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# IMAGINING KANSAS

## PLACE, PROMOTION, AND WESTERN STEREOTYPES IN THE ART OF HENRY WORRALL (1825-1902)

KAREN DE BRES

'Tis neither rank nor wealth nor state,  
But get up and get that makes us great.

—*Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, October 14, 1876

In May of 1876 three men took a private Santa Fe railroad car from Topeka, Kansas, to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. One was the Santa Fe land commissioner and the director of the railroad's exhibit, another was secretary of state for the Kansas Board of Agriculture. The third was a self-trained artist in the railroad's employ, and the designer of both the Kansas and Santa Fe exhibits. Fifty-one-year-old Henry Worrall lifted himself from a boyhood in the back streets of Liverpool

to a comfortable life, and this journey in a company car, through artistic endeavors that helped support mainstream social and political ideology. Worrall's art represented the views of the ruling stratum, and as Rhys Jones recently demonstrated in the case of a medieval Welsh biography, aimed to promote and sustain existing power relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Today it is a truism that national memory is really the past continuously reinterpreted through the present. In this article I will argue for the influence of the past over the present, and that in the American West of the nineteenth century, certain artists were able to shape through their paintings and sketches the national memory of future generations. The importance of the graphic image was clearly understood by American railroad companies of the time, some of which laid thousands of miles of track across the frontier, based on the promised receipt of millions of acres in federal land grants. On the Kansas frontier of the 1870s, for example, one-sixth of all lands were in the hands of the railroads. Then, as now, new migrants moved to a specific location, at least

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in part, on the basis of its image. By depicting scenes that promised wealth and happiness, railroad companies and others with land to sell used effective forms of propaganda, creating specific visual images to encourage settlement. The artists employed to make the pictures have left us with what must be considered a biased interpretation of the nineteenth-century American West. By producing very favorable images of the American West, railroad artists such as Henry Worrall not only helped their employers sell land to farmers and others in the short term but also contributed to a longer-lasting impression of what nineteenth-century America was really like.

Henry Worrall (1825-1902) was considered the "first artist of Kansas" by his contemporaries but has largely been forgotten today. Worrall was called "Kansas' first artist and pioneer decorator" in Blackmar's 1912 *Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Towns, Prominent Persons, etc.* The Kansas University chemist and historian Robert Taft, writing in 1946, referred to him as "the only Kansas artist in the period under consideration to achieve recognition on anything approaching a national scale for his portrayal of Kansas life." Worrall helped persuade farmers to buy railroad land in Kansas, through drawings that appeared to be illustrations of genuine frontier farming and new settlement scenes, but which were acknowledged even at the time to present the Kansas frontier through rose-colored glasses. On a broader scale, Worrall's pictures also helped create or at least reinforce some of the common stereotypes about the American frontier and the characteristics and identities of its inhabitants. These pictures serve as important historical and geographical documents, since they convey messages that transcend surface reality, as Worrall absorbed the ambitions and attitudes of his time and then committed many of those ambitions and attitudes to paper. Worrall mirrored established taste, and his art presented a simplistic and yet compelling narrative.<sup>2</sup> His drawings' own lack of sophistication may have aided their

acceptance by the common person. He was one of many American artists who communicated their view of the subtleties of the essential American experience in an accessible mode for the American people.

Henry Worrall's career as a commercial artist in Kansas spanned roughly twenty-five years, from 1868 to 1893. James Ballinger defines nineteenth-century artists of the American West as "explorer-artists, traveler-artists, resident artists, and illustrators."<sup>3</sup> While Worrall's pictures contain elements of all four, he primarily worked as an illustrator, and many of his illustrations are still readily available in the pages of old *Harper's Weeklys* and *Frank Leslie's* magazines, in the two books he profusely illustrated, and in over two dozen other paintings and prints in the collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, Washburn University in Topeka, and the University of Kansas. Samples are examined and discussed both in the context of events unfolding in Kansas and as documents that emphasize particular themes and characteristics of Kansas life which Worrall and his employers wished to stress. How, in other words, do these illustrations market Kansas and how do the themes they present connect to the wider mythology about life on the American frontier? While I refer to a variety of Worrall's images, I focus on three in particular: (1) "Drouthy Kansas," a cartoon dated 1869; (2) "Great Bend City-Cattle Depot of the A.T. and St. Fe R.R.," an illustration from Joseph McCoy's *Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest*, published in 1874; and (3) "The Kansas Exhibit," an oil painting based on the Philadelphia Centennial exhibit.

I argue that Henry Worrall's pictures and decorations help support myths that formed in the nineteenth century and became case hardened in the twentieth. The art historians Goetzmann and Goetzmann defined myth as "the tale of the tribe [that] weaves together the many strands and layers of complex human experience into one understandable story that inspires the people or the tribe to go on as one into succeeding epochs."<sup>4</sup> Another art historian, William H. Truettner, investigated

those myths or beliefs that inform and link the images of westward expansion, of which many of Worrall's pictures are examples. Myths and ideology, according to Truettner, intersect continuously in western images, and the former "serves as a vehicle to convert traditional narratives into metaphors explaining the way a group (or society or nation) perceives itself. . . . [Myth] functions to control history, to shape it in text or image as an ordained sequence of events."<sup>5</sup> The "myth of the frontier" guarantees progress without encumbering social and environmental debt.

EARLY IMAGES OF KANSAS, 1854-1869:  
FROM "DESERT" TO "GARDEN" TO  
"BLEEDING" TO "DROUTHY"

Henry Worrall arrived in Topeka in 1868, just seven years after Kansas achieved statehood. He was one of six children born to Charles Allen Worrall, an English journalist and sometime editor, and his wife, Mary Roberts Worrall. Charles Worrall, also a flute player and wood carver, was born on Hope Street in Liverpool in 1791. Henry, born in 1825, was his only child to survive to adulthood. When Charles left his native Liverpool for Canada ten years later, young Henry went with him. Together they crossed the border to Buffalo, New York, and later Henry made his way to Cincinnati, where he completed his education as a trained musician and also began to sketch as a hobby. Henry Worrall was described throughout his life as a convivial man of many interests. He was a cofounder of the Cincinnati Sketch Club, which was made up of only male members, but the club he founded later in Topeka also contained "the additional grace of membership composed of beautiful and talented ladies."<sup>6</sup>

By this time Worrall was married to Mary E. Harvey, a student of his at a Cincinnati musical academy and to whom he had dedicated one of his musical compositions ("Mexican Air"). The Worralls presumably spent the early 1860s in Cincinnati, as the 1870 federal census lists them with a son, Harvey, aged ten, and a six-

year-old daughter, Mary, both born there. In 1857 Worrall became an American citizen. He is described on his passport of that year (now in the archives of the Kansas State Historical Society) as 5 feet, 5 ½ inches tall, "forehead broad, eyes hazel, nose and mouth medium, chin sound, hair dark with grey, complexion fair, face thin."<sup>7</sup>

Worrall returned to England in 1851 to visit his mother in Liverpool and to see the London International Exhibition, better known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition. This first world's fair, like the ones that followed, emphasized such themes as nationalism and the importance of modern technology and was filled with very large and eye-catching exhibits, a style that would later influence Worrall's own displays. In 1862, while living in Cincinnati, he published "The Eclectic Guitar Instructor," a collection of guitar music, but although he maintained his interest in music and spent Sundays as a church organist in Topeka, Worrall's occupation in the 1870 census is listed as "portrait painter." There are seven Worrall portraits in the collection of the Kansas State Historical Society. By the 1880s Worrall was doing well enough to establish a studio on Topeka's main street, at 807 Kansas Avenue, and to purchase a home on Polk Street.<sup>8</sup>

The brief history of Worrall's new state was both turbulent and well publicized. The Kansas Territory was created by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which allowed either territory to come into the Union as a slave or free state on the basis of popular sovereignty. Americans from both sides of the slavery issue emigrated into the new territory, previously maligned as part of the "Great American Desert."<sup>9</sup> Emigrant pamphlets quickly proclaimed Kansas not as a "desert" but as a "garden." Those in Kansas Territory who favored the extension of free state land in the 1850s, often members of the new Republican Party, denied the earlier desert image. Environmental images were altered by politicians who claimed a moral imperative of bringing Kansas into the Union as a free state. Northern poets such as Whittier

wrote stirring verse, praising the virtues of the Kansas emigrant. Henry Ward Beecher, the best-known American minister of his day, and other well-known personalities provided both verbal and financial support. The first free state emigrants to "K.T." found themselves eulogized as heroes.

But most of the new settlers came from neighboring states, from Missouri and other upper South slaveholding states. The situation was therefore explosive and made even more so by the presence of John Brown, a well-known abolitionist, soon to be canonized by the Northern press. So strongly were certain eastern Kansas settlements identified with the Northern cause that a Missouri rebel, William Quantrill raided Lawrence and burned the town. John Brown and his sons also killed eight proslavery men. In the 1850s Kansas received the soubriquet "Bleeding" or "Bloody" in the national press.

But what of the competing image of Kansas as a "garden," as an ideal place for yeomen farmers to settle? Kansas's reputation as a garden was seriously damaged by the drought of 1860, the worst recorded drought of the century. Average annual precipitation in the settled counties of the territory (roughly those in the eastern third of the state) dropped from an annual range of thirty-six to thirty-four inches to less than fifteen inches during the drought. Rainfall in Kansas decreases from about thirty-six inches a year near the eastern border with Missouri to about fifteen inches a year near the western border with Colorado, an area not yet settled in the 1860s. Legislatures from every Northern state sent aid to forty-one counties (of the sixty organized at the time). As well as the drought damaging Kansas's image, there were also grasshopper infestations. The "hoppers" returned to damage crops in 1866, 1867, and 1869, with a major infestation in 1874. Between 1867 and 1869 Indian attacks on settlers and railroad construction workers were also common.<sup>10</sup> It was into this new state, beset by drought, grasshoppers infestations, and Indian raids, that Henry Worrall moved his young family in 1868.

Worrall chose to settle in Topeka, the new state capital located on the Kansas River. Cyrus Holliday, one of Topeka's founders, was also the creator of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, and the railroad's headquarters, rail yards, and the wholesale grocery and milling business associated with it were all located in Topeka. The Santa Fe received over two million acres in federal grants in Kansas, and the main competing line, the Kansas Pacific, received over three million acres; much of the land granted to both companies was located in the more arid western half of the state.

Topeka's fortunes flourished with that of the Santa Fe, its population growing from 8,000 in 1870 to 45,000 in 1888. However, following a statewide trend, which will be discussed later, Topeka's population fell to 37,000 during the 1890s. Railroads, says James Shortridge in *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas*, "were the single most important determinant of city growth in nineteenth-century Kansas."<sup>11</sup> In 1878 the Santa Fe established the line's general shops in Topeka, which manufactured and repaired steam locomotives. These shops employed over 5,000 workers by the 1880s. By 1883 the company's new offices, designed by one of the best-known architectural firms in America, Burnham and Root of Chicago, covered nine city lots.<sup>12</sup>

#### "DROUTHY KANSAS" AND EARLY CELEBRITY

When Worrall arrived in Kansas, its growth rate was stagnating, an unpromising condition for a frontier state. Kansas's 1860 population of 100,000 more than tripled (to 360,000) by 1865, but it remained at roughly that figure until 1870, just as the Kansas Pacific and the Santa Fe railroads expanded their lines westward across the state and tried to sell their central and western Kansas lands, primarily to farmers. A variety of organizations both within and outside the state urgently called for more settlers, particularly experienced farmers, but following the dry summer months in 1860, Kansas was labeled "Drouthy." Writers

for immigration pamphlets at the time discussed and tried to dismiss the problem of drought in Kansas (see, for example, "Kansas and the Country Beyond" [1867], "The Best Thing in the West" [1873], and "Kansas As It Is" [1878]).<sup>13</sup> Help also appeared from a humorous picture that soon became locally famous, drawn by Henry Worrall.

Worrall's puckish sense of humor was a lifelong trait. Just a year after his arrival, the Topeka newspapers noted two examples of his talent for caricature. Evidently he was already a well-known figure in town, according to the *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* for August 4, 1869:

Worrall, the prince of artists and musicians, has concocted and executed a most admirable burlesque on the picture of the infantile group of the Commonwealth proprietors, recently taken by Capt. Knight (a well-known Topeka photographer). A peep at Worrall's caricature is worth more than a physician's prescription for the worst case of biliousness. Knight has taken photographic copies of the caricature.

Caricature, says Robert Taft, was Worrall's strongest point, because he was not a skilled draftsman, but

his ever-present sense of humor found its outlet in line drawings whose figures were readily recognizable and whose humor was particularly suited to the taste of Westerners. If Worrall's caricatures do not contribute greatly to our pictorial knowledge of past Western life they do contribute to our knowledge of Western taste and humor.<sup>14</sup>

Worrall had the knack of catching a likeness, very useful for portrait painting, which was his early bread and butter, and also for exaggerating or distorting features, which is a requirement of caricature. This is evident in an illustration titled "Sperit," which appeared in the 1872 publication *Buffalo Land*, in which Worrall depicted a street scene in Topeka centered around a horse of that name.<sup>15</sup>

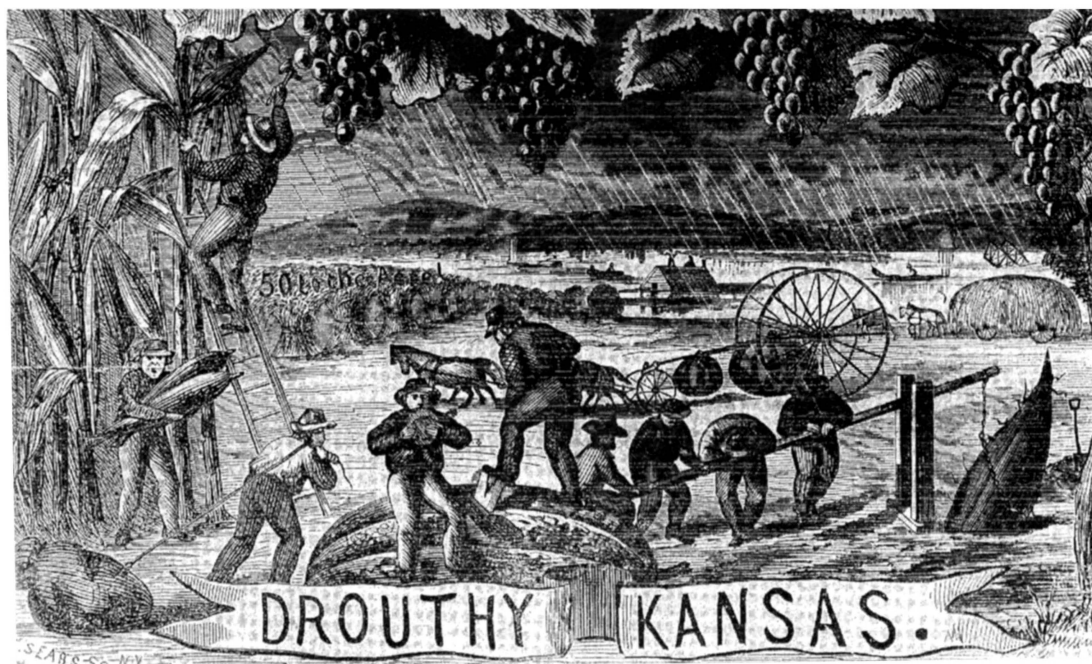
In the same year as the Commonwealth sketch, Worrall also produced his best-known caricature, "Drouthy Kansas," presumably for friends visiting him from Cincinnati. The *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* described the sketch's origin:

In 1869 an excursion party from Cincinnati came to Topeka and prior to their arrival Worrall fastened on the walls a big piece of paper and drew a charcoal sketch which is now preserved in the rooms of the State Board of Agriculture. He had the picture photographed one day by Knight, and had the card copied to "rile" the Cincinnatians with. The thing "took" and we don't know how many hundreds of copies Knight made. . . . It has turned out to be the biggest single advertisement Kansas has ever had.<sup>16</sup>

"Drouthy Kansas" (Fig. 1) depicts an outdoor scene dominated by gigantic fruits and vegetables, the sort of exaggeration associated with the tall tales of nineteenth-century American humorists. The picture is framed by giant grapevines. Four men work together to raise a giant ear of corn, while another stands on a watermelon larger than he is. In the background a river is flooded from bank to bank and contains a house with water nearly up to the roof. The *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* described the picture in detail:

We see in the distant background a deluge of water falling upon a rolling prairie, in the middle distance a city, a railway and a windmill on the bank of a flooded river. . . . [N]earer a wheatfield with "\$50 to the acre" . . . [is] a big wheeled wagon which is groaning under the weight of two large pumpkins. . . . [H]igh on a ladder a man is engaged in chopping off a great ear of corn. . . . [T]he picture does immense justice to the Arid characteristics of the state.<sup>17</sup>

"Drouthy Kansas" was received favorably by many Kansans. It transforms the image of Kansas from a section of the Great American



Desert to a fertile garden, with an abundance of rainfall. Worrall was both a humorist and a romantic, according to a memoir written by a friend.<sup>18</sup> These two traits are found in many of his pictures. This particular drawing had at least two levels of appeal. First, it allowed Kansans to laugh at outsiders (like Worrall's friends from Cincinnati) who may have been sneering at them for coming—and remaining—in what was viewed as a dry and desolate place. Second, it allows Kansans to laugh at themselves when looking at the impossible size of the fruits and vegetables. Not everyone, however, could see the joke.

Copies of the sketch sold by the hundreds. One copy was used as a centerpiece for the drop curtain of Liberty Hall, a Lawrence opera house; another appeared on the cover of the *Kansas Farmer*, a publication of the Kansas Board of Agriculture. Most notably the sketch became a principal illustration in a new book promoting immigration, C. C. Hutchinson's *Resources of Kansas, Fifteen Years Experience*

(1871), which was underwritten by the Kansas state legislature. Hutchinson himself referred to the sketch as "humorous":

I have heard people protest, with a solemn earnestness, that such a sweet potato, watermelon, and Irish potato, such corn, pumpkins and wheat, never grew in Kansas. People of so lugubrious and solemn a turn of mind, are not expected to look at our Drouthy.<sup>19</sup>

There is some evidence, however, that after the major grasshopper infestation of 1874, some settlers who were forced to "sell up" returned east by way of Topeka so they could find Worrall himself. They "waited on him to inform him that, had it not been for the diabolical seductiveness of that picture, they would never have come to Kansas to be ruined and undone by grasshoppers. He was a sufferer for Kansas' sake."<sup>20</sup>

"Drouthy Kansas" established Worrall's local reputation as an artist, and importantly,



as an artist who was seen to have Kansas's "best interests" at heart. Uncritical boosterism, as reflected in pamphlets and newspapers such as the *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, was often seen as the best way to attract new settlers. Promotion, as David Emmons observed, "was considered a civic duty and all who deserved well of the Commonwealth were expected to participate in it."<sup>21</sup> The various problems of the Kansas frontier during the 1860s and 1870s—the drought, the Indian attacks, the grasshopper infestations, and the effects of the national economic panic of 1873—were turned into obstacles to be overcome, in keeping with the motto on the state seal: "To the stars through adversities."

Worrall was given a public benefit for his services to Kansas immigration on March 31, 1875. He was such a celebrity in Kansas that an orator describing the talents of Kansas womanhood said that they were able to discuss "all the artists from Worrall to Praxiteles."<sup>22</sup> Worrall never forgot his Ohio friends, and when some residents there faced hard times following an 1884 flood, he was the principal organizer of a locally famous "grasshopper train," which sent bushels of wheat to the flood victims. Ever the booster, Worrall named the train to remind Ohioans that Kansas, the victim of well-publicized grasshopper infestations in the previous decade, now survived and thrived.<sup>23</sup>

#### WORRALL AS A BOOK ILLUSTRATOR

"Drouthy Kansas" was not commissioned, but it appears to have been a spontaneous attempt by a new Kansan to promote his adopted state in a humorous fashion and to reposition its image from a place of drought and starvation into one of agricultural abundance. Although Worrall remained a caricaturist, most of his career was devoted to Kansas genre scenes. Three years later he was commissioned to illustrate a book that, as in the case of his famous picture, used humor as a form of persuasion to encourage immigration to Kansas. In *Buffalo Land*, the amusing adventures of some Pickwickian-style hunters and travelers were

set in the glamorous context of big-game hunting on the open range. Its author, W. E. Webb, an employee of the Kansas Pacific Railroad and a commissioner of its National Land Company, gave *Buffalo Land* the lengthy and florid subtitle

an authentic account of the discoveries, adventures, and mishaps (of a) scientific and sporting party of the wild West; with graphic descriptions of the country, the red man, savage and civilized, hunting the buffalo, antelope, elk, and wild turkey, etc. etc, replete with information.<sup>24</sup>

Its main characters were renamed for their principal characteristics and behaved much like similar figures in the popular *Pickwick Papers*, if without some of Dickens's charm. One of their first adventures concerned a prairie-chicken shoot just beyond Topeka. Worrall's illustration shows a dozen men firing at once, guns going off in all directions (including at the ground), reminiscent of a similar adventure by members of the Pickwick Club.<sup>25</sup>

*Buffalo Land* was a large commission, with over forty drawings. The frontispiece displays the area (the western half of Kansas and eastern Colorado) as a contrast between civilization and savagery, a popular theme of the period also developed by artists working for Currier and Ives among others.<sup>26</sup> A steam train charges down the middle of the scene, "tying the nation together." Painted on the glowing headlight is "1869," the date of the joining of the transcontinental railroad. The symbolism is similar to that used by John Gast in "Westward Ho" (1872) in which the Goddess of Liberty links the continent with a telegraph wire.<sup>27</sup>

The difficulties of the Plains climate are not entirely ignored but are cleverly transformed into regional attractions. One illustration by Worrall shows a traveling circus blown up into the air—tent, acrobats, and all. With typical western humor the illustration is entitled "A Gentle Zephyr." However, the marked "improvement" of the Kansas climate since the





GREAT BEND CITY—CATTLE DEPOT ON THE A. T. & ST. FE R. R.

FIG. 2. "Great Bend City, Cattle Depot of the AT & St. Fe RR" by Henry Worrall. The original appeared in Joseph McCoy's *Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest*, published in Kansas City by Ramsay, Millet and Hudson, 1874.

beginning of its settlement, a popular delusion of the time often endorsed by the railroads and immigration societies, is also favorably discussed. In one section, for example, Webb attempts to dismiss most of the popular negative images of the Plains, saying that "together with those other legends, localized drought and grasshoppers, the American desert, when revealed by the headlight of civilization, has taken to itself the wings of a myth, and fled away."<sup>28</sup> The appendix advertises Kansas Pacific land for sale in the Plains.

Shortly after the completion of the illustrations for *Buffalo Land*, Worrall received another large commission. Joseph McCoy, the creator of Abilene's cattle trade, asked Worrall to illustrate his memoirs, which also included a chapter for settlers interested in buying Kansas land. Published in 1874, *Cattle Trade of the West and Southwest* associated Worrall with one of the most powerful men in the state. McCoy's book is considered to be the first and the most important nineteenth-century work on the cattle trade.<sup>29</sup> Cowboys first came to

public attention in Abilene, according to J. B. Jackson.<sup>30</sup> Some of Worrall's illustrations, such as "Dance House," have been reprinted elsewhere. Everyone in that illustration appears to be Caucasian, despite the documented presence of African American and Mexican cowboys in the cattle trade.<sup>31</sup>

In another illustration two drovers lead a very long and thin line of cattle, winding their way across the vast expanse of dark, flat prairie. As in *Buffalo Land*, the natural landscape is depicted as immense and occasionally threatening. In the *Cattle Trade* illustration, the cowboys are shown bringing the cattle safely across the wild prairie to Abilene, and they represent, in the words of Howard Lamar, "a free, honorable, and adventurous person."<sup>32</sup> The railroad is credited with bringing civilization to the frontier, and nowhere is the depiction better than in chapter 19, which includes descriptions of Wichita and Great Bend (Fig. 2). In the text McCoy claims that Great Bend "is destined, at no distant day, to be recognized as the chief shipping depot for Texan cattle on the line

of the A., T. & St. Fe R. R.”<sup>33</sup> Great Bend, founded in 1872, just two years before Worrall’s picture, was located on Santa Fe railroad lands, along the Arkansas River and on a point once part of the original Santa Fe Trail.

In the foreground of Worrall’s Great Bend is a well-dressed family strolling along on a wooden sidewalk, which can be interpreted as a sign of civilization in the nineteenth-century West. The lady’s gown features the fashionable bustle of the time, and the gentleman is wearing a silk hat. A soldier carrying a pack has just crossed their path, a reassuring indication of the protective military presence. Near the soldier is a large pile of stones, possibly the sign of a new construction site. In the background a busy street stretches across the page, along which several vehicles are moving rapidly, including what appears to be a Conestoga wagon, which may signify new settlers arriving. Interestingly, the pedestrians in the background are all women and children, showing that families are an important part of the town. A buggy waits outside what appears to be a large public building, probably a courthouse. There are several false-fronted storefronts, including one that says “DRUGS,” indicating that medicine is available, and a school or large home featuring a stylish cupola. Smoke comes out of five chimneys, another sign of comfort on the frontier. The final chapter of McCoy’s memoir, like the appendix of *Buffalo Land*, is essentially an advertisement for land owned by the Kansas Pacific, Santa Fe, and Denver and Rio Grande railroads.

The third and final book illustrated by Worrall was *Thirty Years in Topeka: A Historical Sketch*, the memoirs of F. G. Giles, one of Topeka’s original settlers. Giles described the way Worrall sometimes worked:

The frontispiece is from an oil painting for the author by Henry Worrall in 1870. I had prepared a sketch and submitted it for approval to early associates. From that Mr. Worrall produced the very satisfactory painting—18 by 26—now in my possession.<sup>34</sup>

Giles, who like Cyrus Holliday was a prosperous “Founding Father of Topeka,” chose the relative newcomer Worrall to paint his autobiography’s frontispiece.<sup>35</sup> Worrall’s only contribution was the frontispiece, but it too has been reproduced elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> To Worrall went the honor of memorializing Topeka’s first building. Based on a sketch by Giles, Worrall painted “Topeka 1854” in oils, showing an iconic log cabin. Worrall’s cabin was stoutly constructed, well roofed, and featured a large joint of meat hanging from a hook. It was a portrait of pioneer prosperity and part of the tradition of the epic trajectory of American national development, with establishment of civilization, as represented by the cabin, in the previously savage wilderness. The scarcity of wood appropriate for cabin construction is not mentioned in the text.

#### WORRALL’S PICTURES FOR THE SANTA FE

As early as 1870 Worrall was described in a newspaper account as “a fine fellow with many irons in the fire [who] continues to keep them all hot.”<sup>37</sup> One of Worrall’s “irons in the fire” was his career as an artist for the Santa Fe railroad. Worrall produced several drawings for emigration pamphlets that promoted Santa Fe land sales and used symbolism to illustrate the expansionist rhetoric of the texts.

The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad was originally intended, says James Shortridge, to continue the trade legacy of the Santa Fe Trail.<sup>38</sup> Promoters hired by the railroad published several pamphlets extolling the virtues of the Kansas soil and climate. These pamphlets often had laudatory titles, such as “The Best Thing in the West” (1875) and “How and Where to Get a Living: A Sketch of the Garden of the West” (1876). The Santa Fe in the first four years of the 1870s enjoyed marked success in land sales. According to David Emmons, during those years the population of the thirteen counties served by the Santa Fe railroad increased by 64 percent.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most notable of Worrall’s illustrations for the Santa Fe pamphlets was

produced in 1876. Here he contrasts the difficulty of clearing the eastern woodlands of trees for farming with the ease of breaking the prairie grasslands. A cut stump, previously used as a symbol of pioneer enterprise, is now used as a symbol of difficult labor not necessary in Kansas's grassy plains. Worrall centers his picture on a hearty yeoman farmer surrounded by newly planted fields and other fruits of his own labor. There is a special relationship, says James Shortridge, between the plains and the yeoman farmer myth that seems to have found a home there, and they are perfect symbols for morality and democracy.<sup>40</sup> Worrall's illustrations, particularly this one, are illustrations of this myth.

Worrall also produced sketches from life, including some for the Santa Fe railroad. In 1877 and 1878, for example, he drew some scenes for the Santa Fe pamphlet "The Rocky Mountain Tourist." According to a Topeka newspaper,

J. G. Pangborn and Henry Worrall, of this city, went west over the Santa Fe, with a view to see the country and get "copy" for the next "Tourist Guide." Mr. Worrall will set up [sic] in the extreme car and sketch the varying scene as the train glides along. We may expect some good sketches and pithy articles.<sup>41</sup>

#### AT THE FAIRS: THE TRIUMPH OF POMONA

After his death, Worrall was described as "Kansas' first artist and pioneer decorator" and as a man who was always active in representing Kansas in state fairs and industrial expositions.<sup>42</sup> State, national, and even international expositions were yet another way to promote immigration, and individual states used them as "a kind of road show, an opportunity to display to the world the blessings of their region."<sup>43</sup> In 1851 Worrall had seen the first world's fair, held at the Crystal Palace in London. For the Centennial Exposition, the members of the Kansas committee, alive to the possibility of promoting themselves out of an economic

depression, were the first state to request exhibition space. When they were refused what they regarded as enough space in any of the main buildings, the committee proposed and then built the first and largest of any of the state buildings, allowing the new "Centennial State" of Colorado a quarter of the space. Thirteen *other* states followed Kansas's lead, but their buildings were used mainly as visitors' centers; only Kansas used its building to create a promotional display. So well regarded was the Kansas exhibit that Worrall's painting of it became the frontispiece for a large contemporary history of the fair, Ingram's *Centennial Exposition*, published in 1876.<sup>44</sup>

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 was the first fair to employ Worrall. As the *Kansas Centennial Report* explained:

County organizations falling short of expectation, we employed Mr. Henry Worrall, of Topeka, to assist in preparing for the Exposition. He has visited portions of the State, making collections, and is now engaged, with the necessary assistants, preparing articles already collected.<sup>45</sup>

Worrall's task was not just to create an effective display of Kansas products but also to improve the popular image of the state, as a comment from the *Kansas Centennial Report* makes clear:

Kansas needs all the advantages of a successful display. Remote from the money centers, the crash of the "panic" [of 1873] came, sweeping away our values, checking our immigration, and leaving us our land and our debts. The devastation of the locust was an accidental and passing shadow. . . . Immigration has halted, and investments have measurably ceased.<sup>46</sup>

Worrall had a second, and overlapping, employer at the Centennial Exposition: the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. The Santa Fe's hopes for the fair and those of the state of Kansas were deeply intertwined.

The *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* on June 13, 1876, defended the city's most important employer: "[W]e saw a growl . . . that the whole of the Kansas exhibit seemed to have been turned over to the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railroad. . . . *Harper's Weekly* says that the Santa Fe collection embraces only one-twentieth of the building." According to Snell, a Kansas Historical Society museum archivist writing in the 1970s, the Santa Fe received one-ninth of the interior, paying for one-ninth the cost, and Colorado received one-fourth the space and paid for one-fourth of the cost.<sup>47</sup>

From September 11 to 13 the Kansas-Colorado building was closed to the public, as Worrall and his assistants installed a new exhibit at the building's center, focusing upon the new Kansas harvest, samples of which had just arrived via the Santa Fe. Shortly afterward, Worrall painted the new exhibit in oils, centered now on a twenty-foot-tall replica of the national Capitol (Fig. 3), ornamented with Kansas fruit. Rather than the goddess of liberty, a statue of Pomona, the goddess of fruit, surmounted the dome. In front of the model of the U.S. Capitol was a long table, decorated with more rows of Kansas fruits and vegetables. Two well-dressed men, one with a silk hat and a cane, are signing the visitors' book, while others look at the tall wheat and corn stalks that stretch up above the Capitol dome. A large map of Kansas, supplied by the surveyor general's office,<sup>48</sup> is in the background and is surrounded by more oversized fruits and vegetables from the Kansas harvest. The message that Worrall and his employers were trying to make is clear: Come and farm in the fertile soil of Kansas; we are the prop of American democracy.<sup>49</sup>

To emphasize the importance of the altered exhibition, invitations were issued for a reopening ceremony, and state dignitaries gave speeches praising Kansas (of course) and all its perceived possibilities. Two weeks later Worrall personally escorted the emperor of Brazil, who had opened the entire Centennial Exposition with President Grant several months earlier,

around the new exhibit. The emperor spent several hours in conversation with Worrall and was reported by the *Manhattan Industrialist* to have said that "this is a wonderful show, the most practical of anything I have seen."<sup>50</sup> Not everyone, however, appreciated Worrall's exhibition style, which included seventeen-foot-high cornstalks standing next to ten-foot-high prairie grasses. While not mentioning the name "Kansas," everything in this criticism from the Massachusetts centennial commissioner seems aimed directly at Worrall's displays:

We have no glimpse . . . as to their methods of agriculture, nor of the profits which were derived. . . . [T]he grasshopper never would be dreamed of as a burden. . . . [I]ndeed, we must harshly say that these exhibits were in the nature of a curiosity museum.<sup>51</sup>

Thanks largely to Worrall, Kansas received the best collective exhibit award at the Centennial Exposition.<sup>52</sup> He was given a second public benefit in Topeka on January 6, 1877, as a tribute to his contributions to the Kansas exhibit. Money for future exhibitions was now readily available from the Kansas state legislature. John Martin of Atchison, a future Kansas governor, praised Worrall's efforts and, referring to the Centennial exhibit, said that "it makes a Kansas man feel proud and hopeful." The five years after that fair was a boom time for Topeka. The population of the state rose as well, from around 530,000 in 1875 to over 996,000 by 1880. Indeed, the five years after the Centennial Exhibition were the best years of immigration growth in the history of the state. While some of Worrall's contemporaries gave credit for this to the Kansas exhibit at Philadelphia and the later exhibits at Neosho and Atlanta, contemporary Kansas historians such as Kenneth Davis and Homer Socolowsky attribute the population gains to a wet precipitation cycle, a return of business prosperity across the country, and the introduction of barbed wire.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the Kansas Historical Society, in the main interpretative thread for its permanent exhibit, displayed



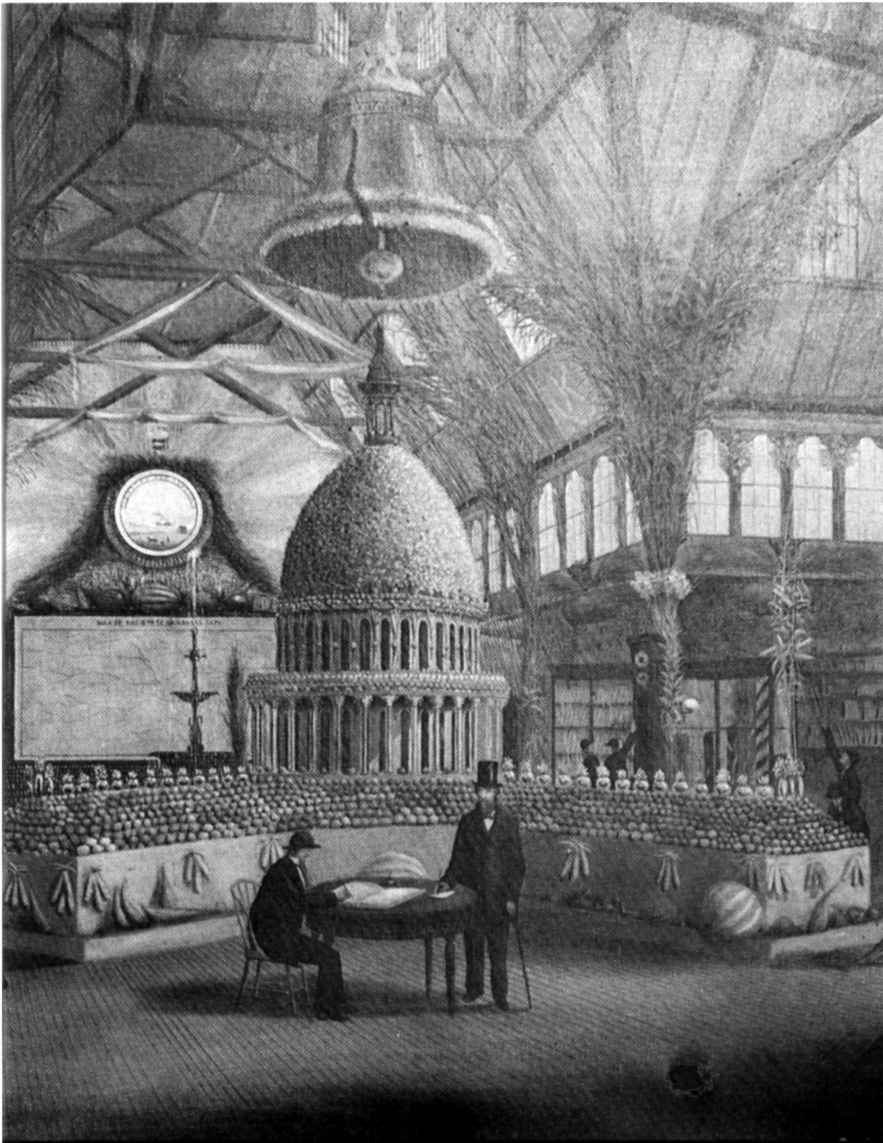


FIG. 3. "The Kansas Exhibit" by Henry Worrall. Courtesy of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Worrall's painting of the Kansas exhibit after the September 1876 reopening and gave the exhibition credit for Kansas's large population increase of the 1870s and early 1880s. Even in the twenty-first century, Worrall's boosterism is positively reinforced.

Worrall's last known employment at a fair was in 1893, when he was retained by the Kansas Board of Managers to take charge

of the Kansas exhibits for the Columbian Exposition. At an exposition, said one writer, a display "is expected to put its best foot forward, not to portray the truth, or at least not the whole truth."<sup>54</sup> In Chicago, as in Philadelphia seventeen years before, Worrall stressed the agricultural abundance of the state. He didn't mention that Kansas had grown more wheat during the boom days of the 1880s than in

the early 1890s and that farmers were burning corn for fuel and burning their wheat in the fields to protest low prices.<sup>55</sup> In the Columbian Exposition in 1893, the Kansas building was the third largest of the state buildings, and it had the Worrall touch, featuring a bunch of giant corn stalks sixteen feet high. The image of the state presented was one of "virile self-confidence."<sup>56</sup>

#### WORRALL AND THE ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINES

Many of Worrall's promotional activities coincided with the Kansas land and immigration boom that occurred between 1877 and 1886. During this period Worrall was also employed by both *Frank Leslie's* and *Harper's Weekly* illustrated magazines as a freelance illustrator of Kansas scenes. When a monument was dedicated to John Brown at Ossawatimie, for example, Henry Worrall's sketch of the dedication appeared in *Harper's Weekly*. In January 1879 his drawing of the Kansas governor's inaugural ceremonies appeared in *Harper's Weekly*. A Topeka newspaper commented that "a picture is to be made of the scene at the Capitol grounds and buildings last Monday, by Prof. Worrall, and will appear in *Harper's Weekly* at an early date. Thus the inaugural ceremonies may result in some good—that of advertising our state abroad."<sup>57</sup> This sketch shows a well-dressed crowd at the steps of the state capitol, with several large buildings in the background, and like the picture of Great Bend, shows prosperous people in an attractive urban setting.

Worrall's last known pictures for *Harper's Weekly* appeared in 1893, when he traveled to Arkansas City, on the state's south-central border, to sketch the opening of the Cherokee Strip. Eight of his pictures appeared later in that magazine and are his last known published work.<sup>58</sup> It is ironic that some of Worrall's last pictures were those of immigration into Oklahoma, an event credited with helping the Kansas population stagnate and even decline in the 1890s, when his first picture, "Drouthy Kansas" was used to promote immigration into

his adopted state. In 1899 Worrall suffered a stroke, from which he did not recover. He died surrounded by his family in his home on Polk Street in 1902.

#### CONCLUSION

Henry Worrall's pictures are those of a man who thought he was living in a "golden age," in a place of heroic deeds and dramatic destinies. His pictures are full of symbolism. They often include specific references, such as the noble farmer or the prosperous settler or the snug new cabin, which were used for propaganda purposes, and they supported contemporary views of the purposes of the frontier and the West.<sup>59</sup> In Worrall's art, landscape representation is used to legitimate and naturalize the emerging capitalist order by erasing many of the facts on which it was built.<sup>60</sup> Worrall made his living as an illustrator primarily by interpreting the text of others, by supporting the texts, both written and unwritten, of successful businessmen. In Worrall's art there are often two major themes, the savage world and the civilized world. The civilized world is the land of milk and honey, represented by oversized displays of healthy produce being admired by smiling farmers. The implication is that this land is within easy reach for all those willing to come to Kansas and work hard. All the problems of the Kansas frontier are either erased or made light of.

Two surviving photographs of Worrall show him in a cravat and jacket, with a well-trimmed beard.<sup>61</sup> In the pictures depicting civilized places, such as the interior of the Kansas-Colorado exhibit at the Philadelphia Exposition or the outskirts of the new railroad town of Great Bend, the inhabitants are equally well dressed. Everyone appears to be Caucasian and male, except in the interesting case of the frontier town of Great Bend, where the presence of women and children indicates that civilization has reached this frontier outpost. In an illustration for Webb, Native Americans in town are portrayed as drunks and African Americans have outsize physical features. Despite modern evidence of the

presence of Hispanic and African American cowboys on the cattle trails, none are seen in Worrall's illustrations. Women are portrayed either under the protection of their husbands or as dancehall girls. When not depicted as the setting for courageous cowboys or for frolicking amateur sportsmen, the natural landscape is often hidden behind buildings or under agricultural fields. It has been conquered and is no longer threatening. Native Americans and wild animals are interesting remnants of the savage world, declining as settlement advances ever westward.

In all three of Worrall's pictures that I have chosen for discussion, figures in the foreground help to display and support the arguments made by the background materials. In "Drouthy Kansas" eight well-dressed white male farmers struggle to bring in a gigantic harvest, while the flood in the background contradicts the Kansas soubriquet "Drouthy." Five years later, in 1874, Worrall's sketch entitled "Great Bend City—Cattle Depot on the A.T. and St. Fe R.R." features a well-dressed family (father, mother, and a young girl) and a soldier walking on the outskirts of a new and bustling courthouse and cattle depot town. In 1876, Worrall's painting of the Kansas-Colorado building's interior focuses on two well-dressed gentlemen signing what is presumed to be the visitors' book as they stand in front of the Capital dome replica. In all three pieces, Worrall uses figures that he finds appropriate—always well dressed for their circumstances, and mostly white male—to help promote his message, the undoubted success of the Kansas economy.

Worrall's work, like the articles about economic conditions appearing in the local newspapers, is uncritical of Kansas and its resources. One function of the pioneer press on the western frontier was to call into being the very population it wished to serve.<sup>62</sup> All of the quotes from the local Topeka newspaper are examples of this. Just occasionally is the self-censorship created by the boomer mentality lifted, as in this sad statement from the editor of the *Sharon Springs Western Times* in 1895: "[W]e have had no rain for two years, the

prairie dogs have left the country and none but fools remain. Yet, if we said so, there are fifty men waiting to 'do us' telling the truth."<sup>63</sup>

While Henry Worrall should be remembered as a chronicler of his times, he was also a paid illustrator who wished to promote his adopted state in a positive light. As a newcomer, one could argue that Henry Worrall, in the words of David Wrobel, was one of the large group of boosters who "enthusiastically and imaginatively portrayed their western places as promised lands because they desperately wanted their own dreams to be realized."<sup>64</sup> As an objective gauge of a past reality, then, Worrall's works are unreliable; instead, they are part of the mythology of the frontier. It would therefore be dangerous to use his drawings as exact snapshots of real events. His pictures of people, for example, are often overgeneralized and idealized in the context of his times, yet they are also often presented as sketches either from life or as described by people who had participated in the events that are illustrated. To take Worrall's images as fact is to risk the fate of the Kansas settlers who believed in the bumper crops of "Drouthy Kansas" and were, as they said in the 1870s, "ruinated."

#### NOTES

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