

The Stokes Brothers

Three Stokes brothers, Edwin, Albert and Henry, all Quakers, came from Pennsylvania to Kansas soon after the territory was opened to settlement. The brothers purportedly operated a sawmill in the Bloomington/Clinton area. Edwin and Henry took up claims in the Clinton Township. Albert's original claim was located in Wakarusa Township.

Edwin became the closest neighbor to Dr. Horace Thompson, locating on the northwest quarter of Section 30. Their homes were approximately one-half mile apart in an area that now overlooks Clinton Lake. In fact, most of the property of both settlers is now owned by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Edwin was an abolitionist involved in the Underground Railroad. In two separate interviews with his descendants, this author was told that the Stokes house was one of many locations on the Underground Railroad. Mr. Glen Freeman, of Lawrence, Kansas, also related that as a child he was told by his family that "they hid slaves in the daytime and that there was a runway from the house cellar attached to an old cistern (covered) in which slaves were hidden." The cellar excavation can still be seen along with the adjoining cistern.

Henry's claim is not listed with preemption records, nor is it shown on the 1857 Territorial Map, but the 1873 Map of Clinton Township shows him owning the west half of the northwest quarter of Section 8 in Clinton Township. The life of Henry Stokes after coming to Kansas provides us with one of the most heart-rending and devastating tragedies that could befall a family. From family records, it appears that he was born about 1827, married Bethias Willis (born in 1832), and this union produced ten children, nine of whom apparently died in infancy or childhood. It is reported that some of the children are buried in unmarked graves in Lawrence (possibly in Pioneer Cemetery). The surviving child was Laura May who was born in Clinton. Henry's wife Bethias died on June 23, 1867.

Henry's second wife was Mary Elizabeth Waddle, whom he married at Bloomington on January 12, 1869. Tragedy struck again when Mary died on May 24, 1871, after giving birth to a daughter they named Mary Catherine. Apparently heartbroken and disillusioned, Henry simply gave up and made his brother, Albert, the guardian of his infant daughter. He left Kansas and went to Indiana to live with a sister until his death (date unknown).

The third Stokes brother, Albert, chose a claim south of McGee's crossing (northwest quarter, Section 33 in Wakarusa Township) on Washington Creek. Albert's claim was in an area where there were several anti-slavery settlers just east of Joseph Gardner's claim.

Albert, as with many of his fellow Quakers, apparently had problems living up to strict disciplines, and according to family tradition, at one point before coming to Kansas, Albert took dancing lessons and was ousted by the Quaker church. Ms. Sally Fosse Lambert, great-granddaughter of Henry (now living in

Oregon), stated in a telephone interview that “slaves were hidden in caves along the creek.” This would be Washington Creek, which crossed the northwest corner of Albert’s claim.

Sometime in the early 1850’s a small log cabin was build on the north side of the creek, reportedly by a slave. In an interview in the summer of 1997 with Mr. Ernie Tuckel, a neighbor living south of the Stokes property, he related that “Mr. Wilson (who was raised by the Williams family) visited with Martha Parker about the log cabin on his farm. A colored man built the cabin to work on the farm in the early 1850’s. The farm was then owned by Roger Williams’ father.” This cabin is now the property of the Clinton Lake Historical Society, Inc. It was dismantled in 1998; the logs marked and numbered, and now are stored until it can be reconstructed on the premises of the Clinton Lake Museum. The cabin is approximately 15 feet by 15 feet. Its logs were made from various kinds of wood – primarily walnut – and trimmed with a broad axe to fit the doors and windows.

By 1873, Albert had moved to another location along the Wakarusa River next to the original claim of the founder of Bloomington, William Jessee.