

Dr. Horace W. Thompson

Dr. Horace W. Thompson came to Kansas Territory from New York in 1855 and pre-empted the northeast quarter of land (Section 30) that bordered the claim of Joseph Gardner on the north. Horace, 35 years old, and his wife Catherine, 29, brought with them their two children, Albert (8) and Mary Victoria (6).

Horace built a two-story house, approximately fifteen feet wide and twenty-five feet long; the downstairs was divided into two rooms, one fifteen by fifteen, and the other fifteen by ten. This smaller room contained the first kitchen, and sleeping quarters were located upstairs. The house also had a cellar. In a 1997 taped interview Mr. Glen Freeman, now living in Lawrence, KS, related the following information to me:

There was a cellar in the Thompson house – the walls were of clay; the floor was mud. In the kitchen above the cellar a hole had been cut in the floor, approximately 2 ½ x 2 ½ feet. This was used to hide slaves. The Gardner's, the Thompsons, and the Stokes [family] were all involved in the Underground Railroad. The road running by all three of the[ir] cabins or houses ran west along the bluff, now bordering the south edge of Clinton Lake, ending in what was the town of Bloomington.

Besides his farming and medical practice, Horace became involved in the founding of Clinton. On March 2, 1857, the shareholders voted to publish a description of their town in the *Herald of Freedom* (a Lawrence newspaper) and appointed Dr. Thompson to the “committee to draft by-laws and rules and regulations for the government of the association.”

At the following meeting on March 7, 1857, Horace was elected secretary of the newly formed pioneer town.

It was Dr. Thompson who accompanied Dr. Macy to the house of Joseph Gardner on the morning of June 9, 1860, when ex-slave Napoleon Simpson was killed. Dr. Macy gave a thorough description of the body of Napoleon, as recounted in the first chapter this work. Dr. Macy testified that “Dr. Thompson picked up from the floor two or three small pieces of bone that had fallen out of the wounds. These wounds were the cause of his [Simpson’s] death.”

The lives of the Thompsons were fraught with tragedy. None of their children born in Kansas survived. In 1858, Catherine Thompson gave birth to a son, Joseph, but he died in 1863. Sometime between 1860 and 1865, two other infant sons were born and died. In 1865, at the age of 18, Albert, the only remaining son, died. The Thompsons’ daughter, Mary Victoria, married Constant J. Cartwright, a man from the Thompsons’ home state of New York, in 1868. A year later, on the 17th of April, 1869, Horace W. Thompson, together with his wife, drowned while attempting to cross the swollen Washington Creek at night. This location on Washington Creek, where it flows into the Wakarusa River was known as Rock-Ford and was the site of numerous drowning in the early days before substantial bridges were built.

Mary Victoria and Constant Cartwright suffered the typical hard times of a Kansas farm, including the grasshopper plague of 1874, low prices, and a general depression in the '70's. Victoria's tragedies continued when on February 12, 1889, Constant was killed as his horses ran out of control, turning south at the east corner of their farm, overturning his wagon and throwing him out. He died instantly.

The Thompson and Cartwright families are buried in the Clinton Cemetery. What remains of their land is now owned by Glen Freeman's son, but the greater part of the farm was bought by the Army Corps of Engineers.