

William Bainbridge Kennedy

William B. Kennedy brought slaves in his care to Henry Hiatt at Twin Mound to be forwarded on the Underground Railroad to Topeka where the Lane Trail would take them to freedom.

William B. had been born in Brown County, Ohio, on October 16, 1822, and had engaged in farming in his native county until 1848, when he moved to Fulton County, Illinois, to continue farming, boating and rafting on the Illinois and Mississippi River. He married Elizabeth Curless in Fulton County, Illinois, on March 21, 1847. She had been a neighbor in Ohio until her parents, Joseph and Lucy Curless, had moved to Illinois a year before their daughter's marriage. William brought his family to Kansas in 1855. With him were four brothers, three sisters, their spouses and all of their children, the party totaling twenty-three. Also with him was his widowed mother, Margaret Ralston Kennedy, who had been born in Manchester (Adam County) Ohio, on October 27, 1800, and had moved to Brown County, Ohio, at the age of 7. There she met Hugh Kennedy, whom she married on June 22, 1820. Hugh died in 1845. All thirteen of their children lived to maturity.

The trip to Kansas was long and arduous and their progress slow, encumbered as they were with a large herd of cattle and horses; they finally reached their destination on June of 1855. The journey was recounted at a Kennedy Family Reunion in June 1895, reported by a Lawrence newspaper:

Forty years ago last Friday night a party of travelers camped at Hickory Point a few miles north of what is now Baldwin. The company had left Illinois one month previous in search of homes for themselves and children. They traveled in large covered wagons each drawn by four yoke of oxen. Traveling northward [from Hickory Point] next morning, at the bow of the hill, the beautiful Wakarusa burst upon their view, with its wide sweep of prairie land covered with luxuriant grass and flowers of every hue, and bordered and fringed by forest on the hillsides and the banks of the creek.

The travelers with one accord decided that this should be their future home and at nightfall they were encamped on the banks of this stream a few rods above where we are now.

Here they lived for the first two weeks in their wagons and tents, before settling on their different claims . . .

William B. (known as "Cap) and Elizabeth pre-empted the northeast quarter of Section 19 in Wakarusa Township bordering the Wakarusa River. Their mother's cabin was built on the southwest quarter of Section 23 with rough-cut timber and split shakes. Another brother, O. P. Kennedy, claimed the southeast quarter of Section 23 and two other brothers, Jonathan R. and Leander J., claimed land just southwest of their mother's on the northeast quarter and southwest quarter of Section 27. Thomas H. later claimed the southwest quarter of Section 19. This large concentration of Kennedy sons and daughters created what became known as Kennedy Valley, stretching southwest from the proslavery town of Franklin and westward to the bluffs that ran north/south bordering Washington Creek.

Cap Kennedy was prominently identified with the free-state cause. He held a Lieutenant's commission in Company B, 2nd Regiment, Kansas State Militia, commanding the cavalry portion of the unit while

Captain Hutchinson commanded the infantry. Cap participated in the battles of Franklin, Fort Saunders, Fort Titus, and other skirmishes. He also held a commission as 1st Lieutenant of Company B, 3rd Regiment, Kansas State Militia, and by promotion of the Captain was placed in command of the company. He took part in the battle of the Big Blue at the defeat of General Price. He was present in Lawrence at the time of Quantrill's raid and was aroused by the firing, but like others in the militia was unarmed and thus powerless to defend the city. After the departure of the raiders, he did assist in extinguishing fires set by them.

Both Cap and Elizabeth Kennedy are buried in their private family cemetery. Their grandson, X. J. Kennedy (son of Eugene) married Leoti Hiatt, the youngest Hiatt daughter, in 1904.

KENNEDY VALLEY SCHOOLS

The district had, over the years, 5 different school buildings. The first was a dugout located on the Asa Dutton homestead, where students were taught by the Kennedy matriarch, Margaret Ralston Kennedy, beginning in 1855. The next school was located on an acre of land in the northeast quarter of Section 26 in Wakarusa Township. This 14 x 16 foot log house was used until 1865, when the third school – a new and better one of stone – was built. The fourth school was a frame building made possible by voting bonds in 1895-96; it burned in 1919 but was immediately replaced by a new two-room, totally modern stucco building, the fifth and last of the Kennedy Valley schools.

Our museum director, Martha Parker, accepted a teaching position at that school, then known as Pleasant Valley, for the 1948-49 and 1949-50 school years. Martha has not been able to ascertain exactly when or why the school became known as Pleasant Valley; the name change was certainly *not* a result of the disappearance of Kennedy families from the community! In fact, Martha had two young Kennedys in attendance, the sons of Dr. Ted and Grace Kennedy who lived just west of the school. In addition to being called Kennedy Valley and Pleasant Valley, the area was also for a time known as Free-State Valley, very fitting for the anti-slavery sentiments of its inhabitants!