. J. A. is also proprietor of a grist mill just west of town, where he keeps meal, chop &c, at the lowest market price.

Next in order is the Millinery store of Mrs. L. A. Pierce, who has a good and well selected stock. Right here we might say that anyone in search of a bargain in the line of Millinery Goods will do well to call, as Mrs. Peirce is closing out her stock of summer goods at very low rates.

Next we found Quin and Sid and Asa, of the firm of F. B. Hill & Co., dealing out Lumber, Drugs and Groceries at a very rapid rate. They are all "jolly good fellows" as their increasing trade indicates.

R. M. Lowe occupies the next building with his stock of smoker's articles. He has a fair trade, considering our nonmetropolitan little city. Here too, is the city barber, Mr. J. S. Tipton, who does honor to his profession by giving the sleekest of shaves and the smoothest of cuts. Mr. Cook occupies a room in the rear of the building, where he keeps "pegging away" at his vocation, viz: to keep our foot-gear in good condition.

We next come to the large and well arranged store of Wm. Leamer. Mr. Leamer is our oldest merchant, having located here in the days of "Bleeding Kansas". He understands well the demands of his customers, and is much better prepared to supply them than many suppose. That he has not labored in vain, his many friends and acquaintances will testify.

Kauffman Brothers come next in order. They have a restaurant and ice-cream parlor, that would not be at all discreditable to a much larger city. We remember having seen many a band of revelers partaking of the goodies found there.

Our old friend, Geo. Seecrist, has a meat market next door, where at stated periods, anything in his line may be found.

Our obliging merchant, Mr. O. H. Graham, holds forth on the corner of Elmore street and Woodson Avenue. He deals on the cash plan and gives his customers the benefit of the system.

Just opposit is the shoe shop of Mr. Mayswinkle, who does all kinds of repairing in his line.

Dr. B. H. Leslie keeps a large and well assorted line of Drugs, just across Woodson avenue, south of Graham's. Here you may find everything from a tooth brush to a dose of Ipecac.

Two blocks west of Leslie's on the north side of Woodson avenue is the Blacksmith shop of R. Sulzen. When you want your plows sharpened call on Bob.

In the north-east part of town near the railroads is the Lecompton Elevator and Chop Mill under the supervision of C. O. Brown. Farmers may here dispose of their grain at prices considerably higher than Lawrence market quotations.

The Santa Fe is represented on our town by Mr. T. W. Pate, who will sell you a ticket to any part of the United States, should you so desire after seeing Lecompton.

In the eastern part of our town on what was to be the foundation of the Capitol building of Kansas, stands the building of Lane University, erected four years ago. The University is presided over by Rev. S. B. Ervin, an alumnus of Hartsville University. This school is Lecompton's principal enterprise, and a better place for the correct training of the youthful mind could not well be found.

With none of the vices so prevalent in our large cities, with its good society and wholesome moral influences, Lecompton has advantages which wealth cannot procure, nor learning invent. Add to these our healthy location and railway connection with larger cities, we may predict a prosperous future for Lecompton as a seat of learning.

We have the usual number of tradesmen and professionals, (some of which advertise in our columns,) and a community of upright and honest citizens.

Our town is growing rapidly, and, with what is not a mere mushroom growth, but steady advancement in wealth.

Should anyone in the crowded east desire to go west and "grow up with the country," no better place can be found for a quiet home and a pleasant old age, than Lecompton.

"The above taken from the Lecompton Monitor-July 2, 1885-Editor-T. G. Robison"

THE LECOMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecompton, Kansas 66050 is a Non-profit corporation for the preservation of Historic Sites. We are eager for continued membership and new members!

Individual membership is \$2.50 per year, from December to December. Life membership is \$50 per individual. Contributions are tax deductible. Checks should be made payable to the Lecompton Historical Society, and mailed to Miss Jeri Skinner, Secretary, Box 56, Lecompton, Kansas 66050.

(Please clip and mail with your check)

\$2.50 Annual Individual Member _____ \$50 Individual Life member _____
Other contribution _____

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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