[In Progress] Kansas history: a journal of the central plains

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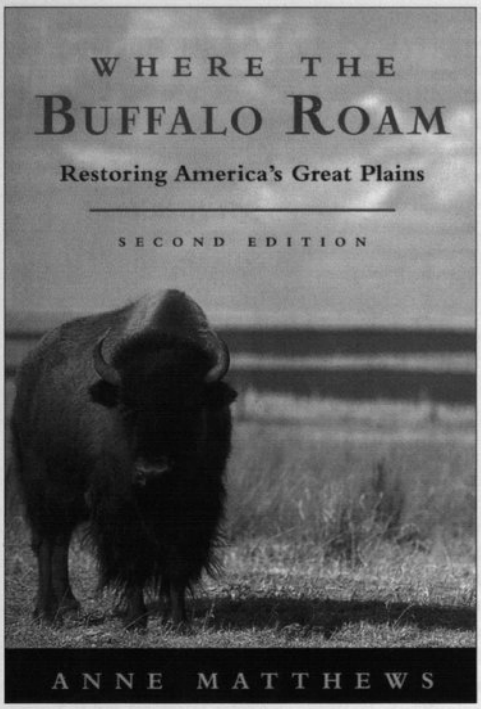


Where the Buffalo Roam *traces the work of Frank and Deborah Popper, whose analysis of the population decline on the plains initially was met with criticism by Kansans and other plains people who felt their way of life was being attacked.*

likely would be necessary, and suggested that the government might want to purchase marginal cropland and convert it to grass. None of this seemed particularly controversial, but after a series of newspaper articles, Kansans and other plains people came to view the study as an attack on their way of life. This, in turn, prompted letters to editors, town meetings, and legislative debate.[28]

After the initial vitriol, people realized that serious discussion about their future was badly needed. Denial that they had any problems gave way to thoughtful assessment and then to well-conceived proposals for action. School consolidation, long a taboo subject, was openly debated, for example, alongside alternatives such as long-distance learning via satellite and Internet courses. Business people began to find better ways to utilize the work ethic and company loyalty of local laborers, while farmers considered niche marketing techniques and other value-added production. Rural people also began to pay more attention to The Land Institute in Salina. There Wes Jackson has been developing strategies for sustainable agriculture in the region, including the creation of perennial grains.[29]

Debate about the plains has now spilled beyond economic issues. People have noticed, for example, the uncomplimentary nature of the widely used words "treeless" and "semiarid." Why define this landscape in terms so negative and so obviously formulated by outsiders? Why not stress instead the glories of low humidity, clear-blue skies, and lush grasslands (and perhaps pity life in muggy, gray-skied, and prairieless places such as Pennsylvania and Virginia)? The aesthetics of the Great Plains environment also is being rethought. Many long-term residents truly love the region's open spaces, but have lacked words to counter the outsider's frequent judgment of them as empty and lonely. New articulations now appear regularly to an enthusiastic audience. They emphasize how plains life can cause the mind to soar and egos to melt away, creating a powerful, spiritual experience that some call prairie zen.[30]

Variations on Kansas

Outside observers, perhaps influenced by the straight lines that form most of the state's political boundary, have always found it easy to generalize about Kansas. Local writers sometimes do the same, but people who know the region

28. Deborah E. Popper and Frank J. Popper, "The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust," *Planning* 53 (December 1987): 12–18. The best discussion of reactions to the Poppers' ideas is Anne Matthews, *Where the Buffalo Roam: The Storm over the Revolutionary Plan to Restore America's Great Plains* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992).

29. John Grossman, "Tapping the Work Ethic in Fading Rural Towns," *New York Times*, November 1, 2004, C2. The literature on the Land Institute is large, but a good place to begin is Wes Jackson, *New Roots for Agriculture* (Berkeley: North Point Press, 1980).

30. Neil Evernden, "Beauty and Nothingness: Prairie as Failed Resource," *Landscape* 27, no. 3 (1983): 1–8; Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1993); Cary W. de Wit, "Sense of Place on the American High Plains," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1997).

well see another scale of place images. This latter group perceive that western Kansas and western Kansans differ in important ways from their counterparts in the east. Such writers also believe that the Flint Hills and southeastern Kansas are worlds unto themselves and that, on a smaller scale, the same can be said for Douglas, Ellis, Geary, Johnson, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte Counties, for the Mennonite-dominated area in and near Newton, and for the packing towns of Dodge City, Garden City, and Liberal.

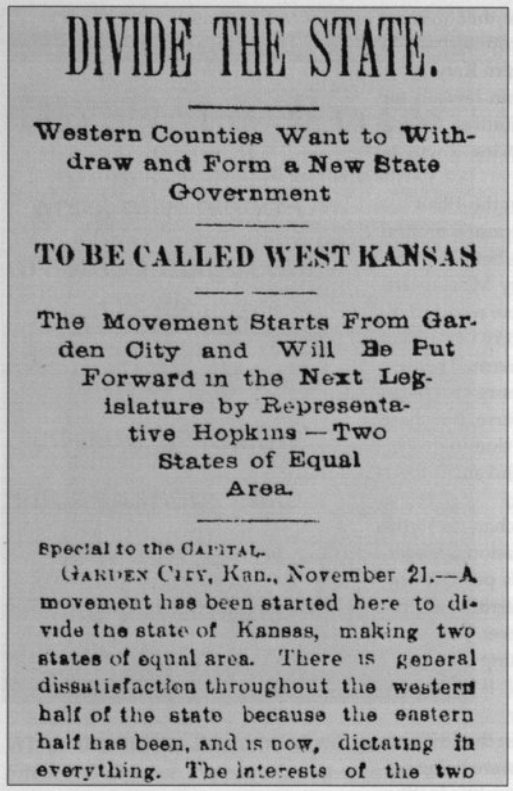
As I discussed at the beginning of this essay, tension existed in the 1850s between eastern Kansans and those in the territory's western gold camps around Denver. People in 1855 and 1856 discerned even greater differences between free-state advocates clustered in Lawrence and Topeka and proslavery Missourians who dominated Atchison and Fort Scott. Both of these disputes were resolved by 1859, however. Then, from that time until the early 1890s, nearly every writer saw the new state's culture as largely homogeneous. The presence of German settlers along the Santa Fe's tracks and of mixed ethnic groups in the Pittsburg coal fields and the packing houses of Armourdale was acknowledged, of course, but these things were portrayed as small irregularities in a state character dominated by former Union soldiers who were building up quality farmsteads and small-town businesses.

People who know the region perceive that western Kansas and western Kansans differ in important ways from their counterparts in the east.

The drought decade of the 1890s brought in its wake major changes to the state's perceptual map. Kansans who wrote articles intended for national readership attempted a balancing act. Not wanting to tarnish their state's positive reputation, they continued to stress that this was "the most fertile territory on the globe." Needing to acknowledge the reality of the drought, however, they carefully added that this fertility consisted of two equal parts: the farming country of eastern Kansas and a west that, "although deficient in moisture, . . . is a Paradise for stockmen."[31]

The difference perceived between eastern and western Kansas in the 1890s actually ran much deeper than corn versus cattle. As the High Plains were being settled in the previous two decades, people there realized that major public institutions were all hundreds of miles distant from them. They felt that residents of the older counties dictated policy statewide, but did not understand High Plains needs. Western Kansas was vibrant, they said, eastern Kansas stodgy, and the best thing to do was to create a new state. The spirit of secession peaked in November 1892 after a series of editorials in the *Garden City Herald*. One supporter, railroad commissioner Albert Greene of Cedar Vale, argued that eastern Kansans were "tenacious of the old idea that the historical part of the state is all there is to it." Western plains counties had to develop "in spite of" and even "in defiance of" this condescending attitude. William R. Hopkins, the state representative from Garden City, added that a new state of West Kansas might include not only all the counties eastward through the tier from Smith to Barber, but also No-Man's Land (i. e., the Oklahoma panhandle) and parts of eastern Colorado.[32]

31. White, "Kansas: Its Present and its Future," 81; Taylor, "In Defence of Kansas," 352.
32. Information on the West Kansas statehood movement is in *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 22–27, 1892; for Albert Greene quotations, *see* ibid., November 23, 1892; for William Hopkins's views, *see* ibid., November 24, 1892.



DIVIDE THE STATE.

Western Counties Want to Withdraw and Form a New State Government

TO BE CALLED WEST KANSAS

The Movement Starts From Garden City and Will Be Put Forward in the Next Legislature by Representative Hopkins — Two States of Equal Area.

Special to the CAPITAL.

GARDEN CITY, Kan., November 21.—A movement has been started here to divide the state of Kansas, making two states of equal area. There is general dissatisfaction throughout the western half of the state because the eastern half has been, and is now, dictating in everything. The interests of the two

As the western part of the state became more populated in the 1890s, residents there believed the policymakers of eastern Kansas did not understand High Plains needs. A movement to split the state peaked following a series of articles in a Garden City newspaper. Above is one such article reprinted in the Topeka Daily Capital, *November 22, 1892.*

Although the rhetoric of the statehood movement employed such flowery statements as "an energetic people . . . absolutely one in interest and sentiment," the driving issue was a perceived difference in agricultural needs. Drought had convinced Garden City residents that a system of irrigation canals and reservoirs made sense. When they tried to secure public financing for such projects, however, they found little sympathy in the legislature and assertions that the state constitution prohibited appropriations for such internal improvements. Some of the legislators had legitimate financial concerns, of course, but others did not want to imagine western Kansas as fundamentally different from the east. Secessionist talk ebbed away partly because private canal companies entered the scene and partly because continuing drought made western counties heavily dependent on state aid.[33]

With its relatively dry climate, low population density, unique agricultural economy, and high rates of church membership, the High Plains today is clearly distinctive within Kansas. The area's separateness also extends to perceptual matters. Residents remain distrustful of people in Kansas City, Lawrence, and Topeka who they see as unsympathetic to their situation. A study in 1992 concluded that westerners felt "neglected by the government, looked down upon by the cities, and ridiculed by everyone." The truth of these words was revealed later that year when state legislators passed a new formula for school financing that blatantly penalized districts in southwestern Kansas. The result was another secessionist movement. People in nine counties went so far as to approve nonbinding referenda to that end. With other sympathizers, they also threatened to withhold tax money until the grievances were addressed.[34]

Although residents of the Flint Hills have never lobbied for political independence, outside observers perceive a regional identity there nearly as strong as that on the High Plains. This upland, whose core extends south from Marshall to Butler and Greenwood Counties, is not particularly unusual in rock types or topography. Its alternating beds of limestone and shale exhibit only slightly more relief than similar formations to the east and west. Instead, the special feel comes from grass and cattle. The Flint Hills is an island of ranching set in the midst of farming country. As such, its streams are clear and its vistas wide. Regional awareness is also helped by a location near the population centers of Topeka and Wichita, beautiful views from the Kansas Turnpike, and the recent creation of the Tallgrass Prairie Nation-

33. Ibid., November 23, 1892.

34. Paul E. Phillips, "An Assessment of the Validity of an East–West Cultural Dichotomy for Kansas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1977); Cary W. de Wit, "Sense of Place on the Kansas High Plains" (master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1992); Peter J. McCormick, "The 1992 Secession Movement in Southwest Kansas," *Great Plains Quarterly* 15 (Fall 1995): 247–58.

al Preserve in Chase County. A survey in 1980 found the Flint Hills "by far the most strongly perceived regional label in Kansas," with the twin towns of Cottonwood Falls and Strong City its self-proclaimed "heart" and nearby Emporia its "front porch."[35]

Ethnicity accounts for the distinctiveness commonly asserted for two other rural areas. In the 1870s and 1880s parts of Butler, Harvey, Marion, McPherson, and Reno Counties became home to about fifteen thousand ethnic Germans who had been living for several generations in Russia. These immigrants and their descendents adapted well to the American economic system, but their Mennonite faith keeps them somewhat apart on cultural matters. Three denominational colleges in the region are visible markers of the group. Subtler, but still much discussed differentiation comes from traditions of modest living, pacifism, and service to people in need.[36]

A second highly visible ethnic cluster exists in southeastern Kansas. It came about in the 1875–1910 period when coal companies in Cherokee and Crawford Counties recruited some ten thousand laborers from Belgium, France, Italy, Slovenia, and elsewhere. Miners ensconced in a land of farmers were reason enough for notoriety. Ethnic food customs (including a taste for wine in prohibition-minded Kansas) provided additional attention as did tendencies to vote Democratic and join trade unions. During a labor dispute in the 1910s, Governor Walter R. Stubbs said the area reminded him of the European Balkans. The label stuck. Local people see the name as a badge of pride, a tribute not only to their ethnic heritage, but also to the longtime industrial character of their area.[37]

Some of the strongest regional images within Kansas today involve cities. This phenomenon is selective rather than universal, as people tend to see the cultures of Hutchinson, Salina, Topeka, Wichita, and other sizeable places as little different from their surrounding countrysides. The sharpest social divide in the state occurs in the Kansas City metropolitan area. There Johnson County epitomizes upper-middle-class suburbia while adjacent Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, are known for ethnic diversity and blue-collar employment. In a state where small towns and agriculture form the stereotype, Kansans see both counties as exceptional.

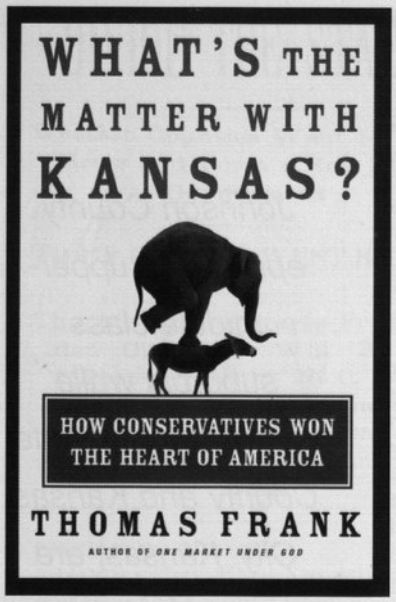
Kansas City, Kansas, was a creation of railroad and packinghouse entrepreneurs. African American, Croatian, German, Irish, Mexican, and other workers soon clustered near the shops and plants, and their descendents remain to assemble automobiles in the Fairfax Industrial District. Along with Democratic politics, kinship systems are strong in this city, something quite unusual for a community of 150,000 people. Johnson County is often said to be the creation of one man, J. C. Nichols. Seeking land to develop about 1910, he found prices cheaper

Johnson County epitomizes upper-middle-class suburbia while adjacent Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, are known for ethnic diversity and blue-collar employment.

35. James R. Shortridge, "Vernacular Regions in Kansas," *American Studies* 21 (Spring 1980): 73–94, quotation on 83.

36. James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 99–104; Steven V. Foulke, "Shaping of Place: Mennonitism in South-Central Kansas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1998.

37. William E. Powell, "European Settlement in the Cherokee–Crawford Coal Field of Southeastern Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 41 (Summer 1975): 150–65; Patrick G. O'Brien and Kenneth J. Peake, *Kansas Bootleggers* (Manhattan: Sunflower University Press, 1991); Amy L. Rork, "Sense of Place in Montgomery County, Kansas: Perceptions of an Industrialized Rural Area" (master's thesis, University of Kansas, 1997).



Perceptions of Kansas continue to make the news. Thomas Frank's 2004 work (above) contends that the "averageness" of Kansans make them a symbol for "squareness."

in Kansas than Missouri. He initially built a cluster of luxury homes called Mission Hills, gambling that other people would want to live near the wealthy. Today's Johnson County shows that he was right. A 1980 survey of regional images produced the labels "suburbia," "rich," and "snob hill" for Overland Park and its neighboring communities. Writer Richard Rhodes added the epithet "cupcake land" in 1987. All these terms remain in common use.[38]

Two more cities with well-defined images lie near Kansas City. Just to the north is Leavenworth, a community closely associated with its military base. For more than a century now Fort Leavenworth has been a prized posting for army officers, a place for advanced training in command and military strategy. For most civilians, however, this glory has been overshadowed since 1927 by the creation of a maximum-security federal penitentiary. The city is now so synonymous with the prison that the local chamber of commerce uses "The Great Escape" as its tourist slogan and is unhappy about a recent decision to lower the security level to medium. Twenty-five miles west of Kansas City is Lawrence, home to the University of Kansas. The university's image, always elitist, has become more so in recent decades. Some people now see Lawrence as an extension of Johnson County, but this view is belied by the city's voting record as the most liberal in the state.

Outstate Kansas contains five communities widely recognized for special peoples and values. One, ethnically diverse Junction City, is the state's second military town. Fort Riley trains enlisted men rather than officers. Its soldiers are younger than those at Fort Leavenworth and more likely to be single. Because of this, Junction City's public image has long been associated with illegal liquor and prostitution along with motorcycle shops and other youth-oriented businesses.

Ethnicity underpins the uniqueness of four western cities. Hays and surrounding Ellis County are home to descendents of several thousand Russian–German Catholics. Assimilation over the past century has been more complete than for their Mennonite counterparts around Newton, but Hays still typically joins Lawrence and Kansas City as the only places in the state to consistently vote Democratic. Newer cultural diversity exists in Dodge City, Garden City, and Liberal. The rise of major packinghouses there in the 1970s led to recruitment of labor from Viet Nam and then Mexico. Then, as immigrant numbers and job turnover rates both grew large, so did media coverage. This publicity, good and bad, has created strong local images for outside consumption. Longtime area residents enjoy the restaurants and shops opened by their new neighbors, but worry about strains being placed on school and social-service budgets.

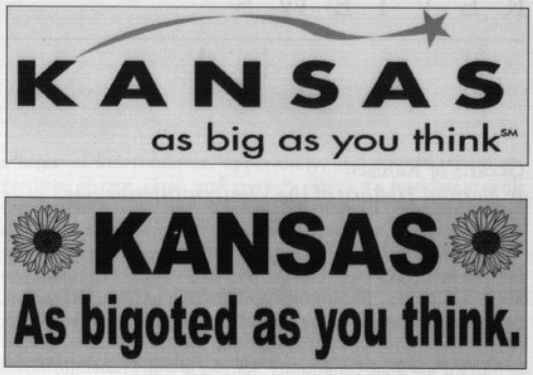
Coda

As I write this essay, cultural conceptions of Kansas are again in the news via a popular new book by Thomas Frank and a major advertising campaign by the state government. Both take as their starting points a symbolism that hovers midway between positive and negative. According to the state's marketing survey,

38. Shortridge, "Vernacular Regions in Kansas," 77, 89-90; Richard Rhodes, "Cupcake Land: Requiem for the Midwest in the Key of Vanilla," *Harper's Magazine* 275 (November 1987): 51–57.

Kansas is "not sexy or chic." Instead, asserts Frank, this is "a guileless, straight-talking truth-place where people are unaffected, genuine, and attuned to the rhythms of the universe." Both assessments are consistent with my arguments here.[39]

As the two studies expand from their common base, they suggest future directions for Kansas imagery. Frank is a pessimist, contending that the "averageness" of Kansans necessarily makes them a symbol for "squareness" and a group that can be duped by skilled politicians into voting against their own economic interests. The government's promotional people are more positive, of course. They claim that their new slogan—"As Big as You Think"—connotes "wide-open vistas and limitless potential." To the extent that the word "think" will help residents interpret their state for themselves instead of listening so much to outside critics, the campaign may turn out to be a cultural and economic success. Already the skeptics are active, however. They suggest alternative mottos such as "Kansas: Even Flatter than You Think" and (in a nod to Mr. Frank) "Kansas: As Liberal as You Think."[40]



The state's "positive image" slogan claims Kansas is wide open with limitless potential. It, however, leaves itself wide open to spinoff mottos spotlighting Kansas's extreme conservative attitudes.

Because images necessarily have at least some basis in fact, any Kansas Cassandra must keep in mind that the state will not be able to exchange its modest topography for mountains or beaches, or its relatively rural setting for subways and skyscrapers. These circumstances actually bode well for the future, however. Outsiders and residents alike, as I have argued above, show increasing appreciation for prairie landscapes and uncrowded conditions.

Cultural attitudes of local residents constitute another part of the image equation. The recent record here is not as good, at least when one focuses on how these thoughts and sentiments are perceived by people elsewhere. Media coverage currently associates Kansas with a series of extremist conservative views: the ongoing tirade of Fred Phelps against gay rights, challenges to science education by the state school board, and a legislative refusal to fund public education adequately without judicial coercion. So long as conservative political attitudes increase in strength nationally, Kansans may gain credibility for their extremist position. This is a dangerous situation, however. A swing of the national pendulum even slightly back toward the left will isolate the state more than does its rurality. As Kansans struggle to find their way in this postmodern world, I submit that their best motto is still the one from 1861—"Ad Astra per Aspera." The "aspera" in the twenty-first century, however, are more attitudinal than environmental.

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39. David Klepper, "Sunflower State, Meet Your Slogan," *Kansas City Star*, January 6, 2005, A1, A4; Thomas Frank, *"What's the Matter with Kansas?": How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), quotation on 28–29.

40. Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, 30; "Kansas: As &%$@*! as You Think," *Kansas City Star*, January 7, 2005, E1.

REVIEWS

Oceans of Kansas: A Natural History of the Western Interior Sea

by Michael J. Everhart

xiv + 322 pages, photographs, drawings, notes, index. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, cloth $39.95.

In the geologic community, Kansas is well known for fossils of marine vertebrates from the chalk beds out west: big sharks, fierce swimming reptiles, giant fish, turtles the size of a Volkswagen, delicate flying pteranodons with the wingspan of a small airplane. Their fossils are displayed in museums throughout the world, including the Smithsonian Institution and the American Museum of Natural History, and in the natural history museums of Kansas. These fossils are more than just crowd pleasers. They are scientifically important. The first fossils of toothed birds came from Kansas. Many of these marine vertebrates were first identified shortly after the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, helping give a sense of the diverse life produced by evolution.

In spite of that, there are few comprehensive, accessible publications about fossil vertebrates from the Kansas chalk. Michael Everhart's *Oceans of Kansas* brings together an incredible amount of information about Kansas fossils from the Cretaceous Period about eighty-five million years ago, when dinosaurs walked the land and the western part of the state was covered by a shallow sea. He describes these Cretaceous animals in detail—what they looked like, the things they ate, where they lived, and their fossil remains.

This explanation can, at times, be detailed and technical, as Everhart discusses each species of each animal. I am not a paleontologist, so I won't attempt to judge this aspect of the book.

However, Everhart (an adjunct curator at the Sternberg Museum in Hays) takes care to aim at a broader audience, providing the kind of background and definitions that make the book understandable to almost anyone with some basic scientific knowledge. In that, he succeeds. The book also succeeds, in part, because Everhart draws on his own extensive experiences in the chalk beds. He gives a blow-by-blow account, for example, of the recovery of a pteranodon. Fossil collecting may sound romantic, but it is time consuming, physically demanding work.

Everhart's stories help readers understand the time, sweat, and just plain luck involved in finding fossils in the chalk beds. Readers of *Kansas History* will appreciate the depiction of the early days of fossil collecting on the Plains. The first big Kansas vertebrate was uncovered in 1867 by the post surgeon (with th wonderful name of Theophilus Turner) at Fort Wallace. Everhart discusses the nineteenth-century scientists, such as E. D. Cope, O. C. Marsh, B. F. Mudge, and S. W. Williston, who found and identified incredible amounts of material. By 1884 Yale's Peabody Museum had more than six hundred pteranodon specimens from the chalk beds. As late as the 1980s packages of fossils that Mudge sent to Yale still sat unopened, awaiting study. In the twentieth century these marine fossils have received perhaps less attention, maybe in part because of the public's fascination with dinosaurs. Everhart correctly credits more recent workers in the Kansas chalk, including J. D. Stewart, Larry Martin, Chris Bennett, the Sternbergs, and the Bonners.

This book is nicely illustrated, with plenty of photographs of fossils and drawings of the animals they represent. In particular, the color plates by Dan Varner help people visualize many of these animals that no human ever laid eyes on. That may be the ultimate value of Everhart's book. He makes real a strange, fantastic world that no person ever saw. He has carefully compiled information about some of the most scientifically significant objects and events in Kansas history. I might quibble a little with the book's subtitle (*A Natural History of the Western Interior Sea*) because this is mainly a book about fossils.

I've long thought that the distinction between human history and natural history is an artificial construct. To understand today's world, we need to study all of the past, not just those times when people were present. Paleontology is a historical science, and *Oceans of Kansas* is a much-needed depiction of an incredible chapter in Kansas history.

Reviewed by Rex Buchanan, *associate director for public outreach, Kansas Geological Survey, University of Kansas.*

Exploding the Western: Myths of Empire on the Postmodern Frontier

by Sara L. Spurgeon

x + 168 pages, notes, index.
College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005, cloth $40.00, paper $17.95.

Sara Spurgeon, an assistant professor of English at Texas Tech University, shares her passion for regional literature in this brief book. In a literary sense, writes Spurgeon, telling stories about the American frontier "allows us to continually reimagine how multiple cultures should coexist, how humans should interact with nature, what we should think and how we should feel about our history and our future" (p. ix). She considers the way recent fiction elevates the drama of the West on a grander scale and scope. Moreover, she interrogates the texts that challenge and accommodate fluid and even dangerous borderlands. Influenced by the scholarship of Richard Slotkin and Annette Kolodny, she discovers fresh meanings in familiar narratives about horses, hunting, captivity, and combat. Even if the imagery of John Wayne no longer "holds water" in the western, she explains how and why the frontier continues to function as a compelling myth.

Spurgeon offers a critical interpretation of the western today, assessing its power and presence in shaping the life, thoughts, and politics of the country that first produced it. Her objective is "to trace the development of various forms of the frontier myth in the works of three contemporary writers," although she suggests that her main themes apply to other texts (p. 3). She focuses on novels by Cormac McCarthy, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Ana Castillo, whose diverse writings tend to illustrate the extent to which the regional literature has become linked to the ongoing manifestations of imperialism and globalization. Spurgeon treats them as "representative authors," who speak from multiple sides of the experience of conquest and colonization. She dedicates three chapters to McCarthy and two to Silko, but scrutinizes Castillo in only one. She ignores several relevant studies of the field, most notably Michael L. Johnson's *The New Westers* (1996). Regrettably, her limited body of research cannot support all of her sweeping claims about the frontier myth.

Nevertheless, Spurgeon creatively deconstructs a postmodern frontier made of words. Full of romance and tragedy, the western gives new vitality to an American hero with a thousand faces. Indeed, he/she battles not only against Apache warriors or Mexican bandits but also, in the latest version of the epic struggle, Arab terrorists and Muslim extremists. Whatever the gathering threats, Spurgeon accentuates the challenge to obtain a sense of independence, opportunity, and empowerment regardless of race, class, and gender. America's fascination with the frontier has become "a fascination with its own Otherness," she concludes, "an acknowledgement of the powerful zones within and against which identities are defined, cultures and communities created and perpetuated" (p. 122). Her textual analysis is brisk but not for the casual reader.

To her credit, Spurgeon locates an enduring symbol of the frontier at El Morrfi, New Mexico. There, a towering rock marks the birthplace of writings that indicate languages other than English, perspectives other than European, and legends other than urban. With sophistication and sensitivity, she explores this contested ground between the "Old West" and an "American Empire." In contrast to new western historians who call the frontier the "f-word," she unearths what makes the western good, bad, and not so ugly. For the literary critic, the current versions of "cowboys and Indians" brilliantly illuminate the complex relationships between culture, memory, and myth. In this respect, westerners should tip their ten-gallon hats to Spurgeon.

Reviewed by Brad D. Lookingbill, *associate professor of history, Columbia College of Missouri.*

On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment

by Geoff Cunfer

xii + 240, appendix, notes, bibliography, index.
College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005, paper $28.00; cloth $55.00.

Until quite recently, Geoff Cunfer argues, historians have lacked the means to explain how Plains farmers "negotiated a living with the great uncaring forces of climate, soil, water, and living things" (p. 5). During the past thirty years, however, satellite cameras yoked to computers have demonstrated that "farmers maintained stable land-use patterns that fit the environment by periodically changing the ways they farmed to fit changed circumstances" (p. 7).

This important book offers a frankly revisionist interpretation of the years since 1870, when Americans farmers began plowing under the grass from the Texas Panhandle to the Dakota Badlands. By overlaying GIS maps atop agricultural census re-

turns and individual farmer case-studies, Cunfer brings methodological verve to one of environmental and agricultural history's central problems: "describing how people intersected natural processes and diverted them, directly or indirectly, to accomplish human purposes" (p. 3).

Cunfer focuses on "North America's middle ground, . . . where people and natural systems interact in complex, evolving, interwoven ways," to test Aldo Leopold's insight "that people are fully part of the natural world, not conquerors or even benevolent rulers of nature" (p. 232, 234). By inflecting natural science with new work by European historical geographers, Cunfer hopes to point the way "toward a better understanding of human interaction with agroecosystems" (p. xi).

The importance and freshness of *On the Great Plains* impel a careful look at its more sweeping conclusions. Cunfer's provocative reading of data and his challenge to consensus surely will cause some readers to splutter in their coffee while others dislocate their elbows patting themselves on the back. "Most environmental historians . . . and most environmental activists," misled by New Deal polemicists and their own "declensionist" sympathies, have gotten the main story about Plains agriculture dead wrong (p. 9, 10). Far from a ravaged Dust Bowl, its bewildered conquerors lurching from one crisis they caused to another they deserved, Cunfer's Great Plains retain some 70 percent of their native prairie, "a reservoir of natural diversity that coexists with the modern agricultural system" (p. 8). After 1920 "the patterns of crop and pasture have been so consistent across time and space . . . that it is not unreasonable to label American agriculture in the plains sustainable" (p. 5).

Cunfer revives arguments first advanced by James Malin in the 1940s. He celebrates American farmers' capacity to adapt creatively to novel challenges. Mistakes they made aplenty, especially during the sod-busting spasm in the 1920s that over-extended many farmers when regular droughts and heat waves recurred. By 1940, however, capitalist agriculture had sorted out the most sustainable mix between intensive plowing and extensive grazing. "Between 1925 and 1940," Cunfer argues, "farmers experienced a transition era in which they reached the natural limits of their new home, exceeded those limits temporarily, then settled into an equilibrium of land use that varied only slightly for the next sixty years" (p. 24–25).

He acknowledges the depression years handled some people roughly. Many lacked capital to endure the dry years by introducing new technology, especially the first irrigation pumps. Others lacked sophistication to build alliances between their bankers and federal agents bringing new infusions of cash in the form of price supports. Cunfer's deft use of farm diaries and records illuminates why transient small-holders, like the DeLoaches of Crosby County, and more substantial capitalists, like the Floyd County Holmeses, traced such different adaptive trajectories during the "transition era" on the Texas Panhandle.

On the Great Plains delivers much good material about subjects too little studied, such as crop diversity, grazing ecology, and fertilizer-soil chemistry. But Cunfer's scrutiny of farmers' land-use raises two problems he neither satisfactorily solves nor fully acknowledges. First, by paring the cast of agents who changed the Plains to farmers and ranchers, he neglects powerful forces unleashed by institutions that loaned money, invented machinery, and manufactured food for distant consumers. Landowners do not stand proxy for the region's human diversity. Other Plains people inhabited those "thousands of churches closed, schools consolidated, and communities dispersed during the twentieth century" (p. 7). Nor does land ownership, analyzed at farm-level or regionally, fully define Plains agriculture's myriad connections to global markets and state actors.

Secondly, Cunfer owes huge debts to science's methods, but *On the Great Plains* verges perilously close to lawyers' techniques, eliding unhelpful evidence and dismissing contrary implications. Central to his ecological claim that Plains agriculture has preserved a "reservoir of natural diversity" is the 270 million acres of "native prairie" revealed by GIS maps. Yet plowing, which Cunfer terms "the ecological equivalent of genocide," has reduced much of the prairie's "native plants and complex ecosystems" to remnants "along field edges, on hilltops, in creek valleys, and in stretches of pasture where soils are unsuited to cropping" (p. 8, 16). Those same maps purportedly show a steady 70/30 ratio between pasture and cropland after 1940 (p. 37), but in Rooks County, Kansas—"representative of the Great Plains as a whole"—Cunfer has adopted a generous definition of "native prairie" (p. 19). Fully 61 percent of its sod had been broken by 1940 (Appendix 1, p. 254) and Cunfer's emblematic Plains farm family, the Bartholomews, had plowed 66 percent of their Rooks County acreage (p. 18).

Since he admits what every range scientist knows, that "nature is changed, surely, by the effects of grazing," Cunfer reaches his sustainable equilibrium by creatively counting once-plowed and now-grazed land as "native prairie" (p. 7).

Cunfer's occasional diffidence about using scientific evidence and demographic data still warm from the printer does not disguise *On the Great Plains*' head-on challenge to the standard historical account of capitalist agriculture's explosion onto the grasslands.

Reviewed by Karl Brooks, *assistant professor of history and environmental studies, University of Kansas.*

[In Progress] Kansas history: a journal of the central plains

Bleed, Blister, and Purge: A History of Medicine on the American Frontier

by Volney Steele

v + 392 pages, photographs, glossary, notes, bibliography, index.
Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 2005, paper $15.00.

Illness was no respecter of persons on the American frontier. Although frequently overlooked by both traditional and "new west" historians, medical care was nevertheless the great leveler in western society and the doctor's office a melting pot for all peoples regardless of race, class, or gender. This volume, written by a physician who plied his skills in Montana for almost three decades, provides insights into the wide range of individuals who sought medical treatment in the nineteenth-century West. The author, the son of a pioneer doctor in pre-World War II Arkansas, builds his thesis around the more humanitarian and frequently more effective treatment provided by Indian and Chinese doctors compared with the "technology" driven Anglo American practitioners. While admitting that doctors trained in Eastern medical schools had reason to place confidence in "bleeding, blistering, and purging" their patients, Steele points out that Indian medicine's emphasis on diet, rest, and personal attention frequently was more effective in restoring health than were the invasive techniques offered by Anglo doctors.

Organized into two parts, the author first presents a summary of medical care as practiced by the Indians before the Europeans came to this continent. He follows that segment with a traditional "frontier" sweep of westward expansion from the Lewis and Clark Expedition to homesteaders on the Great Plains. Interspersed between the explorers and farmers are a series of issues concerning the "Mountain Men," migrants on the western trails, Argonauts, surgeons with the United States Army, and two segments on folk medicine and charlatans. The author also devotes space to the role female physicians played in the West. As with political activities, the author finds that medicine provided females greater opportunities in the West than their counterparts had in eastern states.

Part two of the book is concerned with public health and health education, including nursing, on the frontier. Military hospitals and army surgeons often were the first medical institutions in a western community and provided primary care for both the military and civilian populations. Mining camps, the most urbanized regions in a vast rural landscape, also offered physicians an early start in their medical careers. Mining towns, hastily constructed and almost as quickly abandoned in some cases, were ideal environments for contagious diseases that frequently evolved into epidemics. The author points out that the West frequently served as a training ground for novice physicians to gain practical experience for their recently completed medical school training. While westerners were patient and willing to give young doctors time to learn on the job, too many "mistakes" sometimes led to a doctor being forced "out of town." Older doctors too, if addicted to alcohol or vice or having fraudulent credentials, frequently were encouraged to "move on."

The text is largely a popular account, with little analysis of the narrative. The author does, however, provide lengthy endnotes for each chapter and an extended bibliography. The book also contains numerous pictures of both individuals and institutions, has a limited number of charts and tables, and a sizeable list of "granny remedies." Steele greatly admires the more humane, less invasive, treatments offered by Native American "medicine men" and shaman. He faults Anglo doctors with having too much confidence in "old medicine" even as evidence was mounting that "bleeding, blistering and purging" did more harm than good to patients. The text is relatively free of historical errors—at least that the reviewer found, but frequently is marred by repetition in the narrative. The repetitive segments are no doubt due to the thematic, rather than, chronological, format for the book.

This volume does not have specific data on Kansas, however, it provides the reader with a general overview of the Trans-Mississippi West and the fortitude required for frontier doctors to practice in such an environment.

Reviewed by C. Fred Williams, *professor of history, University of Arkansas at Little Rock.*

Collapse at Meuse–Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division

by Robert H. Ferrell

xi + 160 pages, maps, notes, essay on sources, index. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004, cloth $29.95.

Robert H. Ferrell, for many years a prolific scholar of American foreign relations, has during the past decade shifted focus to the era of World War I and in particular the military history of that regrettably underexplored conflict. Following a broad narrative of the "Great War" for the New American Nation Series, Ferrell has published two fascinating soldier diaries, *A Youth in the Meuse-Argonne: A Memoir, 1917–1918* (2000) and *Meuse-Argonne Diary: A Division Commander in World War I* (2004), and currently he is working on a comprehensive study of the Meuse–Argonne campaign for the University Press of Kansas.

Collapse at Meuse-Argonne offers an assessment of one aspect of that complex offensive: the struggle between the largest component of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) to take the field and the battered but still powerful German forces defending the Allied advance toward the Meuse River and then toward Germany. Ferrell's purpose, set forth in the preface to this slim volume, was to understand how and why the "high-minded, hardworking group" that comprised the Thirty-fifth Division—a group that included such future notables as Captain Harry S. Truman, Major Bennett Champ Clark (later U.S. senator from Missouri), and the division's Red Cross representative and future governor of Kansas, Henry J. Allen—not merely failed to achieve its assigned mission but indeed underwent what was termed at the time a total military collapse. After modest advances from its start point on September 26, 1918, and having suffered tremendous casualties, the Thirty-fifth was withdrawn from the line after only five days in action. This study makes clear that failure in the Meuse–Argonne was not limited to the Thirty-fifth: the men of the Kansas–Mission Division. Indeed, the AEF as a whole was woefully unprepared for the challenges of the fall of 1918. While the author's assessment of the Thirty-fifth's capabilities and performance of necessity offers brief discussions of a number of questions—prewar training, officer selection, coordination with other arms, for example—he provides trenchant analyses (and numerous fascinating anecdotes) about such matters as divisional leadership, the regular army's scorn for the National Guard, and the failure of higher commanders to prepare the units thrown into the Meuse–Argonne battles for the radically changed tactical situation they would experience.

Of particular interest is Ferrell's reconstruction of the controversy that developed even before war's end between critics of the Thirty-fifth and its defenders, including Harry S. Truman, who was so enraged about the insufferable elitism of West Point-educated officers that he entertained the idea of abolishing the U.S. Military Academy. Making excellent use of materials buried for many decades in the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, National Archives documents (in particular, a diatribe against the Thirty-fifth Division's performance written immediately after its was withdrawn from the front) and personal papers, Ferrell demonstrates how little was learned from the difficulties of 1918. *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne* makes a strong case for "what might have been" had the men of the Thirty-fifth been given the training and leadership they deserved.

Reviewed by Theodore A. Wilson, *professor of history, University of Kansas.*

[In Progress] Kansas history: a journal of the central plains

What's the Matter with Kansas?
How Conservatives Won the Heart of America

by Thomas Frank

x + 306 pages, illustration, notes, index.
New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004, cloth $24.00.

What do Hurricane Katrina and the disaster in New Orleans, the constitutional amendment in Kansas to prohibit gay marriage, the breakdown in funding public schools in Kansas, the debate over evolution in Kansas public schools, the conviction of David Wittig, and budget shortfalls in the state of Kansas all have in common? On the surface it would seem little if anything, but a reading of Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas* shows how all of these can be threaded together. Frank provides a hard hitting critique of contemporary Kansas by juxtaposing it with a Kansas of the past. According to his own web-site biography, he was "born on the wild plains of Kansas . . . [where] he pulled himself up by his bootstraps, learned to read, write, and cipher. He likes big steaks, bar-b-que, and most other meat dishes." But actually, as he points out in his book, he is a native of Mission Hills, received a degree from the University of Kansas, and moved to Chicago where he felt more at ease.

Frank places an ironic twist on William Allen White's denunciation of 1890s Populism. He, too, castigates Kansas populism, but a contemporary populism that stands in mirror image to its venerable predecessor. Frank actually holds in high esteem the Populism castigated by White. Old time Populism was, according to Frank, an economic moral movement that challenged the authority and actions of rich, corporate America in the 1890s. Contemporary populism in Kansas, Frank argues, has lost its class moorings and has replaced those ideals completely with a moral agenda that works against its own economic interests. He calls this the "Great Backlash," a social movement that corporate Republicans have learned to ride into political and economic power.

If describing current events, he would say that while Kansans voted to protect marriage, their representatives lowered corporate taxation and thereby reduced the income flow into the state treasury. While the state school board debated the theory of evolution, the supreme court ordered the legislature to fund public schools at an "appropriate" level as legislative leaders claimed there was no money in the state treasury to do so. At the same time, while small family farmers lost their livelihoods in ever growing numbers, David Wittig, the former CEO of Westar, the state's energy conglomerate, is convicted on multiple counts of wire fraud and money laundering. The rich grow richer while the poor become more numerous, sight unseen, until a hurricane blows back the curtains to reveal them. This is the essence of his book, and he sharply questions whether this politics of morality is truly Christian.

But it's not only the conservative Republicans who he lambastes. The "New Democrats" come into their fair share of criticism too. Frank believes they have turned their backs on working Americans and instead place an emphasis on the technology economy and free trade treaties such as NAFTA

Frank, in the time honored tradition of Kansas criticism, uses the state as a barometer of the nation. In his conclusion, he asserts: "Behold the political alignment that Kansas is pioneering for us all. . . . The state watches impotently as [popular] culture, beamed in from the coasts, becomes coarser and more offensive by the year. Kansas aches for revenge. . . . Kansas screams for the heads of the liberal elite. Kansas comes running to the polling place. And Kansas cuts those rock stars' taxes." Will the moral politics of Kansas ever have a chance in redeeming this mess? According to Frank, not so long as the people who cause it to worsen grow wealthier and wealthier. Frank holds up a mirror to the state, and what we have to answer is whether or not it is an accurate reflection. If so, we have much to change.

Reviewed by James E. Sherow, *associate professor of history, Kansas State University.*

Peacekeeping on the Plains: Army Operations in Bleeding Kansas

by Tony R. Mullis

xvii + 250 pages, photographs, illustrations, maps, selected bibliography, index.
Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004, cloth $44.95.

The 150th anniversary of Kansas Territory prompted an outpouring of books marking "Bleeding Kansas" and the coming of the Civil War. Considering the importance of the United States Army in the settlement and pacification of Kansas during these years, a full-length manuscript on its role is long overdue. Tony Mullis, author of two excellent articles on the army's role in the 1856 territorial election, attempts to do just this with *Peacekeeping on the Plains*.

The premise of this book is solid, and the author's intent of "correcting the omissions associated with the army's role" (p. 4) is admirable. Chapter one explains the expectations held by the government and civilians for the army in territorial Kansas, ranging from the pacification of American Indians to intervening between rival civilian factions. This chapter also clearly explains the constitutional basis for using the army in law enforcement and peacekeeping operations. Chapters three and four cover General Harney's 1855 Sioux expedition and how it fits into the peacekeeping framework. Mullis does a wonderful job explaining the logistical nightmare of campaigning on the Plains in chapter three, and chapter four succinctly details the power struggle between the War Department and the Interior Department over managing the post-campaign peace. However, there is little on the campaign itself, so readers will have to go back to Robert Utley's *Frontiersmen in Blue* for details.

Chapters five through eight focus on the army as peacekeeper in Kansas Territory, and Mullis argues that the Civil War would have erupted four years earlier if the army did not stop the bleeding in Kansas. He discusses the military role in both promoting and preventing land speculation—officers actively participated, and civilians got mad when they were prevented from speculating. Mullis explains in laymen's terms the operational limits of the territorial army, how the command and communication structure complicated efforts by the government to have the army carry out its political goals. This discussion is important to understand the events of 1855–1856 and is absent in earlier books on the period. Mullis details from a command and operational perspective events such as Colonel Sumner's dispersal of the free-state legislature, Colonel Cooke's preventing the destruction of Lecompton by free-state forces, and his and Governor Geary's preventing an attack on Lawrence by invading Missourians. The military analysis of the time period is sound and extensive.

Peacekeeping on the Plains has flaws as well. First is Mullis's consistent pro-Southern tone. Mullis defends President Pierce and his appointments, ignores the excesses of proslavery judges and early violence against Northerners attempting to arrive in Kansas, and refers to "free state offensives" and the terror spread by General Lane but never uses such terms to describe the acts of proslavery activists. After reading Mullis's *Kansas History* article, "The Dispersal of the Topeka Legislature: A Look at Command and Control (C2) During Bleeding Kansas," chapter two is a great disappointment, with dated political interpretations of the period and one-sided perspectives.

Some research shortcomings can be found here. Mullis misses most of the research on the Harney campaign and instead relies almost exclusively on the Winship report. He places great faith in presidential addresses and speeches as accurate barometers of the administration's views and plans, even if made years earlier. He continually refers to President Pierce's inaugural message as the key to government actions in Kansas three years later. There is no attempt to examine other correspondence that would apply, whether Pierce's, Jefferson Davis's, or anyone else's. Since Davis was secretary of war at the time, his papers would be useful. Mullis also quotes Fort Leavenworth historian Elvid Hunt that contemporary army views of the conflict in Kansas do not exist, but William Skelton and others have managed to locate them. Finally, arbitrarily declaring that Bleeding Kansas ended in 1856 does not make it so. The army's role diminished over the next few years, but the violence and bloodshed did not disappear.

In the end, this book is an important addition to the literature on Bleeding Kansas, but it should not be the final word on the army's role in the territory.

Reviewed by William D. Young, *professor of history, Maple Woods Community College, Kansas City, Missouri.*

All Aboard for Santa Fe: Railway Promotion of the Southwest, 1890s to the 1930s

by Victoria E. Dye

163 pages, notes, appendices, bibliography, index.
University of New Mexico Press, 2005, cloth $24.95.

The focus of this modest book is how the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (Santa Fe) Railway promoted tourism in the American Southwest, centering on the small state capital city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and to a lesser degree on Albuquerque. This transcontinental carrier, no different from other railroads in the trans-Chicago West, vigorously boomed geographical wonders and cultural sites that tourists would enjoy and remember for a lifetime. But the Santa Fe story possessed unusual, if not unique, dimensions. The railroad worked closely with the Fred Harvey Company, whose famed dining and hotel accommodations sprang up along Santa Fe rails in the 1870s to exploit the commercial potential of New Mexico. The popular "Indian Detours" tours of the 1920s, which allowed sightseers to explore by coordinated rail and bus service the Puye and Cicuye pueblos, and other area attractions, did much to make the New Mexico capital famous and beloved as a vacation destination.

In various ways *All Aboard for Santa Fe* is a disappointing book. The author repeatedly fails to place the Santa Fe, New Mexico, saga in proper historical context. She has missed several important works, including Keith L. Bryant's masterful *Culture in the American Southwest: The Earth, the Sky and the People* (2001). Moreover, this book contains a host of major and minor errors, including incorrect railroad names and inaccurate historical references. It becomes readily apparent that the author is well versed in neither transportation nor western history.

Still, the subject is worthy of serious attention. The effective inclusion of Santa Fe railway pamphlets adds to an understanding of the company's tireless promotion of its service territory, including the New Mexico capital. Indeed, the author contends, that "by the early 1930s the Santa Fe Railroad [*sic*] had already put Santa Fe on the map as a tourist destination, and it can be argued that it was the marketing efforts of the railroad that set the stage for subsequent growth for tourism in Santa Fe (p. 54). Some readers may find the seven appendices of value, particularly "Brochures by the AT&SF and the Fred Harvey Company" and "Santa Fe Curio Shop Listings, 1900 to 1940." And most everyone will appreciate the numerous illustrations.

Reviewed by H. Roger Grant, *professor emeritus, Clemson University.*

BOOK NOTES

Santa Fe Locomotive 132: A Q-125 Remembrance of the "Cyrus K. Holliday." By Richard E. Scholz, edited by Larry E. Brasher. (David City, Neb.: South Platte Press, 2005. 56 pages, paper $19.95.)

Readers of *Kansas History* and members of the Kansas State Historical Society will be especially interested in this attractive little publication, which tells the fascinating story of the 125-year-old locomotive. Now, of course, the centerpiece of the Kansas Museum of History's permanent exhibits gallery, the *Cyrus K. Holliday* has had a long and storied career, and many wonderful photographs, including several that capture the 1980s restoration project, here enhance its narrative history.

The Union on Trial: The Political Journals of William Barclay Napton, 1829–1883. Edited by Christopher Phillips and Jason L. Pendleton. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. xx + 631 pages, cloth $49.95.)

A journalist, lawyer, and justice on the state supreme court of Missouri when secession and war rocked the nation in 1860-1861, William Barclay Napton left an impressive historical paper trail, a portion of which is expertly edited here (excerpts from five bound journal volumes; unfortunately, a sixth volume covering 1858–1862 was destroyed) with an emphasis on the antebellum and Civil War years. This impressive volume begins with a fine seventy-seven-page biographical essay, and the subsequent journal material contains much of interest to readers of *Kansas History*. As early as May 1857, for example, Napton laments the probability that Kansas "is destined to be a free state," a development that he fears could easily cause "the hemp growers and the tobacco planters in the central counties [to] take alarm and gradually retire to the South and Missouri stand alongside of Illinois and Kansas as a free state."

Nebraska: An Illustrated History, Second Edition. By Frederick C. Luebke. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xxiv + 416 pages, paper $24.95.)

First published a decade ago, *Nebraska: An Illustrated History* is now available as a handsome paperback, revised and updated by its author, the noted University of Nebraska historian Frederick C. Luebke, Charles J. Mach Distinguished Professor Emeritus. This Bison Books edition contains five maps and 286 black and white photographs, mostly from the rich collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity. By Paul A. Johnsgard. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xxiii + 402 pages, paper $17.95.)

University of Nebraska professor of biology emeritus Paul Johnsgard first published *The Nature of Nebraska*, which introduces the reader to Nebraska's "incredible biodiversity," in 2001. This Bison Books edition contains the original fifty-six useful illustrations of the region's flora and fauna and fourteen maps. Professor Johnsgard is the author of many other books, including the recently published *Prairie Dog Empire: A Saga of the Shortgrass Prairie* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

Impertinences: Selected Writings of Elia Peattie, a Journalist in the Gilded Age. Edited by Susanne George Bloomfield. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xx + 335 pages, paper $20.00.)

A prolific writer of editorials, columns, and short stories, Elia Peattie (1862–1935) spent nearly a decade (1888–1896) in Omaha, Nebraska, raising a family and contributing to the *Omaha World-Herald*—these writings, on political, social, and cultural issues and subjects, are the main focus of *Impertinences*. The editor, Susanne George Bloomfield, a professor of English at the University of Nebraska, also offers an interesting biography of Peattie and an extensive bibliography of her published work.

Historical Gazetteer of the United State. By Paul T. Hellmann. (New York: Taylor & Francis/Routeledge, 2004. xvii + 865 pages, index, cloth $150.00.)

The "vital statistics" and some historical facts about all fifty states, and many of their larger cities and towns as well as the District of Columbia, are presented in this large reference volume. In the fifteen pages devoted to Kansas, one will discover that the Kansas Pacific reached Abilene in 1867, northeast of El Dorado a lake of the same name was built in 1981, Jetmore originally was named "Buckner," the Franklin County courthouse was built in Ottawa in 1893, and Yates Center was incorporated as a city in 1884.

Along the Edge of Daylight: Photographic Travels from Nebraska and the Great Plains. By Georg Joutras. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 144 pages, cloth $45.00.)

All residents and would-be residents of the Great Plains, whether or not they happen to be from Nebraska, will easily identify with and delight in this collection of 117 color landscape and wildlife portraits by Lincoln photographer Georg Joutras. It is "a portfolio of photographs taken over the last two decade" that captures the region's beauty and, writes Joutras, "celebrate the magnificence of the earth, the rejuvenating calm and serenity of the wilds, the unique and interesting behavior of nature's creatures, and the pristine places that have experienced limited interaction with civilization."

The Real Calvin Coolidge #18. By Jerry L. Wallace and the Coolidge Memorial Foundation. (Plymouth Notch, Vt.: Coolidge Memorial Foundation, 2005. 64 pages, paper $6.00.)

The eighteenth issue in the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation's publication series is mostly devoted to historian Jerry L. Wallace's description of Vice President (later president) Coolidge's involvement with Kansas City's Liberty Memorial, a monument dedicated to the veterans of the Great War. Coolidge was in Kansas City for the site dedication, November 1, 1921, and for the memorial's dedication on laying of the cornerstone on November 11, 1926.

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

THE SOCIETY was organized by Kansas newspaper editors and publishers in 1875 and soon became the official trustee for the state's historical collections. Since that time the Society has operated both as a nonprofit membership organization and as a specially recognized society supported by appropriations from the state of Kansas. A one-hundred-two-member board of directors (three of whom are appointed by the governor), through its executive committee, governs the state Society, which is administered by an executive director.

The mission of the Kansas State Historical Society is to identify, collect, preserve, interpret, and disseminate materials and information pertaining to Kansas history in order to assist the public in understanding and appreciating their Kansas heritage and how it relates to their lives. This is accomplished through educational and cultural programs, the provision of research services, and the protection of historic properties. The Society operates the Center for Historical Research, the Kansas Museum of History, the Koch Industries Education Center, and the Stach School in west Topeka, and sixteen historic sites throughout the state.

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Kansas History is published quarterly by the Kansas State Historical Society, Inc., and contains scholarly articles, edited documents, and other materials that contribute to an understanding of the history and cultural heritage of Kansas and the Central Plains. Political, social, intellectual, cultural, economic, and institutional histories are welcome, as are biographical and historiographical interpretations and studies of archeology, the built environment, and material culture. Articles emphasizing visual documentation, exceptional reminiscences, and autobiographical writings also are considered for publication. Genealogical studies generally are not accepted.

Manuscripts are evaluated anonymously by appropriate scholars who determine the suitability for publication based on the manuscript's originality, quality of research, significance, and presentation, among other factors. Previously published articles or manuscripts that are being considered for publication elsewhere will not be considered. The editors reserve the right to make changes in accepted articles and will consult with authors regarding such. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements of fact or opinion made by contributors.

Kansas History follows the *Chicago Manual of Style*, published by the University of Chicago Press (15th ed., rev., 2003). A style sheet, which includes a detailed explanation of the editorial policy, is available on request. Articles appearing in *Kansas History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life*. The journal is available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The Edgar Langsdorf Award for Excellence in Writing, which includes a plaque and an honorarium of two hundred dollars, is awarded each year for the best article published by *Kansas History*.

The editor welcomes letters responding to any of the articles published in this journal. With the correspondent's permission, those that contribute substantively to the scholarly dialogue by offering new insights or historical information may be published. All comments or editorial queries should be addressed to Virgil W. Dean, editor, *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS 66615-1099; 785-272-8681, ext. 274; e-mail: vdean@kshs.org.

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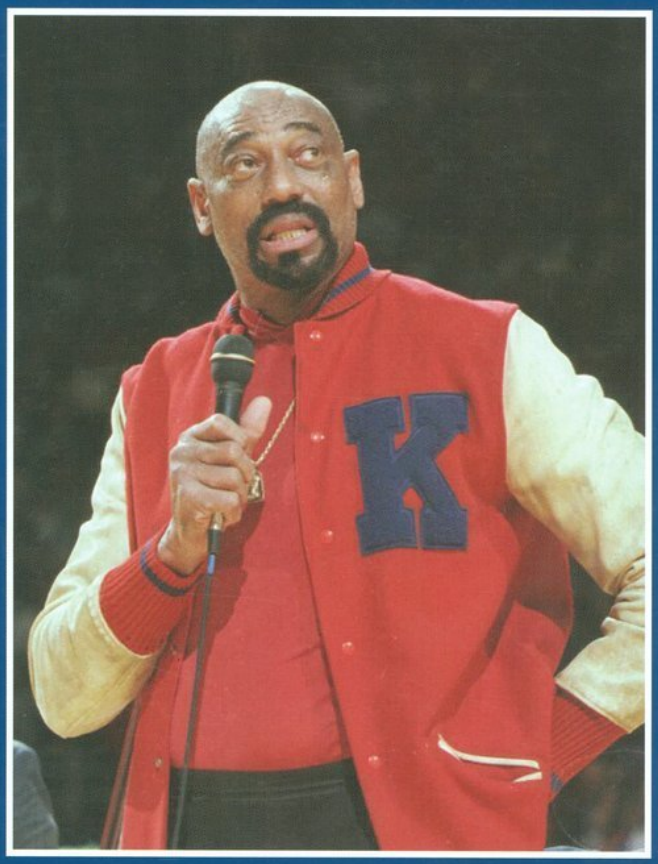
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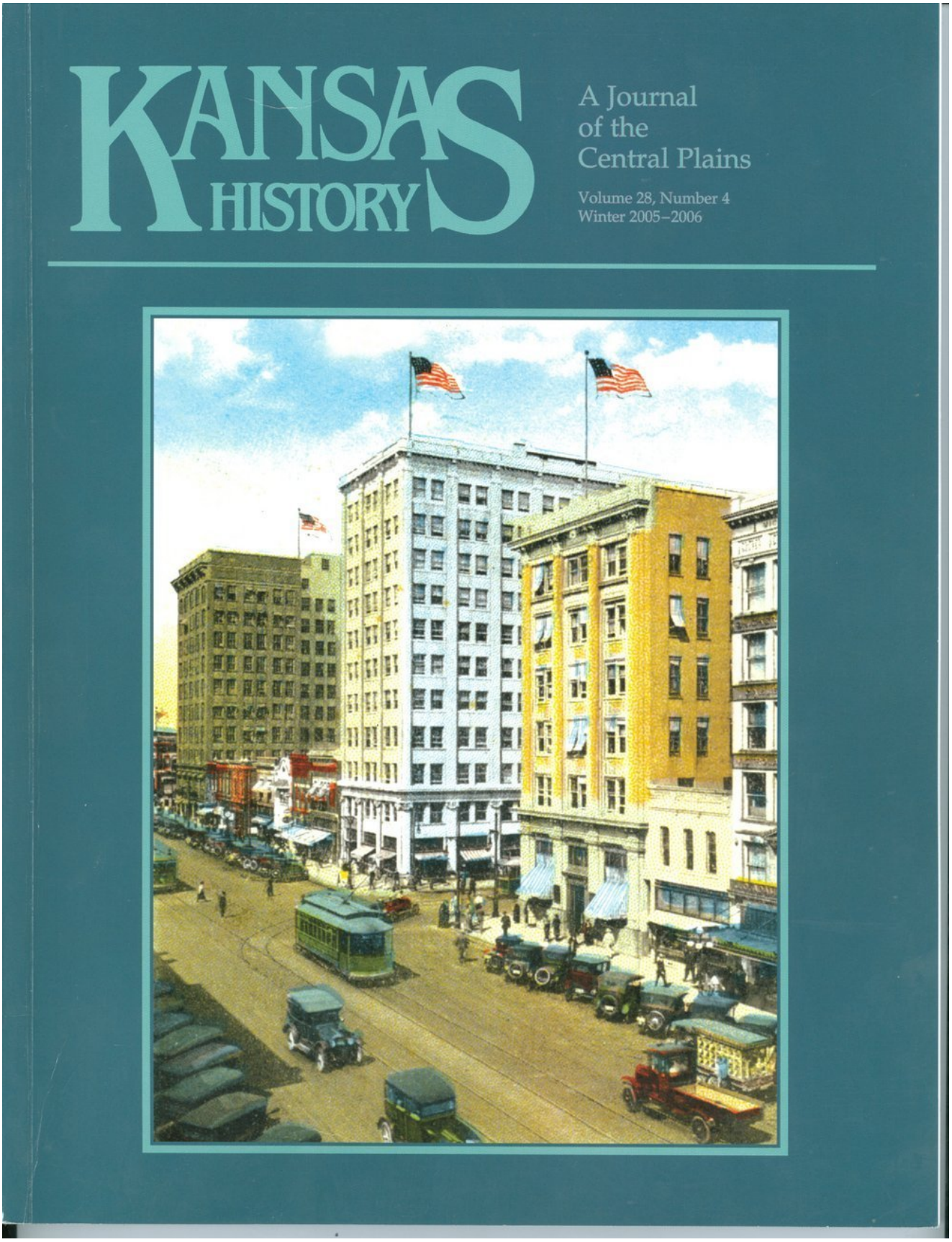

Damon Runyon House, 400 Osage, Manhattan, June 2004.

One seldom associates "Broadway" with Kansas, even though it is located in that other Manhattan (the "Big Apple," as opposed to the "Little Apple"), but the father of Damon Runyon, well-known journalist, author, and Hollywood screenwriter, built this house in Manhattan, Kansas, in 1880. Alfred Damon Runyan was born here on October 4, 1880, and lived in the modest, middle-class house until the family moved to Clay Center. Subsequently, they also lived briefly in Newton and Wellington, Kansas, and Pueblo, Colorado. As Damon Runyon (he dropped his given name and changed the spelling of his surname early in his profession), he launched his career in journalism while still in his mid-teens and is remembered for musicals such as Guys and Dolls *and as the "father of Broadway." Throughout a highly successful career, much of his writing, although set in cosmopolitan New York, was infused with his, as well as his father's and grandfather's, Kansas and western experiences.*

Alfred Lee Runyan, who with his wife, Libbie Damon, built the wood-frame, American Folk style house, moved to Manhattan with his father in 1855 aboard the steamship Hartford, *and thus can be counted among the town's founders. By the late 1860s the younger Runyan had followed his father into the printers' trade and worked as a journalist in Manhattan and Junction City before co-founding in 1876 the* Manhattan Enterprise, *a predecessor of the city's present daily, the* Manhattan Mercury.

The Runyon House, which was considered one of Manhattan's most interesting attractions at the time of Damon Runyon's death in 1946, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 2004, after narrowly escaping demolition just a few years before.

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KANSAS HISTORY

COVER: *A 1921 postcard view of downtown Wichita. A review essay on the urban history of Kansas begins on page 274.* BACK COVER: *The Army– Navy E Award was presented to Kansas City's bomber plant during World War II. "We All Had a Cause" details this home-front industry.*

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Taxation, Spending, and Budgets

Public Finance in Kansas During the Great Depression

by Peter Fearon

During America's Great Depression all branches of government struggled to meet the challenges posed by rising unemployment, falling prices, and social distress. Among the consequences of this unexpected economic shock was the development of new financial relationships between the localities, the states, and the federal government. This was a depression of unexpected severity, which hit both rural and urban dwellers suddenly and without mercy. The optimism that had built up in the late 1920s was replaced with fear and uncertainty. It is not surprising that the economic crisis had an immediate effect on tax revenue. As the economy slid toward its trough, some hard-pressed taxpayers were forced to delay payment and others became delinquent. Inevitably, some taxing units found that revenues declined when the need to assist distressed citizens became increasingly evident.

Starting in 1933 the New Deal made new demands on the states and localities. The federal government extended a much needed helping hand, but at the same time Washington expected reciprocity. To secure federal funding for key welfare programs, states were obliged to contribute to their cost according to their ability. State legislators faced a twofold problem. First, more revenue had to be raised at a time when farm and nonfarm incomes had not recovered to pre-depression levels. Second, legislators had to consider how taxation could be made more equitable, how funds could be targeted to those most in need, and how alternative sources of revenue could be exploited.[1] It is not surprising that taxpayers called for economy in government with a cry so loud that no official seeking election could fail to hear it. On the other hand, this was a time of unprecedented economic and social crisis. The large number of

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1. Howard P. Jones, "Effect of the Depression on State–Local Relations," *National Municipal Review* 25 (August 1936): 465–70.

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 28 (Winter 2005–2006): 230–243.

PROUD OF SAVING

Woodring Adds He Intends Further Cuts in Taxes.

Spent Less Money Than Was Appropriated, Claim.

LEVY 22 PER CENT BELOW '30

Local Expenses Also Reduced, He Says at State Fair.

1933 General Property Taxes May Be Under $70,000,000.

Hutchinson, Kan., Sept. 22 (AP)—Declaring his efforts had been directed toward lowering the tax burden on farms and homes, Gov. Harry H. Woodring in a speech prepared for delivery today at the Kansas State fair quoted figures to show "that for the first time in history the governor of Kansas spent less money than was appropriated by the legislature."

The Democratic candidate for re-election said $1,800,000 had been saved from 1931 appropriations, that cuts amounting to $1,800,000 already had been made for 1932 and that he believed the saving for the cur-

Topeka State Journal, September 22, 1932

RELIEF OF POOR SERIOUS PROBLEM IN LEGISLATURE

General Bill Allowing Counties and Cities to Issue Bonds Will Be Considered Immediately.

WOULD HALT ALL FORECLOSURES

Proposal by Reps. Wood and Benson Would Declare a Moratorium on Collections For Two Years.

Relief of the poor is one of the most pressing problems confronting the present session of the legislature. Most of the counties and cities have exhausted their poor

Topeka Daily Capital, February 10, 1933

VALUE OF KANSAS CURB ON TAXATION APPARENT

—SAYS BARNARD

One of Few States Thru Unscathed.

Sound Kansas Financial Machinery Copy for Other States for Years to Come.

Special to The Capital.

Sabetha, Kan., June 11.—With the sorry spectacle of municipalities in perhaps 30 states facing an appeal for relief from their debts, not one of the 10,000 taxing units in Kansas is seeking escape under the federal bankruptcy law. This is the good result of Kansas legislation bringing business administration to taxing bodies. The final act to give governing bodies sound financial machinery, is the municipal accounting and auditing law, passed by the last legislature. And this law follows logically the budget and cash basis statutes, to make Kansas the foremost state in the union in competent government.

Topeka Daily Capital, June 12, 1935

HOPKINS SILENT AFTER LEARNING OF STATE RELIEF

Stutz Wired Works Progress Administrator Thursday On His Statement Kansas Has Spent Nothing.

ADMINISTRATOR HIT AT LANDON

Figures Showing Kansas Ranks With Leaders of Nation in Expenditures For Relief Wired Him.

John G. Stutz, executive director of the Kansas Emergency Relief committee, last night made public a telegram he sent Harry L. Hop-

Topeka Daily Capital, November 3, 1935

destitute needed public assistance, and legislators everywhere sought to extract from Washington all the funding that they believed was rightly theirs.

The study of federal finances during the New Deal era has attracted the attention of many distinguished historians.[2] For the most part they concentrate on the persistent budget deficit, the impact of the taxes that President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt he had to introduce to keep the deficit in check, and the role that federal finances played in either encouraging, or possibly delaying, full economic recovery. State and local finances largely have been ignored, which is surprising because fiscal changes at the grassroots were no less revolutionary than those emanating directly from Congress. In an attempt to help redress this imbalance, this article will describe and analyze the evolution in public finance in Kansas during the depression decade. It will examine the reasons that lay behind a radical readjustment in local taxation and consider whether Kansas legislators were innovative or merely reactive in the implementation of tax changes.

In studies of the New Deal era, state and local finances largely have been ignored, even though fiscal changes at the grassroots were no less revolutionary than those emanating from Congress.

Perhaps scholars have failed to undertake detailed research into local finance because of its daunting complexity and the inadequacy of statistical information. The complexity can be rendered more manageable by separating the state government finances from the large number of local taxing units. In 1929 state government receipts reached $29 million, while the figure for the more than eleven thousand local units was nearly $105 million. If these figures are recalculated to take account of the state's population, the per capita cost of state government during 1929 was $15.60 and the cost of local government $56.54.[3] The localities raised a good deal more revenue than the state and relied very heavily on receipts from property taxes, which provided almost three-quarters of their funds. The state had progressively managed to offset some of its reliance on the property tax by collecting fees and indirect taxes.[4] Revenue derived from motor vehicle license sales (1913), gasoline tax (1925), cigarette tax (1927), and motor carriers' mileage tax (1931) are examples of the latter. Nevertheless, on the eve of the Great Depression, general property tax was still of great significance as it provided just over half of the state's taxation receipts. In 1929 total income from general property tax for both state and local units peaked at $89 million; by 1936 it had fallen to $63 million.

Throughout the 1920s changing lifestyles and a growing demand for improved services resulted in rising tax levels. By the mid point in the decade, more than 50 percent of state and local tax revenue was earmarked for schooling, although increasing levies for road and bridge construction, and paving city streets, reflected both the growing significance of the automobile and urbanization.[5] During this decade,

2. Benjamin M. Anderson, *Economics and the Public Welfare: A Financial and Economic History of the United States*, 2d ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979); E. Carey Brown, "Fiscal Policy in the 'Thirties: A Reappraisal," *American Economic Review* 46 (December 1956): 857–79; J. Bradford De Long, "Fiscal Policy in the Shadow of the Great Depression," in *The Defining Moment: The Great Depression and the American Economy in the Twentieth Century* , ed. Michael D. Bordo, Claudia Goldin, and Eugene N. White (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mark H. Leff, *The Limits of Symbolic Reform: The New Deal and Taxation, 1933–39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Herbert Stein, *The Fiscal Revolution in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

3. Kansas Legislative Council, *Summary History of Kansas Finance*, Research Report Publication No. 60 (October 1937). Apart from the state government, 11,240 political units held the power to levy taxes or incur debt. They comprised 105 counties, 588 incorporated cities, 8,650 school districts, and 1,550 townships and other civil divisions. *See* Harold Howe, *Local Government Finance in Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Planning Board, April 1939), 1; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Financial Statistics of State and Local Governments: 1932* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), 604. Detailed figures for local tax revenue and expenditures do not exist. This data is from Kansas Legislative Council, *Estimated Direct Governmental Cost in Kansas By Governing Units*, Research Department Publication No. 48 (1937).

4. For an analysis of the impact of property tax in Kansas, *see* Glenn W. Fisher, *The Worst Tax? A History of the Property Tax in America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 147–65.

5. Kansas Legislative Council, *Summary History of Kansas Finance*, 25, 34–35; James T. McDonald, *State Finance. Expenditures of the State of*

local taxes rose relatively rapidly and the Kansas economy seemed capable of coping with this increase. Rapid recovery followed the severe depression that smote the state in 1920–1921, so that most nonfarm Kansans soon experienced relatively low levels of unemployment. The main exceptions occurred in Crawford and Cherokee Counties where serious unemployment and short-time working among coal and lead miners resulted in high levels of poverty.

Farmers would not have identified this period as one of prosperity, but they displayed signs of economic comfort. The vigorous conversion of the prairie sod to wheat fields was evident in the western part of the state. The purchase of expensive agricultural machinery, trucks, and automobiles indicates a willingness to borrow and also a confidence in the future. However, it is important to recognize that the relative prosperity of this period did not prevent farm tax delinquency from reaching disturbingly high levels. In both 1928 and 1929, for example, approximately two million dollars in farm taxes became delinquent, a figure that rose to almost five million in 1932.[6] These figures show that good times were not evenly distributed across the state, and it is possible that farmers who had run up high levels of debt in the golden years from 1915 to 1920 were now in deep difficulty. Disturbing levels of delinquency even before the depression also began to raise fundamental questions as to the reliance on property tax as a reliable source of revenue.

In 1916 the federal government offered assistance to states for highway and road construction, although the recipients were required to find matching funds. As the Kansas constitution forbade state participation in works of internal improvement, a constitutional amendment was necessary to exploit this funding source. The electorate approved the amendment in 1920, but the legislature, which contained a number of representatives deeply suspicious of Washington's influence, did not appropriate the necessary matching funds until 1927.[7] From this point, however, federal funding for highway construction became a vital tool in improving the state's transport connections and in creating many unskilled nonfarm jobs.

Beginning in 1930 farm prices, personal income, and, crucially for tax revenue, property values, declined precipitously. In addition, savage deflation raised the real value of each tax dollar extracted from increasingly resentful taxpayers, who often delayed payment for as long as possible. The fiscal implications of the depression quickly made a mark. As early as 1930 fifty-three counties recorded budget deficits caused, primarily, by declining property values. By mid-summer 1931 many counties were obliged to exercise leniency and suspend the time limit on tax payments, especially in rural areas. The proportion of farm income that was required for taxes increased from 7 percent in 1928 to nearly 14 percent of a much lower income in 1932. Tax delinquency on farm real estate more than doubled between 1929 and 1931, and the situation did not improve during the following year. Indeed, as early as 1931 more than one-third of the total farm acreage of the state was tax delinquent. Economizers seriously suggested that a reduction in the number of counties from 105 to 30 or 40, surely possible in the age of the automobile and the telephone, would result in considerable savings for taxpayers.[8] This was, of course, a popular money saving suggestion before 1930 and has resurfaced in recent times during periods of financial stringency.

The sharp increase in tax delinquency had come about in spite of the fact that the total amount of taxes levied on farmland and buildings declined by almost one-third between 1928 and 1932. Unfortunately, farm and nonfarm income fell faster and more steeply than did tax demands. Indeed, during this period of economic contraction, taxpayers naturally became much more conscious about the cost of government and the burden of taxes levied on general property. Few members of the newly formed taxpayer organizations would have been mollified that the per capita total tax burden declined from just over $72.14 in 1929 to $56.84 in 1933.

Harry Hines Woodring, the successful Democratic candidate for governor in 1930, realized that if he were to have any chance of re-election in 1932 he had to stand as a tax-cutting governor. But he faced the dilemma that as tax

Kansas, 1915–1953, Fiscal Information Series No. 5 (Lawrence, Kans.: Governmental Research Center, n.d), 7–13, tables passim.

6. Harold Howe, *Tax Delinquency on Farm Real Estate in Kansas, 1928 to 1933*, Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station Circular No. 186 (October 1937), 1.

7. Clarence J. Hein and James T. McDonald, *Federal Grants-In-Aid In Kansas*, Special Report No. 50 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Governmental Research Center, 1954), 3–4.

8. *New York Times*, September 13, 1931; Howe, *Tax Delinquency on Farm Real Estate in Kansas*, 1–12. As a result of tax delinquency, the amount of revenue raised is always less than the amount levied.

revenue shrank the demands for relief expenditure rose.[9] To assuage the electorate Woodring implemented a vigorous economy drive that resulted in considerable savings, which enabled him to substantially reduce the burden of general property tax. In particular, public employees found their wages and salaries reduced, job vacancies went unfilled, and all but the most necessary building and machinery maintenance was neglected. Each month all items of expenditure and all receipts were carefully monitored, and great pressure was placed on all heads of public institutions and spending departments to practice maximum economy. However, even if Woodring had been convinced that an increase in public spending was a necessary prerequisite for economic salvation, he would have faced the reality that in Kansas legal restrictions limited state indebtedness. The state could only go into debt with the consent of the legislature, and even then borrowing for general purposes, which included relief, could not exceed one million dollars. Making the tax burden more equitable by, for example, the introduction of income tax needed the approval of the electorate and could not be done quickly.[10] In 1932 Woodring proudly announced that, in spite of worsening economic circumstances, he had achieved a small budget surplus and had become the only governor in Kansas history to spend less than the sum appropriated by the legislature. He also recognized the benefits gained from an additional $1.25 million from the federal government for expenditure on highways. With this addition the state had received a total of $4.5 million from Washington to spend on its highways. These funds played a significant part in reducing the pain of his cost-saving exercise by not only lessening the local tax burden but also by enabling the counties to employ more men on work relief projects.[11] Kansans abhorred dole but regarded employment on road work as an effective means of putting money into the pockets of the unemployed while at the same time maintaining self respect.

Counties and other local units, which also had their taxing powers proscribed by law, faced a growing problem. In Kansas care of the needy was the responsibility of the county in which they had settlement. As a result of rising unemployment, short-time working, and wage cuts, an increasing number of Kansans were unable to care for themselves and their families. Also many farm workers' employment was terminated by drought, and across the state substantial numbers of men and women, for example tradesmen and domestics, felt the effect of the frugality that the depression imposed upon the families that normally hired them. Spending was reduced to the purchase of basic necessities.

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The counties were overwhelmed. They lacked staff with the relevant social work experience, and vital record keeping ranged from poor to nonexistent which, added to financial disarray, meant that the needs of all the distressed people who applied for assistance could not be met.[12]

Fortunately, private charities played a key role in helping the destitute, and these organizations began to raise additional funds for that purpose. Charity football games and other fund-raising activities enabled private welfare agencies to increase their spending from $542,000 in 1929 to just over $1 million in 1932. During the same period, county ex-

9. *Message of the Governor, 1931* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1931), 4–5.

10. Earle K. Shaw, "An Analysis of the Legal Limitations on the Borrowing Powers of State Governments," *Monthly Report of the FERA* (June 1936): 121–23, 126–27; Kansas Legislative Council, *Summary History of Kansas Finance*, 28.

11. Keith D. McFarland, *Harry H. Woodring: A Political Biography of F.D.R.'s Controversial Secretary of War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975), 39–41, 54–5, 71; *Topeka State Journal*, September 22, 1932; *Kansas State Budget, 1934–1935* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1933), 4; Kansas Legislative Council, *Summary History of Kansas Finance*, xii.

12. *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 10, 1933.

penditure on relief rose from $1.8 to $2.9 million.[13] These figures provide a clear indication of the mounting social costs of the depression and must be viewed in the context of the effect of falling property values, which eroded the tax base of many local units. By late 1931 the vast majority of taxing units faced a desperate situation, having reached the limit of their bonded indebtedness while the demands of the needy still rose.

Eventually Congress recognized the impossibility of the task facing many states and localities as they struggled to assist their distressed. In July 1932 the Emergency Relief and Construction Act made available, via the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), $300 million as loans to the states for the purpose of direct relief. Every governor had to make a detailed application for federal funds, demonstrating that all sources of tax revenue and private charitable contributions had been fully exploited to the point of exhaustion. It was made clear that federal funds were a supplement to local effort, not a substitute for it,, and that the borrowed money had to be repaid from future highway allocations. The initial Kansas application, and all those that followed, was carefully scrutinized by RFC staff before the request was granted. Fear of forfeiting federal funds because of a failure to provide accurate data, or because tax revenues had not been fully exploited, created a new atmosphere within which the 1933 legislature would work. For the last three months of 1932 Kansas received more than $1.1 million in loans from the RFC, a sum so substantial that the state's politicians could not afford to antagonize the source of this flow.

In spite of Governor Woodring's fiscal success, Republican Alfred M. Landon was victorious in the November 1932 gubernatorial contest, a time when the nation as a whole moved solidly to embrace the Democratic Party. In his campaign Landon had stressed his commitment to further reductions in spending and to seeking alternative sources of revenue that would lessen the property tax burden that was widely viewed as unfair. At the same time Landon reassured the victims of the depression by stating that although he intended to significantly reduce the cost of government, he would ensure that all legitimate claims for welfare would be recognized. His early actions demonstrated that, wherever possible, government jobs would be cut, however, and all public sector salaries, including his own, faced telling reductions.[14] The governor also had to recognize that despite the importance of the existing relationship between the state and Washington, D.C., a more complex but no less significant one would develop once the New Deal was in place. One of Landon's first acts as governor was to inform the RFC that he would urge the state legislature, due to meet in January 1933, to find the means of raising additional revenue. Indeed, legislative action in January, and during the special session in October and November, satisfied Washington that Kansas was doing all it could to care for the victims of the depression. These significant sessions laid the foundations for Landon's later claim that he was the nation's foremost budget balancer.

In the November elections voters had expressed a clear wish that the state adopt an income tax. The legislature obliged, and the new tax that progressively took between 1 and 4 percent of net personal income and 2 percent of net corporate income began contributing to the budget in 1934. As a result, general property tax, which had contributed 72 percent to state revenue during the 1920s, made a contribution of only 54 percent between 1930 and 1937. The state's tax base became broader and tax demands were more closely linked with the ability to pay.

Landon believed that, in normal circumstances, Kansas communities should take responsibility for a growing relief burden by means of local tax funds and private charitable contributions. However, these were exceptional times. The problem had become too acute to be managed locally, but vital federal funds were only available as a supplement to state and local effort. Landon advocated that, for a two-year period, counties should be able to levy an Emergency Relief Tax if the county commissioners could convince the State Tax Commission of the need for it. The funds raised by this initiative were to be used only for work relief. The new governor conceded that his recommendation was solely based on the fear that without additional revenue the state's entitlement to federal funds might be compromised.[15]

Landon was determined to limit the spending powers not only of the state but also of its subdivisions. The 1931 legislature had enacted a Budget Law that required cities,

13. "Public Welfare Service in Kansas. A Ten Year Report, 1924–1933," *Kansas Emergency Relief Bulletin No. 127* (1934), 46–49.

14. *Kansas City Times*, September 27, 1932; *Message of the Governor, 1933* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1933), 4–5; *Message of the Governor, Special Session, 1933* (Matters pertaining to Highway Department) (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1933): 1, 4–6.

15. *Message of the Governor, 1933*, 10–11.

boards of education, and a number of other taxing units to prepare their budgets to show the amount of money each anticipated raising from taxes and from other sources, and the planned amount to be spent during the ensuing financial year. After publication of the budget, all taxing authorities were obliged to hold a public hearing so that the spending plans could be subject to local scrutiny. This sort of practical democracy appealed to Landon. He insisted, and the legislature obliged, that this practice be strengthened and clarified and then adopted by all taxing units so that officials would be forced to plan expenditure carefully. These same officials also should be prepared to publicly defend their spending plans when confronted by taxpayers. He believed that the discipline of setting budgets and the transparency of operations were a sure means of securing economies in local government.

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Taxing units faced further pressure from Landon's request that the legal limitations designed to restrict tax levies should be examined. The governor was convinced that tax limits often had been set at too high a level, certainly for the straitened times that the depression had imposed. Moreover, many of the limitations seemed to him entirely arbitrary, lacking in coherence and difficult, if not impossible, to justify. Landon believed officials faced a temptation, rarely resisted, to always tax to the maximum and that if taxes were to be reduced so must the ceiling on levies. He did not envisage any loss of efficiency from this change, but he felt that if the state set a clear example in this area then local taxing units would follow. The legislature, in passing the Tax Limitation Act, put his proposal into law.[16]

The governor's message to the legislature reminded all elected representatives that the Kansas Constitution stated that tax money raised for one purpose should not be later reallocated for a different purpose. Yet, he pointed out, this practice was growing. Moreover, spending units, having set their budgets and engaged in public debate, would frequently exceed them and run into deficit. Each legislative session produced the spectacle of taxing units seeking to relieve their debts by the passage of refunding acts. Landon viewed this practice as a means of evading financial responsibility and one that had to be curbed if spending were to be brought under control.[17]

Landon preached with missionary zeal that all taxing units should live within their income. Cities of the first and second class had to observe that rule, and Landon was determined to see this restriction in place everywhere taxes could be raised. Excess spending would be illegal, and it no longer would be possible for officials to exceed their levies and create outstanding warrants and indebtedness. This restrictive fiscal initiative came to be known as the "Cash Basis Law." Once adopted by the legislature, school boards, county commissioners, and indeed, all political units had to limit their spending to no more than the actual income on hand during the current financial year. Once a contract was executed or a purchasing order issued, the money in the fund to cover this expense was frozen, even if the payment was not due immediately. Some exceptions could be made, such as an emergency relating to relief expenditures, but only on a temporary basis and only after approaching the State Tax Commission. Or, of course, the electorate could, provided the legal limit on bonded indebtedness was not exceeded, authorize further indebtedness through the ballot box.[18]

When the legislature adjourned, Landon had every reason to feel a sense of triumph as his fiscal package was in place. The governor regarded the Cash Basis Law as crucial in his fight to reduce expenditure and achieve a budget bal-

16. Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 129; "Limiting Tax Levies and Amounts," Kansas *Laws* (1933), ch. 309; *Message of the Governor, 1933*, 6.

17. *Message of the Governor, 1933*, 6–7.

18. "An Act in Reference to Indebtedness of Cities . . . [Cash Basis Law]," Kansas *Laws* (1933), ch. 319.

ance.[19] Legislation that limited the amount of the tax levy and a budget law that forced transparency upon officials certainly contributed to the economy drive that he spearheaded. However, these were refinements of legislation already in place. The Cash Basis Law, on the other hand, imposed a straitjacket by making it very difficult for taxing units to spend more than their allotted budget. Furthermore, any public officer who violated the provisions of the Cash Basis Law risked being automatically removed from office.[20]

The legislature also reformed the administration of poor relief in Kansas. The central administrative unit was the Kansas Federal Relief Committee (KFRC), which within a few months became the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC). However, each county was given the responsibility for the distribution of relief and the decision-making authority. Legislators decreed that in the future poor commissioners had to demonstrate their awareness of the principles and practices of modern welfare administration. Each poor commissioner was to operate within a more centralized system, and a more systematic collection of statistics and a more professional assessment of all relief applicants would be in place. The fact that the counties now could raise additional revenues and that sweeping administrative changes had been made to the state's relief administration appealed to the RFC officials who examined the state's applications. Between October 1932 and June 1933 Kansas borrowed $2.6 million from the RFC, a sum only slightly less than all Kansas counties had spent on relief during the whole of 1932.[21]

When the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) replaced the RFC in May 1933, states could look forward to grants-in-aid rather than loans. However, the FERA, like the RFC, expected each state to make a full contribution toward aiding the needy, and it was clear that federal grants were a supplement to state and local effort, not a substitute for it. Governors were required to provide detailed information about how the grant would be used and provide, in a monthly report, a full accounting of the resources available within the state. FERA staff analyzed state submissions before allocating funds. Initially, the administration distributed funds on a matching basis: one dollar of federal money for every three spent on unemployment relief over the previous three months. However, Congress soon gave the FERA administrator, Harry Hopkins, the discretionary authority to decide what the contribution from each state should be.

Landon informed the special session of the legislature in advance of its October meeting that $7 million would be required to fund total relief obligations in Kansas until June 30, 1934. He reminded the legislators that the counties already had the power to raise $2 million of this sum by means of tax levies, and he was confident that the FERA would contribute an additional $2.8 million. The shortfall could be made up, so the governor advised, by giving the counties additional bond raising powers to the value of $2.2 million, which, together with federal funds, would be spent on road and street relief work. By this means the full quota of federal relief could be anticipated without the creation of any new tax burden.[22] This plan is a further example of the state, or its subdivisions, having to generate income to ensure that valuable federal grants were not put at risk.

With the new personal and corporate income tax in operation, Topeka had an additional stream of income that would provide greater financial flexibility and give scope for further reductions to property taxes. Unfortunately, those men and women whom the state discarded from its payroll, or those who could not survive swinging wage cuts, became an additional relief charge. Because the model for the provision of relief that the state adopted devolved a great deal of financial and administrative responsibility to the counties, much of the welfare burden caused by both the depression and the increasingly severe drought fell on them. During this time of serious unemployment, short-time working, wage cuts, and job losses among farm laborers because of a persistent drought, counties were pressured for an increase rather than a cut in relief spending. However, the Cash Basis Law acted as a powerful constraint on officials who might be tempted to treat the needy overgenerously or to generally indulge in overcommitting the taxpayer.

Under the New Deal, all states came to rely heavily on financial assistance from Washington. During 1934, for example, Kansas spent $23 million on relief. Of this sum, the federal government contributed $15.4 million and the

19. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas*, 118–29; "Budget-Balancer Landon," *The New Republic* 85 (January 15, 1936): 273.

20. Alfred Mossman Landon, *America At The Crossroads* (1936; reprint, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971), 61–3; "Income Tax," Kansas *Laws*, 1933, ch. 320.

21. Figures from *KERC Bulletin 127*, 43, 46–9; "Relating to the Relief of the Poor," Kansas *Laws* (1933), ch. 196.

22. *Message of the Governor, Special Session, October 31, 1933* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1933), 2–3.

counties $5.6 million. The Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, which purchased and processed farm products as part of the administration's attempt to raise farm prices, allocated commodities valued at $1.8 million for distribution to those in need. The state's contribution to this welfare package was a mere $331,000. Between January 1933 and December 1935 Washington was responsible for 72 percent of funding for emergency relief in Kansas, the county proportion was 26 percent, and the state's 2 percent.[23] In Kansas the counties were responsible for the distribution of federal funds allocated to them by the KERC. However, because Congress allocated insufficient funding to care for all the able bodied needy, each county had to finance care for substantial numbers who, although eligible, could not secure a place on federally funded programs. Kansas counties also provided supplementary assistance to the unemployed who were selected for federal work relief but whose wage was not sufficient to care for their large families. In addition, local resources had to support unemployables, who because of their incapacity were ineligible for work relief programs.

County officials were charged with generating work relief projects that would satisfy federal scrutiny, and with raising the necessary sponsor's funds to sustain the projects. Those counties that possessed a strong tax base and had a team of highly competent and energetic officials could operate effectively under this system, but others with financial or staffing deficiencies could not. For example, Crawford and Cherokee Counties faced great difficulty because of heavy unemployment among coal and lead miners and extremely depressed property values, which eroded the local tax base. Moreover, a volatile population, often driven to despair by deprivation, periodically made life difficult for relief officials. For these counties in particular, the concentration of acute social hardship created a series of problems that were beyond solution by local effort.

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During Landon's tenure as governor, 1933–1937, state tax receipts rose from $22.9 million to just over $28 million. On the other hand, during the same period the local tax burden fell from $81.5 million to $74.5 million and, as a result, the per capita cost of government declined, marginally, from $56.84 to $55.74.[24] However, we should not forget that incomes in Kansas were higher in 1936 than they had been during the desperately bad years of 1932 and 1933. The fact that under Landon's tutelage Kansas had achieved a balanced budget attracted first local and then, when the feat was repeated, national attention. Editors were quick to point out that not only was the state budget in balance but the Cash Basis Law had ensured that all taxing units operated in the black.[25] Kansas presented a sharp contrast to the national government where, argued critics, New Deal profligacy gave rise to persistent and deeply worrying deficits.

During the summer of 1935, for example, the *New York Times* was lavish in its praise for the Cash Basis Law, which it described as a "pay as you go plan." Landon, the newspaper pointed out, had reduced the cost of government, cut property taxes, and shown that it was possible to have a balanced budget in spite of the formidable relief problems that serious drought and a depressed economy had imposed.[26] Landon was beginning to emerge as a Republican hero at a time when the party had few political figures to fill that role.

23. Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, "Cost of Social Welfare Service in Kansas," 58, file 39, box 3, John G. Stutz Papers, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence; *Final Statistical Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), table 18, 307. This figure does not include the $12.2 million that came from the federal government during 1934 to fund the Civil Works Administration (CWA), which was an employment rather than a relief program.

24. The figures are from *Estimated Direct Governmental Cost in Kansas by Governing Unit*.

25. *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 12, 1935.

26. *New York Times*, July 2, 7, 8, 1935.

The governor's increasing public exposure did not escape the attention of leading New Dealers. In November 1935 Harry Hopkins, who was then the administrator for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which had replaced the FERA, accused Kansas of having "never put up a thin dime for relief" and added that Landon had managed the state budget by "taking it out of the hides of the people."[27] This was the first time that Landon had the satisfaction of being singled out for attack by a senior Washington Democrat. The governor remained aloof but his state relief administrator, John G. Stutz, a man with a towering reputation in his field, mounted a robust defense. Stutz pointed out that if state and local government contributions were taken together they amounted to 26 percent of all federally funded work and work relief costs, which was about the national average for such payments. Furthermore, the state's local political subdivisions had always paid in full the relief costs for unemployables, and Kansas had used all RFC and FERA funds entirely for work relief rather than direct relief. Stutz suggested that possibly Hopkins had been misquoted, and if that were true he now had the opportunity to set the record straight.[28] Within a few days Hopkins had distanced himself from what had been an instant and thoughtless response to a journalist's question about the ability of Landon to balance the Kansas budget. The reluctance of Hopkins to pursue the attack is surprising because Congress had stipulated in the Federal Emergency Act (1933) that the ability of both states and localities to contribute to the relief program should have been exhausted before federal funds became available. FERA officials were in no doubt that it was the intention of Congress that states should share poor relief responsibility with their political subdivisions.[29]

Although Hopkins legitimately could have criticized the manner in which the burden of relief provision had been thrust on Kansas counties, he could not have faulted the quality of the state's relief administration. As early as February 1934 federal field agents reported to their Washington chiefs about the exemplary relief administration created under Stutz's leadership. Indeed, at the close of the Civil Works program the organization of relief in Kansas was described as one of the best in the country, and Stutz was personally singled out for praise.[30] New Dealers could not possibly attack on these grounds when experienced agents had frequently identified the state as an example of best practice.

From late 1935 it was increasingly common to find Landon's name linked with the words "budget-balancer."[31] In general, the Kansas governor was praised for his accomplishments, although a perceptive piece in *The New Republic* emphasized the costs of the austerity program he had implemented. The state's school system, for example, was unique in that it relied on local taxes for virtually all of its funding. Compliance with the Cash Basis Law had imposed savage salary cuts on teachers and had led to the closure of many schools. Other public services, such as institutions that cared for the mentally handicapped, could not offer assistance to all those who needed it.[32] These criticisms are hard to dismiss, especially in counties whose local economies had been hardest hit.

Landon's 1936 presidential campaign stressed that the federal budget could be balanced if legislators eliminated wasteful spending and discontinued the political favoritism that increasingly directed New Deal resource allocations. He also pledged that his re-ordering of federal finances would not be at the expense of the provision of relief for the nation's unemployed. The New Deal, he argued, had retarded recovery by displaying hostility to business and by appealing to class prejudice. He believed that his more cooperative approach to the nation's chambers of commerce would encourage business to create more jobs. However, although the candidate remained clear in his promise that as long as the need for relief remained, the necessary funds would be provided, he was very vague about where the axe would fall to achieve the economies necessary for budget balance.[33]

The notion that Landon's tax policies formulated during his term as governor of Kansas could form the core of a fiscal program that would lead to a balanced federal budget was disingenuous. It would have been economically unwise and potentially politically disastrous for his administration to try to impose the equivalent of the Cash Basis

27. *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 1, 1935
28. John G. Stutz to Harry Hopkins, October 31, 1935, Stutz Papers; *Kansas City Times*, November 1, 1935; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 3, 1935
29. L. L. Ecker to Aubrey Williams, November 2, 1935, FERA State Files 1933–1936, Kansas October 1935 file, RG 69, National Archives, College Park, Md.; *New York Times*, November 6, 8, 10, 1935.
30. Peter Fearon, "Kansas Poor Relief: The Influence of the Great Depression," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 78 (Summer 1996): 175–79; *Kansas Relief News Bulletin* 5 (May 21, 1934): 3–4.
31. For example, "Budget-Balancer Gov. 'Alf' Landon of Kansas," *Literary Digest* 120 (October 12, 1935): 30–1; "Budget-Balancer Landon."
32. "Budget-Balancer Landon," 272–3; *New York Times*, October 5, 1936.
33. *New York Times*, July 24, September 24, October 13, 1936.