



SCHOOL CHILDREN VISIT MT. MITCHELL

THE MT. MITCHELL HERITAGE PRAIRIE PRESERVE was originally part of the farm of Captain William Mitchell, an Underground Railroad participant and leader of the Prairie Guards, the local Free-state militia in 1856. The park was created in 1953 by W.I. Mitchell, his youngest son. It is a Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Star Attraction and a National Park Service Network to Freedom Site. The preserve is an Audubon of Kansas Sanctuary operated and managed by the Mt. Mitchell Prairie Guards, Inc., who develop and maintain the park and create activities for students, visitors and the community.

PLEASE JOIN US TO IMPROVE THIS UNIQUE PRAIRIE PRESERVE.



Mt. Mitchell Prairie Guards
23320 Rockton Road
Eskridge, Kansas 66423
mountmitchellprairie.org

All donations are tax deductible

PRAIRIE GUARDS LEARN TRAIL BUILDING



PHOTOGRAPHY: Bob Gress, Brad Neff, Scott Bean, David Seibel, Michael Stubbs. **IMAGES:** George Catlin, Kansas State Historical Society, Mounted Dragon, Hugh Brown, National Park Service, John Charles Fremont, Thomas Hicks, © Courtesy of the The Huntington Art Collection, San Marino, California, The Underground Railroad, Charles T. Webber, Cincinnati Art Museum. **MAP:** Allen Fuhrmann, AgData Map. ©2013 Mount Mitchell Prairie Guards. All rights reserved.

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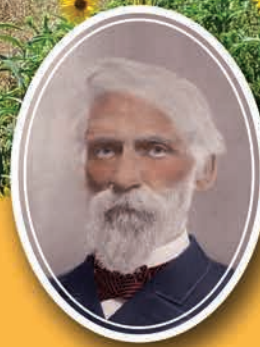


MT. MITCHELL HERITAGE PRAIRIE PRESERVE

WABAUNSEE COUNTY, KANSAS



CHIEF WABAUNSEE



CAPTAIN MITCHELL

Walk in the ruts and swales of a trail used by Native Americans, explorers, immigrants, and slaves seeking their freedom on the Underground Railroad.



Grassland scientists and visitors from around the world come to this special place in the heart of North America where white limestone rock, grasses, and wildflowers merge with a blue prairie sky. Today the tallgrass prairie stands as the world's best remaining example of a diminished ecosystem that is more endangered than the Amazon rainforest.

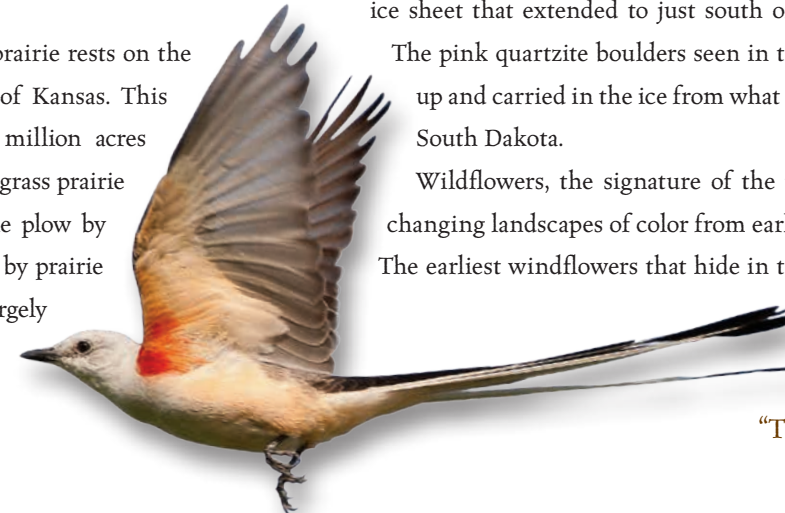
The largest remnant of tallgrass prairie rests on the rolling landscape of the Flint Hills of Kansas. This precious vestige of approximately 5 million acres represents only 3% of the once vast tallgrass prairie in North America. Protected from the plow by outcrops of limestone and maintained by prairie fires, this treasure of tallgrass remains largely unaltered. It offers the finest forage on

earth for grazing livestock, a last sanctuary for prairie plants and animals, and an unspoiled landscape of serene natural beauty.

The prairie grasses and wildflowers that embrace the Flint Hills today began to assemble ten thousand years ago following the retreat of the ice sheet that extended to just south of Mt. Mitchell.

The pink quartzite boulders seen in the park were scooped up and carried in the ice from what is now Wisconsin and South Dakota.

Wildflowers, the signature of the prairie, produce ever-changing landscapes of color from early spring through fall. The earliest wildflowers that hide in the grass give way to a



summer of colorful penstemon, purple coneflowers, and black-eyed Susans. The procession ends with the autumn goldenrod swaying in the wind.

In the spring, when fires again sweep across the prairie, wildflowers come to life and renew the cycle.

Survival of the tallgrass prairie along the edge of the encroaching eastern forest is due to the destructive, but renewing, element of fire that removes last year's plant growth and destroys young trees and shrubs that struggle to invade the prairie.

Ignited by Indians or lightning during historic times, fire, in the form of controlled burns, continues to be a tool used by the managers of the Mt. Mitchell Heritage Prairie Preserve to maintain the prairie's health.

—TOM EDDY, PROFESSOR OF BOTANY, EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

"The 50-acre Mt. Mitchell Heritage Prairie Preserve has the most diverse flora of any prairie that we have visited in the Flint Hills." —ED & SIL PEMBLETON, ST. PAUL MN.



ENJOY THE SIGHTS & SOUNDS OF THE FLINT HILLS TALLGRASS PRAIRIE



NATIVE AMERICANS

Native American peoples have lived in the Flint Hills for at least the last 13,000 years.

The Paleo-Indian Claussen site, on Mill Creek, southeast of Mt. Mitchell, produced a radiocarbon date of habitation of 12,500 years ago.

On the summit of Mt. Mitchell there is a burial mound from a culture that lived here from 1,000 to 2,000 years ago.

In historic times, when Europeans first came into this area, the Kansa Tribe was living here in villages along the Kansas River and its tributaries.

In the 1830s the U.S. Government began forcibly removing eastern tribes to what they designated as Indian Territory on land here taken from the Kansa and other plains tribes.

In 1846 the Potawatomi, originally from the lower Great Lakes Region, were settled on a reservation 30 miles square. Its western boundary was just a mile east of Mt. Mitchell.



JOHN CHARLES FRÉMONT AND THE TOPEKA FT. RILEY ROAD

The origins of the old road that descends from the Flint Hills down the eastern flank of Mt. Mitchell will probably never be known. Trailblazer Jedediah Smith may have been the first American to use the trail during the 1820s. This route West, on the south side of the Kansas River, became known for its ease of passage because it kept to high ground and avoided having to cross streams.



JOHN CHARLES FRÉMONT

In 1842 Congress authorized a survey of the Oregon Trail, the main route of westward emigration between Missouri and Oregon and California. John Charles Frémont was appointed leader of the expedition.

The mountain man Kit Carson was Frémont's guide on this and other expeditions between 1842 and 1846. The 1843 expedition most likely used the road that traversed Mt. Mitchell.

When Ft. Riley and Topeka were established in 1853 and 1854 this old reliable route began to be called the Topeka Ft. Riley Road. A popular stage line advertised it as the "Nearest and Best Route between Fort Riley and the eastern part of Kansas."

Between 1857 and 1861 slaves seeking their freedom in Canada, used this road on what was probably the westernmost branch of the Underground Railroad.

Today visitors to Mt. Mitchell can stand in the ruts of this historic road and imagine the stories of those who passed over it.

BLEEDING KANSAS

"Long before events at Fort Sumter ignited the War Between the States, men fought and died on the prairies of Kansas over the incendiary issue of slavery.

In 1854 a shooting war developed between proslavery men in Missouri and free-staters in Kansas over control of the territory. The prize was whether it would be a slave or free state when admitted to the Union, a question that could decide the balance of power in Washington."

—DUST JACKET COPY, TOM GOODRICH, *War to the Knife*

CONNECTICUT KANSAS COLONY

In the winter of 1855, leaders of the Free-state cause returned to their former homes to raise funds and recruit emigrants to join their cause. Charles Lines, a cabinetmaker from New Haven, CT, organized a company that eventually included fifty-seven men, four women and two children. After a rousing sendoff at Yale's



AGNES MITCHELL



CHARLES LINES



BEECHER BIBLE AND RIFLE CHURCH

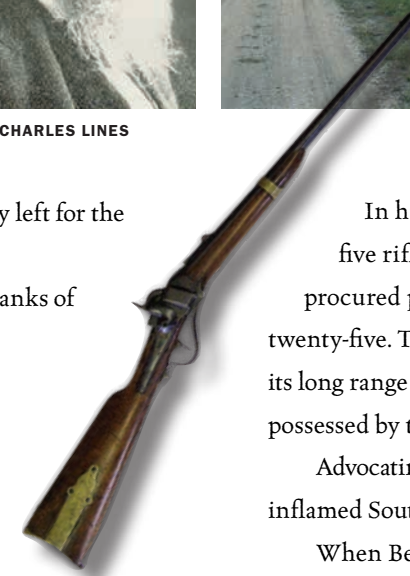
Brewster Hall, the Connecticut Kansas Company left for the prairies of Kansas Territory on March 31, 1856.

The colonists settled at Wabausee on the banks of the Kansas River, southwest of present Wamego.

THE SHARPS RIFLE GETS A NICKNAME

While the Connecticut Kansas Company was preparing to leave, a rally featuring the abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher was held at North Church on the New Haven Green.

During the course of the meeting it was mentioned that the colonists had no means of self-defense. Beecher had recently been quoted in the press as having said that, "He believed that the Sharps Rifle was a truly moral agency, and that there was more moral power in one of those instruments, so far as the slaveholders of Kansas were concerned, than in a hundred Bibles."

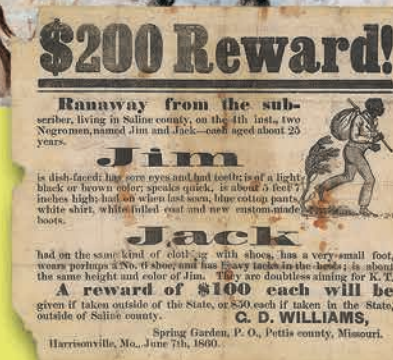
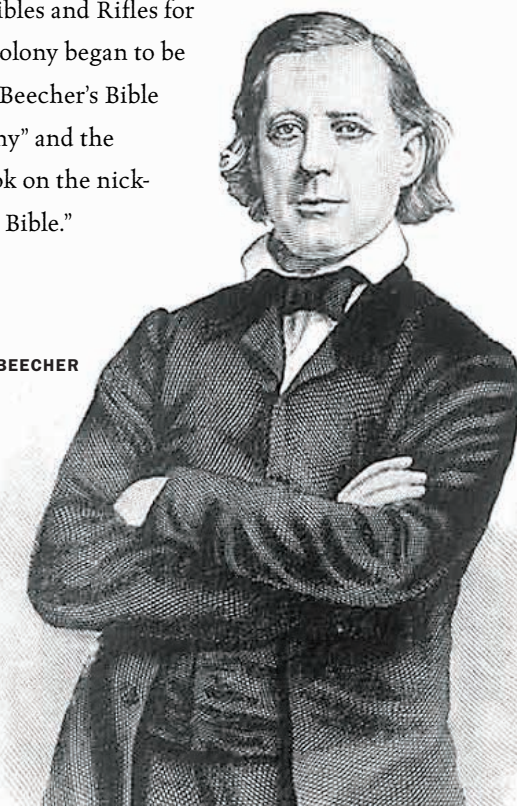


HENRY WARD BEECHER

In his famous theatrical style, he first pledged twenty-five rifles from his Brooklyn, NY. Congregation, then procured pledges from the audience for an additional twenty-five. The newly patented Sharps rifle was known for its long range and high accuracy and was superior to weapons possessed by the pro-slavery factions in Kansas.

Advocating violence from the pulpit of a New England church inflamed Southerners and created a nationwide controversy.

When Beecher sent a check to Lines for the rifles he also included 25 Bibles, and a letter of encouragement that was soon widely reprinted. Headlines proclaimed, "Bibles and Rifles for Kansas." The Colony began to be referred to as, "Beecher's Bible and Rifle Colony" and the Sharps rifle took on the nickname "Beecher Bible."



THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

When slaves heard their masters curse the existence of Lawrence, KS the Free-State Capital, it became a beacon to those seeking their freedom on the Underground Railroad, which was a network of transportation and safe houses helping slaves escape to Canada.

When extra caution was necessary, the usual route, from Lawrence to Topeka and then north on the Lane Trail to Nebraska, detoured west up the Wakarusa valley to safe houses at Bloomington and Auburn, then on to Harveyville, Mission Creek, and Wabausee.

This route included the portion of the Topeka Ft. Riley Road that passes through Mt. Mitchell, which is now recognized by the National Park Service as a Network to Freedom site commemorating the Underground Railroad.

The Captain William Mitchell farmstead, to the north of the park, was a station on the Underground Railroad.

