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Joseph V. Hickey
Emporia State University

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“PAP” SINGLETON’S DUNLAP COLONY

RELIEF AGENCIES AND THE FAILURE OF A BLACK SETTLEMENT IN EASTERN KANSAS

JOSEPH V. HICKEY

“There are gathered at Dunlap and vicinity at the present time between 275 and 300 families of colored people, all of whom are succeeding quite well and many of whom are on the road to prosperity. The plan of Dunlap Colony is very simple, the chief reason, probably, of the success met with, being the fact that every settler is compelled to own his property, no renting being permitted . . . as Mr. Atchison expressed it, “everyone is fat and happy . . .”

So wrote the *Topeka Daily Capital* on 19 October 1882, describing the Dunlap Colony, one of more than a dozen “exoduster” settlements that blacks established in Kansas following the collapse of Reconstruction.¹ In the 1880s the Dunlap Colony may have represented one of the best chances for blacks to succeed as yeoman

farmers in Kansas. Not only had the Dunlap Colony been carefully planned by Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, but in the spring of 1878 he and his business associates, Columbus Johnson and Alonzo DeFrantz, personally helped two hundred Tennessee transplants move to Dunlap and select and make down payments on their forty- to eighty-acre farms. In addition, during the Great Exodus in 1879, when twenty thousand blacks fled poverty and oppression in the south and relocated to Kansas, the Dunlap Colony received substantial financial support. The Kansas Freedmen’s Relief Association (KFRA), a state organization founded in May 1879 and headed by Kansas Governor John St. John, provided some of the aid. Much of the rest came from the Presbyterian church, which not only helped destitute blacks purchase farms, livestock, and homes, but also established “The Freedmen’s Academy of Kansas,” a “Literary and Business Academy” that offered a free education to all former slaves and their children.²

Despite these promising conditions, the Dunlap Colony fared little better than other colonies in Kansas, including the well-known Nicodemus Colony and others in the semiarid western portions of the state. Like most exoduster settlements, Dunlap’s population, which

Joseph V. Hickey is professor of anthropology at Emporia State University and editor of Heritage of the Great Plains. He is the author of numerous studies of the Flint Hills and Kansas in general.

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included ninety families in 1885, began to decline rapidly at the turn of the century, and by the end of the Great Depression only a small number of families remained. Today, of the more than one thousand black settlers that once called Dunlap their home, only one black remains, eighty-four-year-old London Harness, who lives on the farm his grandparents purchased in 1879—the year of the Great Exodus.

As with other rural settlements in Kansas, many factors contributed to the Dunlap Colony's death. Improved transportation, the mechanization of agriculture, and urbanization played significant roles. Because it was a black settlement, however, a number of other factors that were unique to exoduster settlements must also be considered. Although local racial prejudice and discrimination contributed to the colony's decline, another factor may have caused even more harm, and that was the misguided attempts of Dunlap relief agencies to transform as many exodusters as possible into landowners and independent farmers. I suggest that Pap Singleton's colony ultimately fell victim to the best intentions of relief agency and missionary workers, who, during the Great Exodus, decided that it was their duty to relocate as many destitute blacks from Topeka and other Kansas cities—where they had gathered to take advantage of temporary housing and relief aid—to the Dunlap countryside, and in so doing placed an impossible burden on the Dunlap Colony.

THE DUNLAP ENVIRONMENT

Pap Singleton's decision to locate a farming colony in Dunlap was strongly influenced by two factors: one was the nature of the physical environment, which to all appearances—and according to exaggerated claims of local boosters—was an idyllic agrarian environment. The other was cheap government lands that could be had for a small down payment and at very favorable interest rates. As did so many western promoters, however, Singleton and his followers soon discovered that there was a substantial gap between appearance and reality.

Dunlap is located in the extreme southeast-

ern corner of Morris County in east central Kansas (Fig. 1). During the 1870s and early 1880s, black settlements were created in Dunlap village, in the uplands above the village on the Morris County side, and in the neighboring Lyon County uplands three miles or so to the east and northeast of the village. Dunlap village itself is in the Neosho River valley, which contains rich and deep soils that during the last century have consistently produced excellent corn, sorghum, and wheat crops. To contemporary farmers, the Neosho valley's only serious flaw is that it periodically floods, which often delays planting and sometimes destroys crops and requires replanting. Four or five floods per

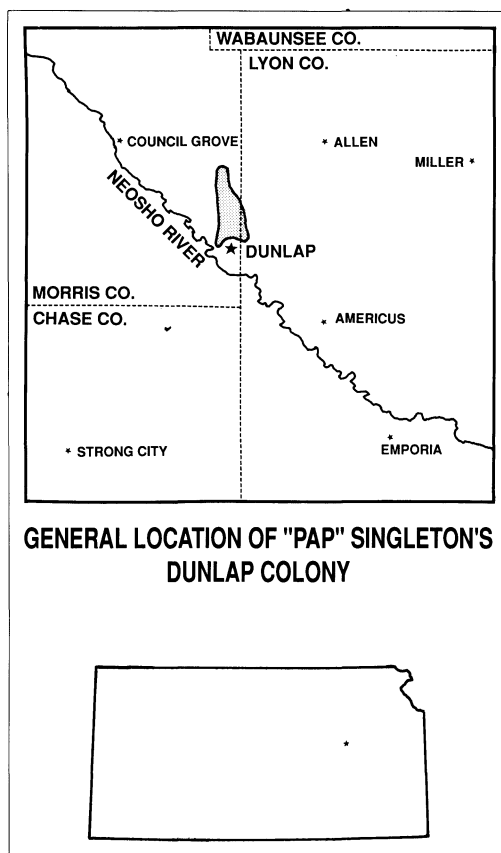


FIG. 1. *The Dunlap Colony and Kansas.* Map by William Phillips.

year are not uncommon, and in 1973, when record floods occurred, the Dunlap townsite was covered by water on ten separate occasions.³

The uplands, where the exodusters established almost all of their farms, presented more formidable obstacles to small-scale farmers. The slope gradient, in many areas 15 to 20 percent, is subject to severe erosion when plowed. Limestone outcrops are common throughout the uplands, and in most areas the soil is too shallow for sustained cultivation. According to contemporary soil conservation agents, the uplands are "better suited to native range than to feed crops or tame pasture."⁴

When he scouted the Dunlap uplands in the 1870s, Pap Singleton may have recognized some of their limitations, but, like others in this period, it is likely he misjudged the area's climate. Dunlap receives an average of 33.59 inches of rainfall a year, an amount that would have seemed more than adequate for the kinds of crops that the exodusters preferred. What Singleton and others did not know, however, is that Dunlap is in a climatic transition zone and rainfall is highly erratic. Rains often come all at once or not at all, sometimes thoroughly soaking one locality and leaving another a few miles away parched and dry. In some years a rainless June may be interrupted by a three-day deluge during which five to ten inches of rain fall, only to be followed by a long summer drought. The erratic climate, thin soils, and rocky hillsides provided conditions that gradually favored a farmer-stockraiser emphasis, and from the 1880s until today the primary agricultural focus of the area has been the summer fattening and winter feeding of cattle, with live-stock feed produced in the valleys and the uplands used for pasturage and hay.⁵

During much of the nineteenth century, Dunlap's social environment was no less turbulent than its physical environment. From 1846 to 1872 the land that would one day become Dunlap was part of the Kansa Indian Reservation, which initially covered 256,000 acres. In 1859, under considerable pressure from squatters, town-boomers, and railroad promoters, the government reduced the reservation to 80,000

acres in the southwest corner of the old reservation. Then in 1872, after officials had removed the Kansa Indians to Oklahoma, the government placed the remaining lands on the market to be sold to an army of squatters, who had taken up residence in the area long before the Indians had departed, and to other interested buyers. In 1874 Joseph Dunlap, a trader to the Kansa Indians in nearby Council Grove, laid out the town that bears his name and built the first store near the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (Katy) railroad tracks, which had been built through the Neosho valley in 1869.⁶

PAP SINGLETON'S DUNLAP COLONY

Born a slave in 1809, Benjamin Singleton spent his childhood and young manhood in Nashville, Tennessee, where he worked as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. After he was sold to owners in the Gulf states, he repeatedly escaped back to Nashville until eventually he fled north to Canada. During the Civil War he moved to Detroit, where he ran a boarding-house, and at war's end he once again returned to the Nashville area, this time to found the "Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association," which he organized to help poor Tennessee blacks purchase farms. After a fruitless search for reasonably priced lands in Tennessee, Singleton focused his attention on former Indian lands in Kansas, and in 1873 he visited the Baxter Springs area with the express purpose of securing for his clients "Cherokee Strip" lands that the government had recently made available to the public. Robert Athearn wrote that in 1875 Singleton helped 300 blacks relocate from Tennessee to Cherokee County in southeastern Kansas, where he founded "Singleton's Colony." Three years later the government placed large blocks of the Kansa Diminished Reservation in the Neosho valley on the open market, and Singleton's second and final planned settlement—"Dunlap Colony"—was born.⁷

In May 1878 Singleton, several of his associates, and about two hundred settlers moved to the Dunlap vicinity. Because squatters, the railroads, and speculators had taken the best

farmland in the river and creek valleys and the bottoms that remained were priced at \$7.00 or more an acre, almost all of the 7500 acres purchased by the black colonists were in the uplands. All colonists made small down payments on forty- and eighty-acre claims costing between \$1.25 and \$2.00 an acre and agreed to pay the outstanding debt over a period of six years at 6 percent interest per year.⁸

Apparently a large block of land sufficient for the entire colony could not be found, so four distinct upland settlements, each with between four and a dozen households, were created. One, established seven miles or so north of Dunlap above Rock Creek in Morris County, became known as the "Rock Creek Colony." Two others, both roughly three miles east and northeast of Dunlap, were in Lyon County—one in Americus Township, the other in Agnes City Township. A final settlement was established in the village of Dunlap itself, where possibly as many as twenty families took claims on the north side of the Katy railroad tracks that extended from the valley floor northeast into the rocky uplands.⁹

DUNLAP AND THE EXODUS OF 1879-80

Colony members had only begun to break out the prairie for farms and move from crude brush shelters—where they had spent the first winter in Kansas—to permanent homes when the Great Exodus of 1879 began. Benjamin Singleton later took credit for the Great Exodus, claiming his circulars inspired thousands of southern blacks to move to "Sunny Kansas." Certainly his promotional material, and fabled rumors that in addition to being the land of John Brown, Kansas promised every freedman \$500, forty acres, a mule, first class hotels, apples as big as grapefruits, and complete equality, were powerful magnets that drew the poor and dispossessed to the state. But terrorism, poverty, and the loss of their civil and political rights following the end of Reconstruction in 1877 provided the "push" that inspired blacks to leave southern homes many had known for generations and take a chance on what was for most the complete unknown.¹⁰

From 1879 to 1880 more than 20,000 "exodusters" migrated to Kansas, with many settling in Wyandotte, Leavenworth, Atchison, Parsons, and other towns in the eastern part of the state. Topeka, though, attracted by far the largest exoduster population of all. As Robert Athearn wrote,

the municipality's apparent willingness to receive them as evidenced by the creation of a temporary relief committee and the construction of temporary housing facilities, put the city into the "Exoduster business" in a big way.¹¹

The decision of Governor John St. John and his followers to establish the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association in May 1879, to "aid destitute freedmen, refugees, and emigrants coming into the state," played an even greater role in making Topeka the Mecca of southern black hope. After it was organized, committee members began a large-scale effort to secure funds from philanthropists in America and England, and within a few months they had collected thousands of dollars worth of food and clothing. Shortly thereafter rumors began to circulate in the south that not only was food abundant in Topeka, but officials there were anxious to give every freedman a free government claim. At the same time, officials in many Kansas cities decided that Topeka was better able to care for impoverished blacks than they were, and they began to funnel "excess" populations to the capital.¹²

The day after the KFRA was organized, 180 impoverished blacks arrived in Topeka, and over the next few months the Association temporarily housed, fed, and clothed thousands of exodusters before finding them jobs and permanent homes in other areas. The KFRA's resettlement plan was complex and at various times included five major options. One strategy was to purchase tracts of land in "Tennesseetown," a black enclave located on the city's western perimeter, subdivide them into house lots, and resell them at cost to the refugees. Another was to find work for the refugees in other parts of the state by having Laura Haviland, a Quaker

philanthropist who was secretary of the Association and operated the KFRA's employment bureau, print circulars and send them to prospective employers. The third was to funnel refugees to other states and the fourth to relocate poor blacks to western Kansas. A final plan sought to remove exodusters from Topeka and other cities and relocate them to rural areas in eastern Kansas—either to colonies that the state would help establish or to settlements that had been colonized in the mid-1870s. Since Dunlap already contained a viable black community, and a local relief agency had been organized there soon after the formation of the state body, it seemed ideally suited to the KFRA's needs.¹³

Two local agencies—the Presbyterian church, and the Freedmen's Aid Association of Dunlap, Kansas, a chapter of the KFRA—played major roles in relocating Topeka refugees to the Dunlap area. In 1879, during the Great Exodus, the

Presbyterian Synod of North America assigned the Reverend John M. Snodgrass "missionary to the colored people of Dunlap, Kansas." He in turn was instrumental in encouraging the church to build the literary and business academy (Fig. 2) that opened in 1880 and was chartered in 1883 as "The Freedmen's Academy of Kansas" and known locally as the "Colored Academy." According to its charter, its mission was "to educate the colored youth for teaching, for business management, for mechanical industries, for an honorable social life; and to encourage the settlement of destitute colored families of the cities on cheap lands in the country." In 1880, the church also assigned two blacks to the school: Andrew Atchison as principal and Maggie Watson as primary school teacher.¹⁴

Although the Mission Board of the Associated Presbyterian church had secured the Academy's charter, its members apparently wanted



FIG. 2. *Dunlap Academy and Mission School.* The boy's sign reads "God Bless Our School." Photograph courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.

the school to serve all blacks in Kansas, so the management of the school was placed in the care of "twelve directors who were chosen as representative men from different Christian denominations of the state." In 1883, the Academy's staff was comprised of Mr. Andrew Atchison, principal; the Reverend John Snodgrass, instructor of music; Mrs. L. P. Fulton, instructor of woman's work (sewing); and primary teachers, Maggie Watson, Georgia Smith, and Mr. R. B. Atchison. In 1882, they served ninety male and eighty-five female students, of whom forty-five were listed as adult ex-slaves.¹⁵

From its formation in May 1879 to the spring of 1881, the KFRA relocated urban refugees to Dunlap and supplied them with food, clothing, and housing in the village. When the KFRA closed its Topeka headquarters on 15 April 1881, the Freedmen's Relief Association of Dunlap took charge of the refugees and their care. Founded in the spring of 1881 and legally incorporated the following September, the Freedmen's Relief Association was directly linked to the Academy and the Presbyterian church, for the president of the Association was John Snodgrass, and Andrew Atchison was its secretary. Columbus Johnson, Pap Singleton's former business partner in the "Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association," also was an officer; an 1882 Association pamphlet described him as "Soliciting Agent," a role that included two major duties: helping refugees move from Topeka and other cities to Dunlap; and soliciting charitable donations that were to be used to purchase farms for poor blacks.¹⁶

It is impossible to give the exact number of exodusters that the KFRA and the Freedmen's Relief Association relocated from Topeka and other urban areas to Dunlap. The initial wave of settlers in 1879-80 may have included one hundred people or more, but a report in the February 1880 *Morris County Times* suggests that many found conditions in Dunlap so bleak they were planning to "return to former homes in the future." Most of those who stayed took up residence at the edge of Dunlap village, and as the *Morris County Times* also observed, "the exodusters have built innumerable small dwell-

ings, which give the town a decided 'band-box' air." In this early phase of refugee settlement only a few families appear to have settled in the countryside, and it is uncertain whether the KFRA gave them any assistance. Robert Athearn mentioned that one exoduster at least, a man named Henry Carter, paid for his own farm by working on local ranches in the Dunlap vicinity from 1879 to 1880.¹⁷

Whatever the number of actual settlers, the possibility that hundreds or even thousands of poor blacks might flood the area—and in the thinking of many whites, harm Dunlap's economic future—generated intense local hostility. The white population (which included approximately two hundred families in 1880) may have feared that the large black population would give blacks considerable influence in local politics, and some poor whites seem to have been concerned that the bountiful state aid that black farmers were rumored to have received gave blacks a competitive advantage. For example, an 1881 Freedmen's Aid Association pamphlet asked,

What will be done with the colored refugees? . . . [I]t was difficult to answer because of their vast numbers, extreme poverty, . . . and because of the dislike of our white citizens to receive them as near neighbors.¹⁸

The Freedmen's Aid Association also bore some of the hostility. For example in 1882 Dunlap citizen T. R. Cannon wrote a letter to the *Dunlap Chief*, a Morris County newspaper, claiming funds given to the Freedmen's Aid Association were being misappropriated. Cannon also stated that "Poor white people should be cared for too."¹⁹

While the 1878 colonists were greeted with curiosity, the exodusters encountered various forms of prejudice and discrimination. For example, in September 1879, at a "donation and barbeque" for the benefit of exodusters that was attended by an estimated 1500 blacks and whites, the editor of the *Morris County Times* wrote that everything went just right "with the exception of one negro boy who was inclined to be a little

noisy because the colored people were not permitted to join in a quadrille with the whites . . ."²⁰ As more poor blacks arrived, discrimination intensified and clear social boundaries between whites and blacks were drawn and enforced.

On 5 March 1880 the *Morris County Times* reported that "There will be a meeting of colored citizens of Dunlap Township to take into consideration a graveyard, as [there is] a public objection to colored people being buried where good Republicans are buried . . ." A short time later, blacks established their cemetery about a half mile north of the white one. Separate churches and schools also were established. For example in March 1882 the editor of the *Dunlap Chief* wrote that School District No. 40 "is divided—the white children occupying the school house of the district, and the colored . . . one room of the Academy building." Residential areas were segregated as well, with blacks north of the tracks, and whites to the south. Some merchants barred blacks from entering their stores, and black and white social activities were reported separately by the local newspapers. For example during the early 1890s, local news and gossip about blacks in the *Dunlap Courier* and the *Dunlap Reflector* could only be found in columns entitled "Colored Folks" or "Colored Society News."²¹

RELIEF AGENCIES AND BLACK FARMERS IN THE DUNLAP UPLANDS

At the height of the exodus in 1879-80, the Academy and the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association were acutely aware of the suffering of the poor, and this clearly influenced their decision to relocate as many blacks as possible from urban areas to Dunlap. After the crisis had ended and black emigration had largely ceased in 1881, however, the Academy and the Freedmen's Relief Association of Dunlap continued or even increased their efforts to bring urban blacks to the area, apparently ignoring the fact that black villagers and farmers who had already settled in the area were having a difficult time succeeding.

While the original colonists and many of the exodusters had come from farming back-grounds, few were prepared for the conditions in the Dunlap area. At a time when the farms of their white neighbors averaged almost 160 acres, those of black settlers averaged but 87 acres. Moreover, the farms of whites typically contained a mix of bottomlands and upland pastures. Those of blacks were located almost exclusively in the uplands and many contained such an abundance of rocks that London Harness, whose grandparents lived on such a claim, cannot understand how they ever could have plowed them. Confined to the uplands, few blacks had access to timber and water, and a lack of reliable water may have had particularly serious consequences because of their agricultural focus on corn and hogs. The agricultural strategy of J. A. Bridges of Americus Township in Lyon County is somewhat typical of his black neighbors. In 1885, twenty acres of his eighty-acre upland farm were in corn, and on the other sixty he kept five hogs, two horses, and two cows.²²

In December 1879, black farmers in Morris and Lyon Counties, apparently struggling to meet the second installment on their loans, petitioned the KFRA for assistance. It is unlikely they received much help, however, for at that time the Association was preoccupied with resettling the urban poor. An Academy circular described the first two winters as particularly hard on the immigrants, and in an interview in the *Topeka Daily Capital* in October 1882, Andrew Atchison, the principal of the Academy, noted that, while everybody was fat and happy that year, "The crops of the previous year [1881] were somewhat disheartening." Census data for the years 1880-85 also suggest that black farmers experienced difficulties in the uplands; despite the efforts of relief agencies to expand the number of black farmers, few settled in any of the four settlements, and the number of black farmers in Agnes City Township in Lyon County actually declined in this five-year period from twelve households to five, probably because of farm failures.²³

Despite these problems, the Academy and

Freedmen's Aid Association continued to request aid from the state and from wealthy individuals so that additional poor blacks could be relocated to the Dunlap countryside. In a pamphlet distributed in the fall of 1881, the Freedmen's Aid Association stated:

It is the desire of the Dunlap Freedmen's Aid Association to secure means to purchase some tracts of land near Dunlap to be sold to the Refugees on easy terms and the payments to be added to the school fund . . .

Several months later in its Quarterly Report, the Freedmen's Aid Association noted:

The Association has resolved upon the purchase of a choice tract of land to be divided into five- and ten-acre lots for the accommodation of as many of the homeless families of refugees as possible . . . The land will be sold to the refugees on easy terms . . .²⁴

Ann F. Jamison of Maine, "a supporter of John Brown and the abolitionist cause," seems to have responded to an Association request. In 1881 she bequeathed to the Association sufficient money to purchase 240 acres that were to be given to the Dunlap Colony "for the purposes of encouraging poor colored families who make a difficult living in the cities to remove to the country." Land was found, all of it in the uplands three miles southwest of Dunlap village, and in 1886 it was opened for settlement. According to the provisions of Jamison's will, each farm was to be sold to the poor for \$1.00, provided that blacks "personally reside upon, improve and cultivate [it] . . . in a husband-like manner . . . , and that said premises shall not be sold . . . until the expiration of seven years . . ."²⁵

As they said they would do, rather than partition the land into forty- or eighty-acre farms—like those owned by the majority of black farmers who were at best marginally successful—Association members subdivided the 240 acres into twenty-eight lots, with each lot containing either five or ten acres of land. They called the property "A. B. Whiting's Subdivision."²⁶

The following year Mark and Hannah Hillyer of Topeka, apparently wishing to take advantage of \$3500 donated to the Academy to buy additional land for poor blacks, partitioned their land at the northern edge of the village into thirty-two five-acre lots. These lands, called Hillyer's Subdivision, were offered to black refugees for \$160 each. Buyers (or the Academy on their behalf) were required to make a small down payment, pay 10 percent interest per year on the outstanding debt, and pay off the loan in a five-year period.²⁷

By the early 1890s fifteen black families had taken claims in Whiting's Subdivision. The Academy seems to have provided each with a twelve-by-sixteen-foot cabin, a livestock pen, and possibly some livestock. That year's census shows that most cultivated about two acres of their five- or ten-acre farms, and despite their meager farm holdings, most owned two or more horses, a cow, and several hogs. In the same period, six families took claims in Hillyer's Subdivision. Their farm sizes, the amount of land in cultivation, and livestock holdings were so similar to those of people living in Whiting's Subdivision, that it appears likely that they too received money and assistance from the Academy Board.²⁸

THE DUNLAP COLONY'S FAILURE

Given Dunlap's stock raising emphasis in the 1880s and the fact that by this time local farmers were fully aware that a minimum of 160 acres—including both bottomlands and upland pastures—was needed to sustain a viable farming operation, it is difficult to comprehend the actions of the Academy Board. It might be argued that Dunlap relief agencies were unaware of the limitations of the Dunlap uplands, but local understanding that this niche was primarily suited to pasture and hay had dominated farmer thinking for almost three decades. It is more likely that Association members considered it only a temporary measure when they placed poor black families on five- or ten-acre farms; when they secured additional funds they probably planned to increase the size of black farm holdings. But the charitable aid that trickled

into the area in the early 1880s gradually diminished, and after 1886 benefactors became very hard to find. The loss of aid had the most serious consequences for those who had taken five- or ten-acre claims, but over the next decade several developments adversely affected the entire black community.²⁹

One was a cattle bust that came in 1887 after six years of spectacular growth in Dunlap and in most other parts of the West. Prior to the bust, dozens of ranches had been established in the area, herds had been expanded, and Dunlap had become a major cattle shipping station on the Katy line. Black settlers derived a considerable portion of their incomes from working on local farms and ranches, and during the boom years employment opportunities were excellent. For example, London Harness noted that many early settlers worked on local stock farms for \$.50 a day, baling hay and shucking corn. And, as noted earlier, by working on local ranches, Henry Carter not only was able to make a down payment on his forty-acre farm but also purchase a "horse and two cows."³⁰ While employment opportunities in stone quarries in Dunlap and in Strong City twenty miles to the west tempered the impact of the cattle bust, the loss of income from farm labor was keenly felt by all black settlers.

A few years after the cattle bust, Kansas and the nation entered a period of severe economic depression. Beginning in 1889, agricultural prices steadily declined. For example, in 1889 and again in 1896, corn prices fell to \$.20 a bushel, and wheat at \$.49 was not much better. Many Kansas farmers attempted to hold on to their farms by borrowing at annual interest rates of from 40 to 375 percent, but this tactic rarely succeeded; between 1880 and 1890 the number of tenant farmers in Kansas increased from 16.3 percent to 35.2 percent.³¹

In Dunlap the full impact of the depression does not appear to have been felt immediately, for Dunlap's black population declined only slightly, from ninety families in 1885 to eighty-six in 1895. Over the next decade, however, Dunlap's black population declined by more than 50 percent, from eighty-six families to forty.³² Given its central role in the community, the

closing of the Academy in the early 1890s must have been a particularly serious blow. Without its support, blacks not only lost valuable economic assistance but also a free education, which may have been a major reason many decided to leave the community.

In May of 1889 the Academy sold most of its real estate holdings to local businessmen, and a year later John Snodgrass moved to Iowa, where he retired. Andrew Atchison, the Academy's principal, seems to have left the area sometime during the same year, and a short time later the Academy ceased operation. The Academy building sat vacant until 1895, when Dunlap businessman Alfred Parrish purchased the neat two-story frame structure and moved it several blocks to Commercial Street, where it served as his family's residence for several decades. After Parrish's death it was left vacant, and eventually it burned to the ground.³³

Soon after the Academy closed, blacks began to flee Dunlap, abandoning both their five- and ten-acre farms and their homes in the village. Between 1895 and 1905, the number of black families in the village declined from twenty-nine to nineteen, and only six of twenty-one farmers remained in Whiting's and Hillyer's Subdivisions. The rural black population in Valley Township, in Morris County, declined by more than 50 percent. Even in the three original 1878 settlements, where black farmers had the largest farms and seemingly the best chances of success, losses were heavy. In Americus Township in Lyon County, the black population declined from twelve families to five, in Agnes City only two of seven families remained, and in the Rock Creek Colony only five of thirteen families survived the decade.³⁴

As happened throughout rural Kansas, Dunlap's citizens, both black and white, gradually left the farm and moved to cities. By the depression so few black families remained that they closed their schools and black children began to attend integrated schools. On 22 September 1931, blacks held their last Emancipation Day Ceremony, an event that had until that time celebrated their black heritage, their coming to Dunlap, and their sense of commitment to others in the Dunlap community. Two black



FIG. 3. John R. Somers (grandfather of London Harness) holding his buggy in front of the limestone house he built on his farm northeast of Dunlap in the 1880s. Photograph courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

churches remained open until the early 1950s, but in the end each was supported by only a handful of families. Today, London Harness is the final link to the past, the last reminder of the exoduster presence in the Dunlap area and of black efforts to succeed as yeoman farmers in eastern Kansas.³⁵

In examining the actions of the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Agency, its local chapters, and various missionary aid groups, it is clear that during the exodus their primary goal was to assist and relocate destitute blacks from Topeka and other Kansas cities to the countryside. Politicians and religious groups joined forces to accomplish this goal, though both groups seem to have had motives of their own. Politicians wanted to remove blacks to the countryside to relieve overcrowding, reduce the possibility of civil disturbances, and contain the spread of disease. Religious groups may have had similar

objectives, but their ideology also had a strong anti-urban bias which held that in cities the poor were inclined to laziness, moral laxity, and corruption. By contrast, missionary groups fervently believed that if poor blacks worked with their hands in the countryside they would be both economically and morally rewarded.³⁶

Long-term plans by relief agencies to transform exodusters into yeoman farmers are much less in evidence in Dunlap; the support Dunlap farmers received was clearly inadequate. Dunlap was not the only colony in eastern Kansas that received KFRA and missionary aid. Singleton's Colony in southeastern Kansas and the Little Coney Colony in Chautauqua County also received some assistance. The KFRA also established the Wabaunsee Colony in the rugged Flint Hills uplands. There, as in Dunlap, blacks were given farms of forty acres or less, and as happened in Dunlap, they too failed and moved

back to the city. The efforts of relief agencies to solicit funds were so vigorous that many Kansans may have concluded that black farmers had been given every opportunity to succeed, but the nature of that assistance shows that rather than helping blacks succeed as yeoman farmers, the efforts of relief agencies ensured that they would fail.³⁷

I do not want to suggest that relief agencies had no benefits for black exodusters: clearly relief workers saved many lives and their humanitarian aid helped many find homes, receive educations and job training, and even get a start in farming. They had other unintended benefits as well. There is another side of the exoduster story that deserves to be told, and that is how Dunlap colonists and exodusters used the meager aid they were given not only to sustain the colony for more than half a century but to build a social support system that stretched across Kansas and included most cities and many small rural communities as well.

THE DUNLAP COLONY'S SUCCESS

Local newspapers and most historic documents tend to emphasize the helplessness and vulnerability of the exodusters—in part to promote a greater appreciation for white generosity. But there are occasional newspaper accounts that mention black church groups and associations that blacks created to help themselves as well as to assist those with special needs. For example in 1879 the *Morris County Times* mentioned that the "Colored Actual Settlers' had met to take into consideration the payments of their land," and near the turn of the century *The Dunlap Reflector* stated that blacks had a new organization called "The National Ex-Slave Pension Association."³⁸ Emancipation Day, as London Harness explained to me, however, was particularly important to black self-help and success.

Soon after they arrived in Dunlap, blacks began to celebrate Emancipation Day, an event that drew hundreds and sometimes more than a thousand people. Most of the people who attended the celebration were local blacks, but kin, friends, and former residents from other

parts of Kansas were well represented, as were whites from the village and nearby towns, businessmen, and local and state officials. To most outsiders, Emancipation Day was little more than feasting, games, and inspirational speeches. For black families, however, it was not only a day to celebrate their freedom but also an opportunity to make social contacts with both blacks and whites across the state. It was a time for kin to pool their resources and help those in need. It also was a vital communication channel that alerted blacks to employment opportunities in various cities and on local farms and to prejudice and discrimination in various parts of the state. Contacts with white officials and local whites were also useful not only in helping blacks find jobs but also in resolving local problems in a rare forum where blacks—rather than whites—were the majority.

Many blacks even appear to have found a way to turn the colony's failure to their advantage. During interviews, London Harness told me that throughout his working life he knew where many former Dunlap families had moved, and when working in Manhattan, Abilene, Junction City, and other Kansas towns, he could always count on their providing him with housing, food, and other necessities. For blacks these were essential services, for until the 1950s in many Kansas towns and villages blacks were unwelcome in hotels and restaurants, and many whites either would not serve blacks or demanded that they take their meals and eat in segregated areas, or in some small towns, outdoors.³⁹ Thus while the Dunlap Colony was a failure in terms of establishing a persistent black farming community in the Kansas Flint Hills, it was a success in allowing individual black families to escape poverty and overcrowding in Kansas cities and in establishing an enduring social and economic network that enabled many generations of family members to live, work, and travel throughout the state.

NOTES

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1. *Topeka Daily Capital*, 19 October 1882, Morris County clippings, vol. 1, 1874-1933, Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS), Topeka, Kansas. Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas 1879-1880* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), p. 167, noted that "the 1880 census figures show 43,107 blacks in Kansas, an increase of 26,000 since 1870 . . ."

2. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 205. See also Lee Ella Blake, *The Great Exodus of 1879-1880 to Kansas* (Manhattan: Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Studies, 1928), p. 15. Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 116, noted that "Singleton, W. A. Sizemore, and Alonzo De Frantz lived there [Dunlap Colony] from the middle of 1879 to the early part of 1880." Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, p. 57, wrote that the KFRA asked for incorporation in May 1879, and that Governor St. John headed its thirteen member governing board. Presbyterian church efforts in founding the Freedmen's Academy of Kansas are discussed in H. C. Speer, *Fourth Biennial Report, Superintendent Public Instruction, 1883-84* (Topeka, Kansas, 1885), p. 127, KSHS.

3. *Emporia Gazette*, 3 May 1962, "Dunlap"—"History of Dunlap Is Full of Excitement of Old West," Gilson Scrapbooks (newspaper clippings), Lyon County Historical Museum, Emporia, Kansas. See also Fred Bernard in *Flint Hills Oral History Project* (Emporia: Emporia State University, 1974), p. 1. Bernard said that in 1973 ten floods occurred in Dunlap and that prior to that time, "five had been the record."

4. Wesley L. Barker, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey of Morris County, Kansas* (Washington, D.C., 1974), p. 12.

5. Joseph E. Van Riper, "Details of a Simplified Koeppen-Geiger System of Climatic Classification," *Man's Physical World*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 626-30. The dividing line between Humid Continental Climate and Humid Subtropical is near Council Grove, Kansas; Joseph V. Hickey and Charles E. Webb, "The Transition From Farming to Ranching in the Kansas Flint Hills," *Great Plains Quarterly* 7 (Fall 1987), note 8, p. 255; "Farm Facts

1974-75," *Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 58th Annual Report* (Topeka: State Printer, 1974-1975), 19F. My figures are long-term rainfall averages for the twentieth century. Barker, *Soil Survey of Morris County, Kansas* (note 4 above), p. 50.

6. William E. Unrau, *The Kansa Indians: History of the Wind People, 1673-1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 213. See also H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854-1871* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), p. 102; Morris County clippings (note 1 above).

7. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 77; Orwal L. McDaniel, "A History of Nicodemus, Graham County, Kansas" (Master's thesis, Fort Hays State University, 1950), p. 12; Painter, *Exodusters* (note 2 above), p. 113; Roy Garvin, "Benjamin, or 'Pap' Singleton and His Followers," *The Journal of Negro History* 33 (January 1948): 8. Kenneth M. Hamilton, "Black Town Promotion and Development on the Middle Border, 1877-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, St. Louis, 1978), p. 26, noted that the success of Singleton's Cherokee County Colony "prompted various Kansas railroads . . . to send immigration agents into Tennessee and Kentucky to recruit more blacks, in the process offering reduced fares from Nashville to Topeka."

8. Randall B. Woods, *A Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), p. 20. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 77, gives an even larger black population for Dunlap, "eight hundred settlers." I determined homestead and settlement locations from tract records in Morris and Lyon counties and used Geological Survey maps to determine their upland nature. These records are in both Lyon and Morris counties; Register of Deeds Office, Council Grove, Kansas and Register of Deeds Office, Lyon County, Kansas.

9. London Harness, *Flint Hills Oral History Project* (note 3 above), pp. 3, 27.

10. Painter, *Exodusters* (note 2 above), pp. 207, 158-59, 191-93. See also Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 81; Van B. Shaw, "Nicodemus, Kansas: A Study in Isolation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1951), p. 86.

11. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 57. Athearn discusses the various strategies for black removal from Kansas cities in chapter 9, pp. 155-71.

12. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), pp. 57, 167.

13. Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas 1865-1915, A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 62; Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 263; Blake, *The Great Exodus* (note 2 above), p. 60.

14. William M. Glasgow, *Cyclopedic Manual of the United Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Church Board Publication, 1903), cited in Cheryl Romine, "The Freedmen's Academy Mystery," paper prepared for Flint Hills Folklife Class, Emporia State University, Summer, 1989; Andrew Atchison, "An Urgent Appeal in Behalf of a New and Important Charity," *Freedmen's Academy of Kansas*, pamphlet, 1884, KSHS; *The Dunlap Chief*, 3 March 1882. Under the heading "Dunlap Colored Academy," the newspaper noted that "Andrew Atchison and Miss Maggie Watson have since come [to the Academy] as auxiliary workers . . ."

15. H. C. Speer, *Fourth Biennial Report Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1883-84* (Topeka: State Printer, 1885), p. 128; Doug Thompson, "A Historical Study of Dunlap, Kansas and the Negro Exodus," Social Science Research Project, Emporia State University, May 1974.

16. Kansas Colored Literary and Business Academy of Dunlap, Morris County, Kansas, Business Report, November, 1881, cited in Thompson, "A Historical Study of Dunlap, Kansas" (note 15 above), pp. 80-81.

17. *Morris County Times*, 27 February 1880; Andrew Atchison, *The Freedmen's Aid Association of Dunlap, Kansas*, pamphlet, vol. 1, 1881, KSHS. The pamphlet noted, "About forty families have settled in the village . . . [I]t is their desire to obtain small farms . . ." The 1880 census also shows that most exodusters initially settled in or near the village. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 278.

18. *The Freedmen's Aid Association of Dunlap, Kansas*, pamphlet, 1881 (note 17 above); Andrew Atchison to John P. St. John, 22 August 1881, Governor St. John Letters file, KSHS. My count of white families includes those in Dunlap Village and in Valley Township, Morris County, that are listed in the 1880 federal census. The white population would have been considerably larger had I counted Agnes City and Americus townships in Lyon County as part of the area. Tenth United States Federal Census, Morris County, Kansas, Valley Township and Dunlap Village, 1880, K-19, vol. 13, Reel 390.

19. T. R. Cannon, "True Freedom and How to Gain It," *Dunlap Chief*, 28 April 1882. Athearn quotes an E. D. Bullen, of Dunlap, who had written Governor St. John in 1882 and claimed "the Association is doing a good work for the colored people . . . but [it is] so very obnoxious [sic] to the whites," *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 271.

20. *Morris County Times*, 26 September 1879.

21. *Morris County Times*, 5 March 1880. *The Dunlap Courier*, 11 July 1891, listed under the heading "colored churches" Methodist-Episcopal, Baptist, and First Mount Zion Missionary Baptist. *Dunlap Chief*,

10 March 1882; Fred Bernard, p. 3, and London Harness, p. 6, *Flint Hills Oral History Project* (note 3 above). See also, *Morris County Times*, 5 March 1880; *Dunlap Courier*, 11 July 1891.

22. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Morris County, Valley Township, 1885, vol. 183, Reel 93, KSHS. Farm sizes are based on a comparison of white and black farms in Agnes City Township in Lyon County, where black farm holdings were somewhat larger than those in other black settlements.

23. *Morris County Times*, 19 December 1879; Andrew Atchison, *Topeka Daily Capital*, 19 October 1882, Morris County clippings (note 1 above), KSHS; United States Federal Census, Lyon County, Agnes City Township, 1880, Reel 390, Schedule 2; Kansas State Agricultural Census, Lyon County, Agnes City and Americus townships, 1885, KSHS.

24. *The Freedmen's Aid Association*, "Quarterly Report of the Freedmen's Aid Association of Dunlap, Kansas," 1 February 1882, pamphlet, vol. 4, KSHS.

25. A. B. Whiting's Subdivision, Tract Records, Morris County, Register of Deeds Office, Council Grove, Kansas. For example, see H. W. Watkins Grantee, Ann F. Jamison Grantor, 1 May 1889. The land was in Section 27, Township 17, Range 9 east.

26. "Quarterly Report," 1 February 1882 (note 24 above).

27. Atchison, "An Urgent Appeal" (note 14 above); Hillyer's Subdivision, Plat Record No. 27, S. E. quarter of Section 12, Township 17, Range 9 east, Tract Records, Morris County, Register of Deeds Office, Council Grove, Kansas.

28. Bernard, *Flint Hills Oral History Project* (note 3 above), p. 3. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Dunlap City, Morris County, Kansas, 1895, vol. 250, Reel 200, Schedule 2. I came to this conclusion after determining the tenants of each subdivision and comparing their farms and livestock holdings as listed in the 1895 census.

29. The (Council Grove) *Republican and Democrat*, 25 May 1878, discussed folk notions about the bottoms and uplands; Hickey and Webb discuss Kansas pioneer perceptions of the bottoms and uplands in "The Transition From Farming to Ranching" (note 5 above). After 1889 I found no record of any additional land purchases by the Academy. Moreover, in 1889 the Academy sold all of its holdings to R. A. Boyd, a local businessman. See also Romine, "Freedmen's Academy Mystery" (note 14 above).

30. Robert W. Richmond, *Kansas a Land of Contrasts* (St. Charles, Missouri: Forum Press, 1974), p. 125; Daniel Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas* (Holton, Kansas: Bell Graphics, 1982), vol. 3: 228; Harness, *Flint Hills Oral History Project* (note 3 above), p. 16; Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 278.

31. Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier*,

Agriculture 1860-1897 (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1945), p. 235; Scott G. and Sally McNall, *Plains Families* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1983), p. 27.

32. Kansas State Agricultural Census, Valley Township and Dunlap City, Morris County, Kansas, 1885, Americus and Agnes City townships, Lyon County, Kansas, 1885, 1895, 1905, and Garfield Township, Morris County, Kansas, 1895, 1905.

33. Romine, "Freedmen's Academy Mystery" (note 14 above). See also Louis H. Douglas and Scott Shelley, *Community Staying Power: A Small Rural Place and Its Role in Rural Development* (Manhattan: Kansas State University, Research Publication 171, 1977), p. 27, n. 7, KSHS.

34. Kansas State Agricultural Censuses, Americus and Agnes City townships, Lyon County, Kansas,

1895, 1905, Garfield Township, Morris County, Kansas, 1895, 1905.

35. London Harness, *Flint Hills Oral History Project* (note 3 above), pp. 16, 27. One of the Emancipation Day celebrations is mentioned in *The Americus Greeting*, 19 September 1890.

36. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), p. 201; *Freedmen's Aid Association*, pamphlet, vol. 5, 1883, KSHS.

37. McDaniel, "History of Nicodemus, Graham County" (note 7 above), p. 18; see also Athearn, *In Search of Canaan* (note 1 above), pp. 270, 156.

38. *Morris County Times*, 19 December 1879; *The Dunlap Reflector*, 15 January 1897.

39. Taped interview by author with London Harness, Emporia, Kansas, August 1990.