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A Kansas City Founder "Proud of His Position:" Race, Exploitation, and the Rise of William Gilliss

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A KANSAS CITY FOUNDER "PROUD OF HIS POSITION:" RACE, EXPLOITATION, AND THE RISE OF WILLIAM GILLISS

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, History

By

Diane Euston

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

Americans are largely accustomed to the history of western expansion and enslavement by slaveholders. Questionable government policies led to the removal of Native American tribes further west. In Missouri, French Canadian traders moved to continue their business with them, and eventually, white settlement along the invisible border between Indian Territory and Missouri replaced indigenous peoples. William Gilliss, born in Maryland about 1797, is a prime example of an enterprising trader who, because of his reliance upon Native American tribes, followed his source of income west. His relationships with multiple Native American women resulted in at least three children. His relocation to Jackson County, Missouri and involvement in the Town Company which established Kansas City made him one of the most important and one of the area's richest early settlers. This, however, along with his Southern sympathies, made him a target of the Union and antislavery settlers. By the time he died in 1869, his work as a trader, relationships with Native American tribes, and role as a town builder were soon overshadowed by headlines over the contestation of his will by his Native American children and grandchildren. Through depositions in these cases from Native Americans, former traders, one of his children, the formerly enslaved, and prominent residents of Kansas City, an analysis of a Kansas City businessman and the community in which he lived can be assessed with great detail.

KEYWORDS: William Gilliss, Indian removal, Delaware, Shawnee, Indian traders, Kansas City, slavery, Town Company, Kaskaskia, indentured servitude

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The collections at the State Historical Society offered much assistance to my research, and I owe much thanks to Whitney Heinzmann and Rachel Forester for their assistance in pulling the records from Columbia, Missouri and sending them to Kansas City. Their help in securing the microfilm of the Pierre Menard Collection and the Native Sons Archives was critical. Records from the Pierre Menard microfilm that couldn't be deciphered were a challenge, and Michelle Miller, Manuscripts Librarian at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, kindly sent me beautiful scans of the original documents in the Pierre Menard Collection. My friend, the late historian John Dawson, was also an early, critical go-to for anything and everything Kansas City. I know he will be reading these pages perched up in heaven. Slainte, John.

Never in a million years did I think that this thesis would require fluency in French, but the Pierre Menard Collection and early baptismal records in Kaskaskia, Illinois offered some serious challenges for me. I want to humbly thank my friends Josie Goeke and Dr. George Gale for lending their translation skills for these records. And, thank you, George for teaching me the importance of historiography and reading my early drafts of this thesis. Navigating primary sources in Randolph County, Illinois was difficult, and I am forever grateful to Emily Lyons who organized the early court records into an index and is the foremost expert on Randolph County. When the courthouse didn't have an answer when I arrived to scour the records in person, Emily did!

I owe a debt of thanks to the professional guidance of Dr. Jeremy Neely, my advisor, for opening my eyes to different perspectives on the Civil War on the border that I hadn't considered. Dr. Neely's advice on what scholarship to read and his insistence that a chapter strictly devoted to William Gilliss' enslavement proved to be invaluable to the story told on the pages to follow.

Most importantly, I have two people to thank. I have to thank my father Larry for believing in me enough to agree that getting a second master's degree was a great idea after I had openly declared to everyone ten years ago that I was finished with my education. Second, I cannot put into words how vital my mother Helen has been on this journey as a historian and writer. As I balanced teaching full time, bartending part time, going to graduate school, and writing articles on Kansas City's history for the *Martin City Telegraph,* my charming "unpaid research assistant" made countless phone calls to repositories, arranged meetings with people, came up with story ideas, jumped into the car as my travel buddy on several long-distance road trips and listened on the phone to me read page after page of my writing. Without her, I would not be where I am today. I love you very much.

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INTRODUCTION

When the celebrated Gilliss Opera House, an early showcase building along Kansas City's skyline, burned in 1925, the *Kansas City Star* eulogized the complex life of its namesake, William Gilliss (See Figure 1). The article's title, "The Romantic Story of the Man Whose Fortune Built the Gilliss," offers a hint as to what Kansas City had chosen to remember about William Gilliss fifty-six years after his death.[1]

Figure 1. William Gilliss. This is the only known photograph of him. Courtesy of the Native Sons Archives, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.

[1] "The Romantic Story of the Man Who Built the Gilliss," *Kansas City Star,* July 16, 1925, D.

The idealism of the article's celebrated subject continued in the description of the man himself, a man "physically a superb specimen of the frontiersman" who was one of the fourteen original founders of Kansas City. He started the town's first newspaper, *The Kansas City Enterprise*, was an integral part of early town planning, encouraged the development of commerce, and promoted the Hannibal Bridge that spanned the Missouri River and secured the city's dominance as a regional railroad hub. Later in his life, he was seen on the streets in every season carrying a gold-headed cane and fashioned in a Prince Albert coat.[2]

Upon his death in 1869, Gilliss willed his massive fortune of approximately $500,000 - the largest known estate in Western Missouri at the time - to his beloved niece, Mary Ann Troost. "Through the benevolent hands of his heir," Mary Ann arranged that Gilliss Opera House and the Gilliss Orphan Asylum were constructed after her death.[3] By 1925, journalists skimmed over Gilliss' other directives in his will, including "nominal bequests to the two Indian children."[4] In actuality, there was much more to the story of the man who arrived in 1831 in what would become Kansas City.

According to his obituary, William Gilliss "was a shrewd business man, of strong prejudices, but one whose errors were of the head more than the heart."[5] Even though William Gilliss was one of the fourteen original founders of Kansas City and became one of the richest men in the city when he died in 1869, little is truly known about how he amassed his wealth or about his personal life. In 1988, Jackson County Historical Society archivist Jerry Motsinger

[2] "The Romantic Story of the Man Who Built the Gilliss," *Kansas City Star,* July 16, 1925, D.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] "An Old Citizen Gone," *Daily Journal of Commerce*, July 20, 1869, 1.

wrote of his legacy, "While William Gillis retains his position as one of our city's founders, the shroud of mystery that surrounded his complex character in life remains impenetrable today."[6]

Stories riddled with inaccuracies emerged about Gilliss at the turn of the century and gained traction. References to him as part of Kansas City's founding repeated the same unsubstantiated stories. Born in Maryland about 1797, he allegedly ran away from home and began working on ships by the age of fourteen. Newspapers in the twentieth century alleged that Gilliss, having become a skilled carpenter, gained the attention of William Henry Harrison in Cincinnati and then worked for him.[7] Some accounts claimed he even served in the War of 1812 under the command of Harrison during his famous Tippecanoe campaign.[8] Accompanied by his brother, John, William moved to Kaskaskia, Illinois and worked as a carpenter and met Colonel Pierre Menard. Within a few short years, Gilliss abandoned carpentry to work for Menard as a trader stationed in southwestern Missouri.[9]

After working as an Indian trader between 1820 and 1830 on the White River in southwestern Missouri, Gilliss landed at the future site of Kansas City when he followed the Delawares west to their new lands in current-day Wyandotte and Johnson County, Kansas. As trading became more difficult due to the concentration of the various reservations and their location to already-established trading houses, he focused his energy on several enterprises, all of

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[6] Jerry Motsinger, "Mystery Still Surrounds the Life of One of the City's Founders," *Kansas City Star,* April 13, 1988, 6.

[7] Descriptions of Gilliss' early life appear in various newspaper accounts and historic publications. See references in the *Kansas City Star*, December 24, 1880, July 16, 1925, January 31, 1926, April 13, 1988; *Kansas City Times,* February 15, 1913; Kansas Town Company Biographies, Native Sons Collection, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

[8] "Kansas City's Centennial Year Begins Tomorrow," *Kansas City Star*, November 13, 1938, 3C. Newspapers continued to repeat these stories about Gilliss years after his death, and over time, biographers and reporters continued to present these unfounded remarks about his early life despite the lack of primary source corroboration.

[9] "On the Old Gilliss Farm, its 611 Acres Assembled for $1,310, William Gilliss, Adventurer, Settled into the Life of a Country Gentlemen and Played His Part in the Village Affairs of Early Kansas City," *The Kansas City Star,* January 31, 1925, 1. This article mentions that John and William Gilliss were accompanied to Kaskaskia with their widowed mother. This is false, but like most of the biographies on him, there are pieces of confirmed truths.

which involved purchasing land for investment. His relationships with Native Americans, connections to powerful trading families such as the Menards and Chouteaus, reliance on enslaved labor, and his extensive investment in early land in and around the plat of Kansas City (incorporated in 1853) shaped him into one of the most prominent men of the area. Through each of these developments, he continued to maintain close relationships with his extended family who eventually followed him to what would become Kansas City.

William Gilliss is largely ignored in scholarship despite his early involvement of co-founding and developing early Kansas City, Missouri. His life exemplifies many significant historical developments, including Indian removal, western expansion, and the spread of slavery across the western frontier. This thesis will assess how Gilliss, a largely overlooked historical figure, sheds light on these key themes of nineteenth-century America. He utilized his relationships with Native American tribes, enslaved people, and later business dealings on the western border for his own self-advancement.

The historiography of Kansas City developed through the hyperfocus of early prominent businessmen and their vision of the greatness of the city's location. In 1960, R. Richard Wohl and A. Theodore Brown noted that nineteenth-century Kansas City historiography was deeply embedded in "dominant tradition, drawing its force from conceptions of what the city was supposed to *be* and what it was supposed to become."[10] They noted that early histories focused on this destiny and the writings of Robert T. Van Horn, a man who arrived in Kansas City in 1855 and purchased the city's first newspaper. Van Horn's "community ideology" focused on the promise of the city when growth was not guaranteed and underplayed significant events that

[10] R. Richard Wohl and A. Theodore Brown, "The Useable Past: A Study of Historical Traditions in Kansas City," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (May 1960): 238.

hindered its growth such as the Civil War and sectional crises.[11] Even more significant was the lack of acknowledgement of Native American tribes and Chouteau's early French settlement. Compiled histories of Kansas City continued to repeat earlier oral stories told by business leaders such as Theodore S. Case. In 1888, his focus shifted from the advantages of Kansas City's location to business enterprises that ensured its success.[12]

The study of Kansas City broadened by 1950 to include its larger place in American history, concentrating especially on western expansion and the Civil War.[13] Charles N. Glaab studied the importance of railroad expansion and noted that early business leaders focused on real estate development.[14] Although true, Glaab missed how the earlier history of these businessmen, including trading with Native American tribes and reliance upon the enslaved, created the financial means to invest in real estate. A. Theodore Brown picked up the scholarship started by historian R. Richard Wohl and wrote *Frontier Community: Kansas City to 1870* and used primary source documentation previously ignored to support the early history of the city. All of these histories mention William Gilliss in passing and largely focus on his role as a founder of the city. James R. Shortridge's 2012 book, *Kansas City and How It Grew: 1822-2011* shifted back to the geography of the city with focus on regional economics after settlers arrived. Although the title suggests attention to early regional history starting in 1822, only six pages of his writing are devoted to the history prior to the founding of Kansas City in 1838. In order to convey the motivations of the men which led to town building, one must look deeper into the motivations of why these men chose this distinctive area of the country.

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[11] Wohl and Brown, "The Useable Past," 239-40.
[12] *Ibid.,* 249-50.
[13] *Ibid.,* 254.
[14] Charles N. Glaab, "Business Patterns in the Growth of a Midwestern City: The Kansas City Business Community Before the Civil War," *The Business History Review* 33, no. 2 (Summer 1959): 158.

Chapter One, "'A Man of Even Mind, Large Capacity, Education Limited:' Early Developments Shape the Man" uncovers the details of the Gilliss family and aids in piecing together a picture of the hardships which led to his move to Kaskaskia, Illinois. From here, he met and maintained a long friendship with Colonel Pierre Menard, a French-Canadian trader and former lieutenant governor of Illinois. Menard employed him in business as a Native American trader. Lynn Morrow's pathbreaking scholarship in 1981 on Gilliss' time as trader in southwestern Missouri largely focuses on the migration of Native American tribes and how that area became their temporary home before removal to Indian Territory. This chapter focuses on the material advancements that Gilliss gained through his relationships with Native American tribes and how he utilized his connections when relocating to Jackson County, Missouri. His decisions to invest in land and connect with other early settlers to form The Town Company led to the formation of the Town of Kansas.

Chapter Two, "'I Was Raised by William Gilliss:' Enslavement in a State of Change," focuses on Gilliss' reliance upon enslaved labor through the majority of his adult life. Due to multiple contestations of his estate after his death, there is incredible insight into the personal experiences of the enslaved, the regional differences of small-scale slavery, and how he relied upon enslavement for further material advancement. He focused on multiple business ventures and quickly built a large fortune, in large part using enslaved labor. The enslaved hailed from both Missouri and Illinois, the latter being a place where slavery was illegal yet continued with the offspring of the enslaved brought to the state in the eighteenth century.[15] Although most of

[15] M. Scott Heerman, "In a State of Slavery: Black Servitude in Illinois, 1800-1830," *Early American Studies* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 114.

this thesis is organized chronologically following William Gilliss' life, this chapter focuses on the lives the formerly enslaved and what can be pieced together of their lives past emancipation.

Chapter Three, "'A Man of Notorious Disloyal Sympathies and of Great Wealth:' The Rumblings of War and the Growth of Kansas City" covers William Gilliss through Civil War in Missouri. Although local elites preferred to preserve their existing commercial ties over staking forceful partisan positions, this became difficult when the country was split in two. Martial law and the arrival of Union troops complicated the matter, and suspicions of Gilliss' loyalty translated into forced removal from a key business interest in 1861 and banishment by General Thomas Ewing in 1863. His loyalty to the Union was questioned, but evidence indicates he was targeted, in part, due to his wealth. Upon his return after the war, he eagerly threw himself into railroad promotion. City leaders wanted to see the Missouri Pacific Railroad completed in Kansas City to secure its station as a hub of trade and immigration over neighboring towns. This study addresses contentious topics involving William Gilliss which largely transformed the illiterate boy into a leading businessman of Kansas City. His life is full of controversy yet is important to the greater understanding of the enterprises which largely shaped the United States as it expanded westward.

"A MAN OF EVEN MIND, LARGE CAPACITY, EDUCATION LIMITED:" EARLY DEVELOPMENTS SHAPE THE MAN

William Gilliss' early life is somewhat of a mystery. No primary source records have been located as to when he was born, but most historians place his birth around 1797 or earlier in Somerset County, Maryland. He was the son of Thomas Gilliss and Nelly Cannon, and his paternal line hailed from Scotland, arriving in Virginia and Maryland as early as the 1600s.[16] Especially proud of his Scottish heritage, he would often quote the poetry of Robert Burns. When his father died around 1800, a will written twelve years earlier was used in the distribution of property; in it, his four children, Levin, John, Elizabeth, and Mary are listed, and his wife, Nelly, was named executor. William was left out of the will due to it being written before his birth. By this time, William's mother, Nelly had died, and his oldest brother, Levin, who was to inherit the land known as "End of Strife" at the head of Wicomico Creek, was appointed a guardian because of his age.[17] In 1803, John, then about seventeen years old, was bound to the court as an apprentice "until the age of twenty-one" to learn the trade of "a house carpenter and joiner." The man in charge of him was to teach him to read and write as well as supply him clothing.[18] Due to William's age, he likely would have stayed with extended family.

[16] Charles J. Gilliss and W. Wier Gilliss, *The Gilliss Family* in the Gilliss Family Collection, 1732-1994, Edward H. Nabb Center for Delmarva History and Culture, Salisbury University, Salisbury, Maryland. The spelling of the last name "Gilliss" is mistakenly spelled "Gillis;" the subject of this paper spelled his name "Gilliss" throughout his life.
[17] Thomas Gilliss will, dated September 3, 1789, probated April 23, 1800, Liber E.B. 23, Folio 11-12, Somerset County, Maryland Wills.
[18] Somerset County, Maryland Guardian and Administrator Accounts, Liber E.B. 22, Folio 253. William Gilliss could have learned the trade of carpentry from his brother and followed him once John was released from the contracted apprenticeship. William may have lived with his uncle, Thomas Cannon, appointed as guardian of his older brother, Levin, until he was old enough to support himself.

By 1815, John and William Gilliss had moved to Kaskaskia, a village situated in between the Kaskaskia and Mississippi Rivers in what would become southwest Illinois, settled by the French in 1703. In 1809, it became the capital of Illinois Territory, and in 1818, it served as the capital of the newly-formed state.[19] In 1817, William became a landowner for the first time in his life when he purchased a plot of land in Kaskaskia for one hundred dollars from his brother, John.[20] At this point in William's life, he could not read or write, and a simple "x" on agreements with merchants sufficed as his signature.[21] The two brothers began working as carpenters, and their business ventures crossed paths with one of the area's most powerful men, Pierre Menard (See Figure 2). This meeting would change the course of William's life and would transform him from an illiterate trader into an entrepreneur.

From a Carpenter to an Indian Trader

A merchant, politician and Indian agent, Pierre Menard was born in 1766 near Montreal and came to Kaskaskia around 1791, when he began selling merchandise to Native Americans in exchange for fur pelts. He was elected the state's first lieutenant governor in 1818 and became involved in several fur companies as Native American tribes were relocated from the east to the Trans-Mississippi region; subsequently, he partnered with J.B. Valle of Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, and established Menard & Valle, an operation that supplied Indian goods to traders.[22]

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[19] Dorothy Brandt Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa: The Letters of François and Berenice Chouteau,* ed. David Boutros (Kansas City: Western Historical Manuscript Collection, 2001), 246.
[20] Randolph County, Illinois, Deed Book C: 155-156, John W. Gilliss & William Gilliss, December 9, 1817; Randolph County Recorder of Deeds, Chester, Illinois. This same land was sold October 16, 1827 to Louis Valle and Pierre Menard, then partners and Gilliss' employers.
[21] Samuel Cochran v. John and William Gilliss, Box 13, Case 358, Randolph County, Illinois (1819). In this case, Cochran loaned $375 to the brothers, and the original promissory note shows a signature for John Gilliss and an "x" for William Gilliss.
[22] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa* 252-53.

In 1813, he was appointed by the government as an Indian sub-agent, and in 1828, he was appointed with Lewis Cass to make treaties with the Potawatomis to sell lands in Michigan and remove them further west.[23]

Figure 2. Pierre Menard (1766 –1844) was a pivotal figure in William Gilliss' life. Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

William Gilliss developed a relationship with Menard that would last for decades and would overlap personally and professionally in various ways. The Gilliss brothers were hired in 1817 to work as carpenters on Menard's impressive home, constructed around 1815 and still standing today.[24] Subsequently, this positive rapport with Menard would lead by 1820 to his

[23] Thomas J. Campion, "Indian Removal and the Transformation of Northern Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 107, no. 1 (2011): 44.
[24] John W. Gilliss v. William Gilliss, Box 18, Case 538, Randolph County, Illinois (1820). The case notes different periods of time where William's brother, John claims he did not work as promised on various projects they were

working for Menard & Valle, a business with two locations, one in Kaskaskia and another across the river in Ste. Genevieve. William was hired to work within the tribes that had relocated to what would become the state of Missouri.[25] One of the most substantial of the Native American groups were the Delawares, who numbered about eight hundred spread across three villages in 1817.[26] There were approximately 1,800 Delawares on the White and Current Rivers in 1820, and this number steadily increased as more Native Americans relocated from the east.[27] By the mid-1820s, approximately 2,500 Delawares lived in southwestern Missouri.[28]

By 1821, William Gilliss was working as an Indian trader with Sylvester Saucier, Pierre Menard's brother-in-law.[29] William had developed a positive rapport with the Delaware Indians and learned to speak their language. In 1819, he was adopted into the tribe.[30] Due to his strong relationship with the Delawares, Gilliss was sent by Menard & Valle to southwestern Missouri where other tribes had been relocated from the east. While working for Menard & Valle in modern-day Christian County, William established a trading post about 1822. Strategically situated between two Delaware villages on the James Fork of the White River, he traded with the Delawares, Shawnees, Peorias, Piankashaws, and the Weas.[31] The Native American tribes received cash annuities from the federal government and used this money to purchase items from

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contracted to complete. This includes work done "at the Presbytery" and "to thirty days work done at Col. Menard's when [William Gilliss] did not work at $3 per day as per our agreement."

[25] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa*, 252.

[26] "Indian Census, Missouri Territory," C1628, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.

[27] Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 204.

[28] Lynn Morrow, "Trader William Gilliss and Delaware Migration in Southern Missouri," in *The Ozarks in Missouri History: Discoveries in an American Region,* ed. Lynn Morrow (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2013), 20.

[29] Menard and Valle to Pierre Lorimier, June 7, 1821, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 118, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.

[30] Morrow, "Trader William Gilliss," 23.

[31] Senator Emory Melton, *Delaware Town and the Swan Trading Post, 1822-1831* (Cassville: Litho Printers, 1977), 3.

traders.[32] William Gilliss was one of the select few who began to amass a fortune trading with these relocated tribes.

William's increased wealth is demonstrated by his lifestyle on the White River, where he acquired enslaved women that resided near his dogtrot log cabin constructed using his carpentry skills. Rhoda, his enslaved cook, lived in the adjacent kitchen. Five additional enslaved people, two adult women named Matilda and Olive, along with three children, lived nearby in a building used to manufacture cheese.[33] A separate cabin for Poquas, the Delaware wife he married in 1822, was close by. Additional buildings included a storehouse for the goods used to trade and a cabin for hired men.[34] Despite his lack of education and the probability that he was illiterate (he could only sign his name at this point), he was able to lead a successful business amongst the Indian tribes. He also purchased from Louis Lorimier a second trading post on the Swan Creek in 1822, which he primarily used to trade with the Weas, Piankashaws, Peorias, and the Shawnees.[35]

It was not uncommon for white traders to marry and have children with Native American women. Men could secure a marriage with a Native woman by taking presents to her mother and placing them in front of the wigwam; if the goods were accepted, it was a contract of marriage. "Keeping" more than one wife at a time was not uncommon. Divorce was equally uncomplicated; Peter Menard, Jr. explained, "There was no formality about it – they just separated and divided the blankets."[36]

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[32] Morrow, "Trader William Gilliss," 19.
[33] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Mary Gillis Rogers and Sophia Gillis v. Mary Ann Troost,* 51 MO 470 (MO 1870). See also Rhoda Jones and Baptiste Peoria depositions.
[34] Morrow, "Trader William Gilliss," 24.
[35] Melton, *Delaware Town,* 5.
[36] Peter Menard, Jr. deposition, Francis Boyer and James Charley, Jr., by their next friend M.W. McGee, Respondents v. Michael Dively, with will annexed of William Gillis and Bernard Donnelly and F.M.

These details have been preserved due to two lawsuits, one filed in 1870 by his two children born to Delaware women and the other filed by the two grandchildren of another Native wife who was the daughter of a Piankashaw chief.[37] These complex cases were linked to three indigenous children born to Gilliss named Sophia, Mary, and Nancy. Recorded depositions taken from Native American tribal members, the people he once enslaved, business acquaintances from the period when he operated his trading post, and businessmen from Kansas City offer vivid details heretofore omitted from the historical record.

A chief witness in both trials was Joseph Philibert, who worked with Gilliss from the spring of 1822 to the spring of 1831 and relocated with him to Jackson County, Missouri. "From the very beginning we were intimate together," testified Philibert. "We were more like brothers than friends."[38] The two men lived together in a room in the dogtrot log cabin, and Philibert would travel three times a year to Ste. Genevieve to retrieve trade goods for Gilliss (See Figure 3).[39] Philibert was employed as his clerk, a likely role given to him due to William's illiteracy. However, he eventually learned to read and write; by 1829, he was able to compose basic business transactions, albeit phonetically spelled and littered with grammatical errors.[40]

Establishing a positive rapport and friendship with the tribes was paramount to William's success as trader. William was able to communicate with the Delawares in their language, but he

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Black, Executors of the last will of Mary A. Troost, Appellants. 58 MO 510, 517 (1875). Other mentions of the informality of Native American marriages are included in the depositions of Baptiste Peoria and A.G. Boone, *Ibid.*

[37] See Mary Gilliss Rogers and Sophia Gillis v. Mary Ann Troost, 51 MO 470 (MO 1870), and *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517. For a summary of these cases, see also Michael R. Bredhoft, "The Contested Will of William Gillis[s]: Insights into Life in the Early Kansas City Region," *Kawsmouth* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Autumn 1999) and Norman & Robertson, "Synopsis Over the Estate of William Gilliss," (Self-pub., Kansas City, 1901).

[38] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Daniel Yoacham v. William Gillis (*sic*), Box 85, Folder 88, Jackson County Circuit Court Appeal, Independence, Missouri (July 1836). In this case appears a note dated from the James Fork at White River, May 29, 1829. The signature and handwriting matches later writings pertaining to Gilliss' affairs.

utilized a translator for transactions with other tribes. Baptiste Peoria, chief of the Peorias, worked at various times selling goods and interpreting for William.[41] Because the tribes resided

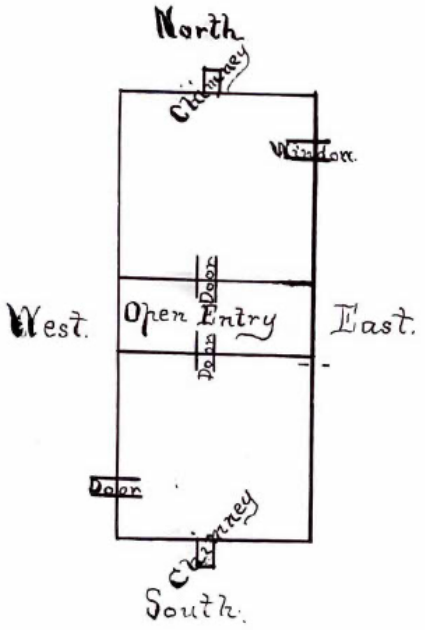

Figure 3. "Diagram of Wm. Gilliss dwelling house on James Fork of White River, made from memory" was illustrated by Joseph Philibert. This drawing of Gilliss' dogtrot log cabin was provided as "Exhibit A" in the case initiated by Gilliss' two grandsons, James Charley and Frank Boyer.[42]

in different areas of southwestern Missouri, Peoria would often travel with him to conduct business. Although William was able to gain the trust of the tribes, some government agents did not trust his ways of transacting business. John Campbell, a government subagent for Richard Graham, visited the Delaware village and updated Pierre Menard on the annuities paid out to the

[41] Baptiste Peoria deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[42] Exhibit A, drawn by Joseph Philibert, *Ibid.*

tribe. “I cannot say much in favor of William Gilliss’ business here at present,” Campbell wrote. “But his presence has been much wanted here.”[43]

Gilliss’ presence among the tribes was welcomed by them, but his treatment of women after securing their hands in marriage was questionable. In about 1820, he married a Delaware woman named Wa-Wau-tiqua. Around the close of 1822, Wa-Wau-tiqua gave birth to a child named Sophia. About this same year, he married Poquas, and in 1824, a daughter he named Mary was born to them. When the girls were older, they moved into William’s home on the White River. Though the girls were mostly under the care of the enslaved Rhoda, Gilliss “was an affectionate and good father.”[44] Although witnesses such as Rhoda, Joseph Philibert, Baptiste Peoria and others testified that he paid for the care of his children as they lived with him, he ultimately “sent away” these wives at different times, equivalent to a divorce in the Native custom.[45]

This was not the only marriage that came under scrutiny after Gilliss’ death. He married Kahketoqua, the daughter of the chief of the Piankashaws named Laharsh in about 1829. Because of her beauty and standing within the tribe, Gilliss enlisted the help of Baptiste Peoria to secure a marriage for him. Per Native custom, the mother made the decision whether to approve a marriage, and Kahketoqua’s mother was concerned with the prospect of her daughter marrying him because of his history of deserting his wives.[46] Despite her concern, Gilliss secured this marriage.

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[43] John Campbell to Col. Pierre Menard, October 25, 1827, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 223-A, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[44] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[45] Native customs of divorce were informal. See Peter Menard, Jr., Joseph Philibert depositions, *Ibid.*
[46] Morrow, “Trader William Gilliss,” 29. See also Joseph Philibert deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517. Philibert mentions other women kept temporarily as Gilliss’ wives. These included Charlotte, Black Squaw, Wilson’s daughter and a daughter of Captain Ketchum’s.

The increase of the white population who were intolerant of Natives in Missouri made the removal of the Delawares and other Native American tribes inevitable.[47] A treaty signed in 1829 between the federal government and the Delawares at James Fork of White River guaranteed the tribe would relocate west of the state of Missouri.[48] In the fall of 1829, William Myers, Gilliss' clerk at the Swan Creek Trading Post, went from James Fork with a majority of the Piankashaws, Weas, and the Peorias to the Grand River in current-day Cass County, Missouri.[49] Kahketoqua, the last of William's Indian wives, was part of this journey and was pregnant at the time. In the spring of 1830, Kahketoqua moved to Indian Creek, about twelve miles south of Kansas City where she gave birth to a "light haired and blue-eyed" child named Nancy. Unlike Sophia and Mary, he did not raise Nancy; she was left in the care of the Piankashaws, but he did occasionally ask others about her well-being.[50]

As Joseph Philibert worked to close up the trading post at James Fork in the fall of 1830, William Gilliss returned from removing the tribes to Grand River in Cass County, Missouri. He likely traveled with them under the direction of Menard & Valle which still had various accounts with Native Americans open.[51] From there, he moved to Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, possibly working with Menard & Valle to close the accounts of the tribes.[52] "[In] the latter part of 1830 he was in Maryland and was absent for three and a half months," Philibert explained. William visited his nieces and nephews.[53] He still had contact with extended family in Somerset County, Maryland who would prove to be an integral part of his future.

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[47] Stephen Aron, *American Confluence*, 214.
[48] Ratified Indian Treaty 158: Delawares, White River, Missouri, September 24, 1829.
[49] William Myers deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[50] Baptiste Peoria deposition, *Ibid.*
[51] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Ibid.*
[52] 1830 United States Census, Ste. Genevieve County, Missouri, digital image s.v. "William Gilles," *Ancestry.com.*
[53] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.

Trade Relationships in Jackson County

The western border of Missouri had only been sparsely settled prior to the removal of Native Americans. In 1819, Francois Chouteau married Pierre Menard's daughter, Berenice, in Kaskaskia, Illinois. The Chouteaus were a powerful St. Louis family involved in the fur trade with years of experience trading with Native Americans. In about 1822, the couple became permanent residents at the mouth of the Kansas River at the future site of Kansas City. The Chouteaus were drawn to the area so they could continue the family operations trading with the Native American tribes slowly being relocated nearby, and trade, due to Indian removal, was diminishing in other posts established by them.[54] Francois' half-brother, Cadet, became head of the western department of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company in 1826. Astor purchased the Chouteau fur trading business in order to eliminate them as his competition.[55]

By the early 1830s, the French-speaking community, mostly comprised of those involved in the fur trade, concentrated in the West Bottoms near the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers on the state's western border. According to historian James. R. Shortridge, at least a hundred people settled with them where the population contained people of pure French descent while others were multiracial with French and Native American ancestry.[56] The Chouteaus and their followers first settled on land in 1822 on the north bank of the Missouri River near the Randolph Bluffs landing in current-day Clay County.[57]

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[54] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 15-16.
[55] *Ibid.,* 15.
[56] James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How It Grew: 1822-2011* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012), 10.
[57] David Boutros, "Confluence of People and Place: The Chouteau Posts on the Missouri and Kansas Rivers," in *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa: The Letters of Francois and Berenice Chouteau*, ed. David Boutros (Kansas City: Western Historical Manuscript Collection, 2001), 195.

In the winter of 1830, most of the Delaware journeyed north from the White River to their new lands in current-day Wyandotte County, Kansas. "A few [Delawares] that are still left on James Fork of White River, fifteen or twenty they say, passed my Agency a few days ago to the Lands allotted to them on Kansas River," William Cummins, an agent to the Shawnee and Delaware wrote to William Clark. "I have not as yet been able to ascertain the precise number, they say about four hundred in all."[58] Those who remained were removed by Gilliss and Philibert in the spring of 1831. After the move, the two men along with Sylvester Saucier settled in Jackson County, Missouri.[59]

When William Gilliss first moved to Jackson County, he settled on Turkey Creek steps away from the state line and near the Delawares. His choice of relocating could be twofold. First, his children and their kinfolk were forced to relocate. Stephen Aron points out, "Rather than battle the prejudices of American neighbors, most children of French, as well as English and American traders, opted to move west with their Indian kin."[60] Second, he was essentially unemployed once the tribes relocated, as gaining trade goods from across the state was geographically impossible. Although Philibert maintained that Gilliss was "engaged in no particular business" at this time, records indicate that he could not resist making a few more dollars off his relationships with the Delawares. While Francois Chouteau had control of Native trade in western Missouri and the organized territory across the border through the American Fur Company, Gilliss sought to continue his relationship with Menard; however, Francois was Menard's son-in-law. Because Francois was attached to the American Fur Company, Menard

[58] Richard W. Cummins to William Clark, April 2, 1831, in *William Clark Papers Collection #741, Records of the Superintendency of Indian Affairs* Vol. 6, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
[59] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[60] Aron, *American Confluence,* 216.

continued his connections to the removed Native tribes by acting as a silent partner in Chouteau's business ventures in northwestern Missouri.[61]

Surviving letters indicate that William Gilliss, who seemed to want to act independently and on his own terms, was a natural link between the newly-removed tribes and Pierre Menard. Francois Chouteau had some difficulty reining in William. Francois was a rule-follower, and William worked oftentimes outside of the legal boundaries established by the government for traders. Regardless of Chouteau's personal opinion of Gilliss - he called Gilliss and partner Sylvester Saucier "real cheats and scoundrels"- he needed him in order to appease the Delaware and continue trade.[62] In November 1831, Francois Chouteau wrote Pierre Menard that the business proposal brought to William was not enough financial compensation. Although Gilliss had no license to trade, he continued. Chouteau complained that he was "asking for increase in salary and an assistant on the treaty and many hired men . . . He began building among the Loups (Delawares) without approval from Major Cummins."[63] William seemed to get what he wanted in some regard; he and Philibert both attended the Castor Hill treaty negotiations in St. Louis where "the federal government awarded $12,000, to be applied to Delaware debts, payable to Menard & Valle of Ste. Genevieve for the benefit of William Gilliss and William Marshall, a fur trader who followed the Weas and Delawares west."[64]

Most of the displaced Delawares built their homes close to Missouri's western state line near the Kaw and Missouri Rivers.[65] The proximity of the Delawares influenced Gilliss' decision

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[61] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa*, 42.
[62] *Ibid.*, 99. Francois Chouteau to Pierre Menard, January 17, 1832, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 371, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[63] *Ibid.,* 96-7. See also Francois Chouteau to Pierre Menard, November 30, 1831, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 369, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[64] Morrow, "Trader William Gilliss," 31. See also Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 250.
[65] Brice Obermeyer and John P. Bowes, "The Lands of My Nation: Delaware Indians in Kansas, 1829-1869," *Great Plains Quarterly*, 36 (Winter 2016): 5.

to stay. In late 1832, he began buying land in the West Bottoms near the Kaw River. In 1833, he invested in even more land further south of the river, some of which would eventually be the site of his impressive plantation home he called "Woodlawn." Between 1833 and 1836, he purchased a total of four hundred and fifty acres in this area. He acquired an additional four hundred acres further south near the newly-formed town of Westport, which had become the center of Indian trade and the jumping-off point for the Santa Fe trade. In the first five years after moving to Jackson County, Gilliss had accumulated over 1,100 acres of land, making him one of the largest landowners in the vicinity.[66]

Because he had acquired so much land, it is hard to decipher where exactly in Jackson County William Gilliss was living at this period of his life. A drawing in the *Kansas City Star* from 1925 indicates his trading post was situated on top of a hill on his land, part of his 1833 purchase he made.[67] This land was especially strategic for a man deeply connected to the Delawares. The land bordered the Shawnee trail (now Southwest Boulevard) on the west side of Turkey Creek and a short distance from the displaced tribes. Though his exact place of residence is unknown, depositions from his contested will offer details of his life at the time. The "old place" where Gilliss lived for about ten years was a three-room log cabin "built of round logs," likely a dogtrot cabin similar to the one he built on White River.[68] It sat on the west side of Turkey Creek; the enslaved lived in their own cabin nearby. He brought at least eight enslaved

[66] Abstract & Index to Deeds, Kansas City, 1831-1867, Midwest Genealogy Center, Kansas City, Missouri. See also General Land Office Records, 1776-2015, Bureau of Land Management, *Ancestry.com.*
[67] "On the Old Gilliss Farm, its 611 Acres Assembled for $1,310, William Gilliss, Adventurer, Settled into the Life of a Country Gentlemen and Played His Part in the Village Affairs of Early Kansas City," *The Kansas City Star,* January 31, 1925, 1.
[68] John Calvin McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer: Containing Early Reminiscences, Stories and Sketches of Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas*, Kansas Historical Society in the John Calvin McCoy and Woodson McCoy Papers (1916), 240. The waterworks McCoy mentions was located about five-hundred feet east of the State Line near current-day Avenida Cesar E Chavez (formerly 23rd Street).

people with him from southwestern Missouri. Rhoda, his cook and caretaker of Gilliss' daughters, Sophia and Mary, was present along with Olive's family, which had grown to include her husband, Alexis, and her children Jane, Lizzie, Lewis, Alexander, Lucretia, and William.[69]

Familial Connections

Despite claiming to be a bachelor, William Gilliss never lived alone, nor did he spend any considerable time in Jackson County, Missouri without having extended family residing with him. About 1834, William moved his widowed aunt, Louisa James, from Maryland to live with him and help take care of his two children.[70] Sophia and Mary attended a school run by the McCoy family at Westport while living with Isaac McCoy, a Baptist missionary to relocated Native Americans, and Rhoda and Louisa James accompanied them.[71] According to Philibert, Louisa treated his children "as if she had been their own mother. She was very much attached to them."[72]

Louisa James was not the only relative who relocated to the wilderness from Somerset County, Maryland. Gilliss' nephew, William Barkley, and niece, Mary Ann Kennerly, opted to leave Maryland for Missouri. According to John C. McCoy, Gilliss "always manifested a great deal of interest in William Barkley."[73] He ensured his nephew received a good education; this

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[69] 1840 United States Census, Jackson County, Missouri, digital image s.v. "Wm. Gilles," Ancestry.com. Gilliss has nine slaves listed. See also Rhoda Jones, Lucretia Anderson and William Booker depositions, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[70] Louisa James, nee Cannon, born about 1785, was the sister to William Gilliss' mother, Nelly. For more information about the Cannon family, see Doug Cannon, *A Cannon Compilation, Volume 1 (1680-1803),* Edward H. Nabb Center for Delmarva History and Culture, Salisbury University, Salisbury, Maryland.
[71] Miller, *The History of Kansas City,* 388. See also Isaac McCoy Journal, July 2, 1835, Isaac McCoy Collection #422, Box 18, Kansas State Historical Society. Rev. McCoy struggled to find work administering to the Native Americans, so he supplemented his income during this time period by bookkeeping at a store in Westport and boarding people for extra money, which he found "lamentable." This likely places Mary and Sophia living with him around this time.
[72] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[73] John C. McCoy deposition, *Ibid.*

was important to Gilliss, likely because he was not afforded the same opportunities. He sent Barkley in the 1830s to St. Mary's of the Barrens in Perryville, Missouri, with his friend, Pierre Menard Chouteau, the son of Francois and Berenice Chouteau. The young Barkley "was apparently sponsored by Pierre Menard," as the young man wrote Menard several letters expressing respect and gratitude."[74]

The most important and influential relationship of William's life was the relationship with his niece, Mary Ann Barkley Kennerly, born around 1812 to William's sister, Elizabeth. Mary Ann married George Kennerly in 1830 even though her father protested the match.[75] She and her husband, George, arrived in Jackson County in the spring of 1833. The following year, George Kennerly left Mary Ann "in the charity of her uncle" and disappeared. Kennerly surfaced a year later in Kaskaskia where William's brother, John, was still living. Kennerly went to Menard & Valle to secure financial assistance to "get home to Maryland."[76] Even after William Gilliss paid Kennerly off in order to remove him from their lives, Mary Ann tried to reconcile with her husband to no avail. She filed for divorce from her husband in April 1838 claiming desertion, stating that "for years the said George is and has been a habitual drunkard."[77] The divorce, although never mentioned in any historical account of Mary Ann's life, changed her path and solidified her permanent address of Jackson County, Missouri.

Westport and Kansas City founder John C. McCoy described Mary Ann as "a woman of energetic character, [a] strong mind and comely person."[78] When his daughters, Sophia and

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[74] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 221.
[75] Mary A. Barkley to George Kennerly, April 26, 1830, available in "Maryland, U.S., Compiled Marriages, 1655-1850, *Ancestry.com.* See also Charles J. Gilliss and W. Wier Gilliss, *The Gilliss Family,* 526-27.
[76] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[77] Mary Ann Kennerly v. George Kennerly, Box 4, Folder 9, Jackson County Circuit Court, Independence, Missouri (August 1838). See also William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, February 28, 1838, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 852, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[78] John C. McCoy deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.

Mary, lived with their father on White River and first moved to Jackson County, they "slept in the same room" and "ate at the same table" with him, indicating that they were openly recognized as his children.[79] After Mary Ann moved in permanently to the three-room log cabin, everything drastically changed.

Depositions of Gilliss' formerly enslaved people and Mary Gilliss Rogers, one of the children he fathered with a Native woman, offer rare insight into a complex household dynamic which otherwise would be impossible to decipher. While these formerly enslaved people spoke highly of William Gilliss, stating he treated them fairly and had a calm demeanor, they had little positive to say about his niece.[80] They testified that Mary Ann "took charge of the whole place and had her own way about it" and stated she had a temper.[81] She "convinced" her uncle to send his children away, and for about a year, Sophia and Mary lived in a small cabin near Westport with Gilliss' aunt. For a time, they did return to the cabin on Turkey Creek, but Mary Ann would not allow them to sleep in her uncle's room or eat at the same table. Mary Gilliss Rogers stated, "She treated us badly called us nasty Indians and nasty dogs and bad names." Before long, Gilliss was convinced that the children could not stay there and he sent them back to live with their mothers in about 1837. Afterwards, "he never came to see us but he sent us some clothes," Rogers recalled.[82]

[79] Mary Gilliss Rogers deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[80] 1840 United States Census, Jackson County, Missouri, digital image s.v. "Wm. Gilles," *Ancestry.com.* Gilliss had nine enslaved people listed. See also Rhoda Jones, Lucretia Anderson and William Booker depositions, in *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[81] William Booker, Lucretia Anderson, and Mary Gilliss Rogers depositions, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470
[82] Mary Gilliss Rogers deposition, *Ibid.*

The Struggle for Title in the North

William Gilliss was never apprehensive to invest money in land deals, and the shrewd businessman even looked outside of Jackson County for investments. Coincidentally, the land he claimed ownership of in current-day Lee County, Iowa bordering the state of Missouri and the Mississippi River was involved in a long, chaotic court battle which, much like would occur in Kansas City, was held up for years. In 1836, Francois Chouteau wrote to his father-in-law, Pierre Menard:

> Gilliss leaves in a few days to go down the Mississippi to explore some land that he purchased from Grand Louis who is a half-breed Sac. If he is in the region of the mines it is possible that he got a good deal especially if that half-breeds have a right to sell without the government setting up an obstacle.[83]

The Grand Louis mentioned in the letter is Louis Bertholet, an elusive figure in early Kansas City history. Born to a French-Canadian named Louis and a Sac woman named Marie in Cahokia, Illinois, Grand Louis, described by John C. McCoy as a "Canadian half-breed," arrived ahead of Francois Chouteau in the future site of Kansas City with his wife, Margaret, his stepson, and two others in order to establish Chouteau's first trading post at the confluence of the Missouri and Kaw Rivers.[84] The log cabin built by Bertholet was situated on the north side of the Missouri River in current-day Clay County and was likely built about 1822.[85] Grand Louis stayed in Jackson County as more French-Canadian traders and trappers settled in the area, and when William Gilliss settled on the west bank of Turkey Creek in 1831, his nearest neighbors

[83] Francois Chouteau to Pierre Menard, April 8, 1826, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 718, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[84] McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer,* 220-21.
[85] Boutros, "Confluence of People and Place," 195-96.

included the Bertholets who had traded farming land in Clay County for the fertile river bottoms in Jackson County.[86]

Ascertaining how Grand Louis Bertholet was aware of land set aside by the government for displaced Sac and Foxes is mere conjecture and requires a brief history of this highly-contested section of land in southeastern Iowa. A treaty ratified in 1825 with the Sac and Fox nation "disposed of all their right and title to the northern portion of the state of Missouri from the river to the western borders of that state." In return, 119,000 acres of land in the southeastern portion of Iowa "touching the town of Ft. Madison, and including the town of Keokuk" in between the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers was set aside for the Sac and Fox tribes, along with their descendants (including those of mixed parentage).[87]

Problems establishing true ownership of the land began immediately. The tract included white agents with Native wives and soldiers who stayed in the area during Indian wars and took up with indigenous women. These people joined an existing population whose mixed ethnicities only grew through the 1820s.[88] There were numerous problems with this land; not only could the mixed-race children not sell it per treaty negotiations, but numerous squatters settled the land. A letter to William Clark asserted that in 1829, there was a specific group of "half-breeds" settled on the land, although the list does not survive.[89] William Clark's list certainly did not include Bertholet as he was documented as living in Jackson County, Missouri. At the urging of the Sac and Foxes' descendants legally entitled to the land, Congress relinquished the claim to them and allowed for sale of the land in 1834. What followed was mass chaos as white settlers purchased

[86] John C. McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer,* 53. The address given at McCoy's writing suggests Bertholet's cabin was at 5th and Bluff Street in the West Bottoms.
[87] B.L. Wick, "The Struggle for the Half-Breed Tract," *The Annals of Iowa* 7, no. 1 (1918): 17.
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] Matthew Hill, "'Half Breeds,' Squatters, Land Speculators, and Settler Colonialism in the Des Moines-Mississippi Confluence, (University of Northern Iowa, 2019), 41-42.

claims for as little as a barrel of whiskey, without any proof of whether the seller even had legal claim to any portion of the land.[90]

Due to the failure of the bill identifying who was entitled to claims and no response from the government, William Gilliss traveled to Lee County, Iowa in 1836, to survey the situation of the lands he had purchased without any legal title. His concern over the land mounted as he read an advertisement for lands for sale near Keokuk in the *Republican,* a St. Louis newspaper. William called on his old friend, Pierre Menard, for more information. "I drop you these few lines to ask the favour of you to call on Mr. Walsh and John W. Johnson and Spalding to know of what their arrangement is concerning the half bread land for I see in the *Republican*," he wrote. "This I do not understand what they are about to do with it."[91]

William's concerns were valid. The men mentioned in the letter were a sampling of those who claimed legal title and were attempting to sell a portion of the land. In January 1838, the legislature passed an act requiring any person claiming title to the land to file with the district court within one year, and they appointed three men to take testimony to these claims. It took two years to hear the claims.[92] Companies of white businessmen organized to try to profit from these land claims. One included the St. Louis Land Company which eventually bought out the interests of another company in New York. The whole claim was sold to Hugh T. Reid, a land speculator, and a deed was executed so that he could subsequently sell the land which was divided into one hundred and one shares.[93]

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[90] Wick, "The Struggle for the Half-Breed Tract," 20.
[91] William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, May 20, 1837, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 788, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[92] Wick, "The Struggle for the Half-Breed Tract," 21.
[93] *Ibid*, 22.

William Gilliss worked with Reid in order to "prove" the legality of the claim he paid Louis Bertholet for years earlier. William wrote again to his friend, Pierre Menard, in January 1841 that he wished to obtain the deposition of Menard's mother-in-law; Bertholet's mother, Marie, a Sac woman, lived at the Saucier home, so she could prove Grand Louis's tribal status. He continued:

> He also told me that he was baptized in Cahokia and that his godfather and godmother lived there but he believed they were and but expected that there was someone yet that lived in the town that knew him. I will be very glad if you would make some inquiry there and probably the records of the church might show of what nation he is. . . If you take any [depositions] between this time and the first of April please forward them to Reid & Johnston, Fort Madison, IT and if you take any after that time send them up to me.[94]

Gilliss filed with the Iowa courts in March 1841 where he claimed title "in the right of Louis Buttattoth (*sic*) a half breed of the Sac and Fox tribe of Indiana."[95] Attorneys for the St. Louis Land Company, including Hugh Reid, filed for a Degree of Partition on May 8, 1841 and successfully granted Gilliss share number twenty of the disputed tract.[96] After several years of litigation and questionable titles, the bulk of those proving ownership were wealthy white men, and William was no exception.[97] The rights of ownership remained tied in the courts as groups challenged the legality of Hugh Reid's actions and the legality of the titles of the land. The

[94] William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, January 1, 1841, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 427, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[95] Charles Mason, "Degree in Partition of the Half Breed Tract in Lee County, Iowa, 1840." *The Annals of Iowa* 14, no. 6 (1918): 431.
[96] *Ibid,* 457.
[97] Hill, "'Half-Breeds,'" 91.

United States Supreme Court returned ownership back to Reid, thus legalizing William's ability to sell the land he purchased at least fourteen years earlier.[98]

William Gilliss' land speculation in Iowa is another example of taking advantage of relationships with Native Americans. Although it remains unclear how much he paid Louis Bertholet for the land, it is evident that he made a considerable amount of money through the deal. Starting in March 1851, Gilliss began trying to sell all of his land, including eight hundred and eighty acres and lots in Keokuk for a total of $10,400. Lyman E. Johnson was authorized to sell the land "all-together."[99]

As was the case in Iowa, William's land dealings sparked litigation. Gilliss' power of attorney, Lyman Johnson, sold ten acres out of William's land to his law partner, Joel Mathews; however, this, according to Gilliss, violated his desire to sell his land in one transaction. What followed was over five years of litigation that reached the Iowa Supreme Court and ruled against William's claims.[100] Despite these holdups, William called upon Hugh Reid to sell what remained of his land in 1855 for $22,000 – a large increase in value of the land from four years prior.[101] The price may have been too high, as Gilliss continued to sell portions of his land in Iowa until after 1866.[102]

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[98] Hill, "'Half-Breeds,'" 96.
[99] Mathews v. Gillis, 1 Iowa 242 (1855).
[100] *Ibid.* William sent his nephew William Barkley to Keokuk to act as his power of attorney, and what followed were multiple questionable land sales executed by his nephew. Many of the transactions fell through, and the Supreme Court upheld Mathews' title to the ten acres.
[101] "Land and City Lots for Sale," *The Daily Gate City* (Keokuk, IA), July 28, 1855.
[102] "Rare Chance for Bargain in Real Estate," *The Daily Gate City* (Keokuk, IA), December 1, 1866. Land advertised included a city block in Keokuk, 150 acres four miles from the city and another quarter section of land nearby.

The Founding of Kansas City

While William Gilliss began a long-winded fight for rights to Louis Bertholet's claim in Lee County, Iowa, he invested with thirteen others in what would become a bustling town along the riverfront in Jackson County, Missouri. This land was significantly smaller in size than his land holdings in Iowa, but its success would solidify William Gilliss as a successful businessman and town builder. While some settlement had moved to Jackson County, predominately from Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, a portion of the population in the 1830s included the French-speaking community near Chouteau's warehouse.[103]

Trade along the Santa Fe Trail had energized the area as wagon trains trekked out West, and a ferry across the Missouri River at the foot of current-day Grand Avenue was established in 1826 by Peter Roy (Roi). A road was carved out of the bluffs from the landing to the Santa Fe Trail. The ferry was then sold to James Hyatt McGee, a Kentuckian, who was the first settler in 1828 to legally register land in Jackson County. This landing offered new opportunities due to its flat surface along the Missouri River; previously, the nearest landing for riverboats was Blue Mills, eighteen miles away. Traffic from Blue Mills Landing routed to the town of Independence, established in 1827.[104] With the popular town of Westport only four miles distant from this ferry stop near Chouteau's warehouse, the prospect to divert traffic from Blue Mills to this landing was a goal of men who lived and owned land in the area.

However, land speculation was not William Gilliss' first attempt at crafting a plan to enrich his own self-interests. In partnership with John King, he turned his sights to the riverfront just over one mile west from the natural rock landing utilized as a flatboat crossing from Jackson

[103] *History of Jackson County*, 103.
[104] Miller, *The History of Kansas City,* 394-96.

County to Clay County to the north. At this location, Kaw Point, the spit north of the Missouri River and the mouth of the Kaw River, was a short flatboat trip away. In the early 1830s, a military road from Fort Leavenworth to the Santa Fe Trail opened for overland access to trade and travel, and this road was just across the river from Gilliss and King's jointly-owned land.

In 1831, Moses Grinter - a white man married to a Delaware woman - established a ferry crossing over the Kaw River from current-day Wyandotte County, Kansas that was utilized by Fort Leavenworth troops and Native American tribes.[105] The crossing, known as Grinter's Ferry, was about ten miles west of the Missouri border, and Gilliss, along with his partner, John King, devised a plan to divert the traffic from Grinter's Ferry to a piece of land of Missouri land the men co-owned in the present-day East Bottoms; however, there were legal obstacles conducting business outside of the organized United States. While Moses Grinter had the legal right to live and conduct business in Indian Territory due to his marriage within the Delawares, Gilliss did not maintain his marital connections and did not have legal right to conduct business across the river. Thus, Gilliss and King turned to the federal government and petitioned for a ferry crossing, claiming they purchased the land with pre-emption rights and that the ferry crossing would be "of great convenience to the United States troops and to those who furnish the garrison" as well as beneficial to the Delawares.[106]

Gilliss and King claimed that they purchased the land with pre-emption rights, but this was false; the land was originally purchased by none other than Grand Louis Bertholet.[107] Their

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[105] National Parks Service, United States Department of the Interior*, Santa Fe National Historic Trail: Comprehensive Management and Use Plan*. 1990, 53-54.
[106] Petition of Wm. Gilliss and John King of Missouri, praying the purpose of a land granting them the right of preemption to certain lands, January 2, 1838, House Committee on Public Lands (HR25A-G18.1); 25th Congress, Records of the United States Senate, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
[107] Louis Bartlett (sic), Homestead Patent No. 1899, December 5, 1833, Jackson County, Missouri, *General Land Office Records.*

desire to build a ferry crossing in the current-day East Bottoms of Kansas City did not come to fruition, as there are no records indicating Congress accepted this moneymaking opportunity. In addition, regional history descriptions never include any mention of a ferry crossing that far west. Gilliss may have chosen to not push the issue further as other more promising opportunities developed later in 1838.

The original portion of the land where Kansas City would come to be was owned by Gabrielle Prudhomme, and when he, according to John C. McCoy, was "killed in a full fight," his 263.8 acres of land bordering the Missouri River to the north and situated at a natural rock landing was for sale. He left a widow and six children; a seventh child, a daughter, was born after his death.[108] In 1837, the court ordered that the land be sold at public auction. The guardianship of the minor children fell to James Hyatt McGee.[109] The estate was ordered to properly advertise the land in newspapers and handbills in order to the fetch the highest price, but McGee did not. On July 7, 1838, McGee acted as the auctioneer, and William Gilliss and one other man stepped away to confer about possibly investing in the property together. While they were absent, McGee proclaimed the land had been sold to his friend, Abraham Fonda, for $1,800. The sale was later ordered null and void because McGee "had not allowed for free and open bidding and thereby had cheated the infant heirs of Prudhomme out of their just due."[110]

The court ordered a new public sale on November 14, 1838, and for the land to be properly advertised in Liberty and St. Louis, Missouri. Those who lived in the area saw the possibilities that existed on the flat rock landing, to which riverboat traffic on the Missouri River

[108] Mildred Cox, "Town Company, Research Material Compiled by Native Sons, ca. 1950," in *Native Sons of Kansas City Collection, 1790-1910*, The State of Missouri Historical Society, Kansas City, Missouri.
[109] "Kansas City's Centennial Begins Tomorrow," *Kansas City Star,* November 13, 1938, Sec. C.
[110] Cox, "Town Company."

could be diverted from Blue Mills Landing and Independence. When the sale of the land was advertised in the *Missouri Republican*, it read, in part, "The situation is admirably calculated for a ferry across the Missouri River, and also one of the best steamboat landings on the river; an excellent situation for a warehouse or Town Site."[111]

November 14, 1838 changed the fortunes of William Gilliss, as the land he was about to purchase would become the site of Kansas City. About thirty people gathered at the foot of current-day Grand Avenue on the levee. Fourteen of them congregated together, and within short order, created what became known as the Town Company. They were William Sublette, Moses G. Wilson, William Gilliss, William Collins, William M. Chick, Fry P. McGee, Abraham Fonda, George W. Tate, Samuel C. Owens, Russell Hicks, Jacob Regan, William B. Evans, Oliver Caldwell and John C. McCoy. All lived in the area except for Sublette, a well-known fur trader in St. Louis who was often in Westport conducting business through A.G. Boone's trading post.[112] They purchased the land for $4,220.[113]

There were a few major problems with this plan. The site of what would become Kansas City was exceptionally hilly south of the riverfront, and John C. McCoy was certainly aware of the challenges of platting a town with this major obstacle. Although there were steep hills, McCoy had successfully established steamboat traffic on the flat rock landing surrounding the area, called Westport Landing, in 1834 when the first steamboat docked there.[114] This river traffic gave the founders promise. John C. McCoy later reported:

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[111] "Prudhomme Estate Abstract and Company Records," in Native Sons of Kansas City Collection, 1790-1910, The State of Missouri Historical Society, Kansas City, Missouri. The news clipping is dated September 29, 1838.
[112] Andrew Theodore Brown, *Frontier Community: Kansas City to 1870* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), 36.
[113] McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer,* 121.
[114] Carrie Westlake Whitney, *Kansas City Missouri: Its History and Its People, 1808-1908, Vol. 1* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1908), 63.

> Town-making was in those primitive days almost an unknown art, and the occasion drew together a large assemblage of stalwart yeomanry of the back-woods, with a fair sprinkling of the mercantile and trading classes. . . As the day advanced everybody got lively and many of them pretty rich; so much so as to become wholly indifferent to, or unconscious of, the topographical features of the town site.[115]

McCoy had been involved with his father in government surveying and platted Westport to the south just six years earlier. They also had to name their new townsite and settled on the name, "The Town of Kansas."[116]

Shortly after the sale, a warehouse was built by the Town Company and "the brush and logs cleared off as far back as Second street" so lots newly-platted by McCoy could be sold. McCoy recalled, "About a half-dozen purchasers built cheap log houses along the river front under the hill." McCoy claimed that the land had not yet been paid for, and three of the members of the Town Company refused to acknowledge the plat.[117] Complicating the process was that the land sale was held up in court. Two of the three commissioners in charge of the sale had died prior to the date of sale, putting in question the second attempt to sell the land.[118] The riverfront became known as "West Port Landing," a fitting description as the only use that continued at this time was for steamboats unloading merchandise and people who headed four miles south to Westport. In 1840, the Prudhomme heirs' guardian died, and the court appointed William Gilliss

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[115] McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer,* 122-123.
[116] *Ibid.,* 125. The story of Kansas City's founding is repeated in many histories of the city, and the roots of the story trace back to McCoy. At the cabin of "One-Eyed Ellis," who McCoy described as "a lank, cadaverous, specimen of humanity with one blind eye and the other on a sharp lookout for stray horses, straggling Indians and squatters," the fourteen men conferred over what to call the town. The first suggestion of a name for the town was "Port Fonda" and the suggester was none other than Fonda himself. This was quickly rejected, and another man "facetiously suggested Rabbitsville or Possum-trot but was treated in silent contempt."
[117] *Ibid.,* 4-5.
[118] Cox, "Town Company."

in his place.[119] The land was held up in the courts for seven years. Any progress in the area was also especially difficult after the great flood of 1844, which washed out most of the old French settlement and led a bulk of the French-speaking population to move out west. [120]

As sale of lots in the Town of Kansas was still held up in court, Gilliss focused his attention on the construction of two mills on Turkey Creek. In August 1838, he filed a petition in the Jackson County Court to build a fourteen-foot dam in order to construct a saw and gristmill. Once he received the proper approval, Gilliss hired Amos Case to construct a dam that would be "good and permanent for two years." Unfortunately, the dam failed when after only a few months, water broke through the mill.[121] Troubles continued for William's saw and gristmill business for several years. "I have been engaged with my mills, which have caused me a great deal of trouble and uneasiness," Gilliss complained to Pierre Menard.[122]

One obstacle standing in the way of the sale of lots was the fact that William Sublette still owned principal shares in the Town Company but was absent from negotiations. Sublette, a well-known fur trader, joined business interests with Robert Campbell in St. Louis. William Gilliss wrote to Sublette in January 1846, urging him to appoint someone to represent him in his Jackson County interests and asking that Sublette appoint an agent so shareholders could sell lots. "It is generally understood that all the mountain companies intend on stopping and landing their goods here this season," Gilliss wrote. [123]

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[119] "Prudhomme Estate Records," in *Native Sons of Kansas City Collection*, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
[120] Miller, *The History of Kansas City,* 405-6.
[121] William Gilliss v. Amos Case, Box 6, File 52, Jackson County Circuit Court, Independence, Missouri (April 1839). Gilliss sued Case for the leaky dam and won; Case had been paid $175, one cow, and one calf for his work.
[122] William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, July 25, 1840, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 1093, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[123] William Gilliss to W.L. Sublette, January 20, 1846, *William L. Sublette Collection,* Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri. The date on the letter is hard to decipher and has been incorrectly listed in prior research as 1845. It is catalogued as 1846.

Unbeknownst to William Gilliss, Sublette died in July 1845 and Robert Campbell was appointed executor of his estate – including his landholdings in Jackson County. Gilliss' letter may have inspired Robert Campbell to further invest in Kansas City as it is probable that Campbell received the letter intended for Sublette.[124] When the court finally approved the sale to the Town Company in 1846, "many changes in ownership had taken place reducing the number of shareholders from fourteen to seven."[125] In February 1846, William Evans, William Gilliss, Fry P. McGee, Jacob Regan and John McCoy met to establish terms to sell the lots. They, along with two new investors, Robert Campbell of St. Louis (former member of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and buyer of Sublette's share) and Henry Jobe, held all fourteen shares. Gilliss then held three shares, giving him the second most shares after Robert Campbell in the company. The men agreed to sell lots on reasonable terms of twelve months credit at ten percent interest. At their next meeting the following month, William Gilliss was elected chairman of the Town Company and Fry McGee was appointed collector.[126] A new survey was entered, extending the town's plat. A "Public Square" that had acted as the town square for the French was also added.[127] This remains today and is known as the City Market.

On June 5, 1847, the company began clearing land and selling lots. The accounting in the original Town Company book indicates that one-hundred and twenty-seven lots were sold, totaling $8,643.62. A month later, the company disbanded and divided the unsold land and acreage outside the platted town "into fourteen shares as nearly as possible." After a delay of over seven years, the Town Company functioned together for only sixteen months; however,

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[124] Robert Campbell became primary shareholder of the Town Company after Sublette's death, indicating, as executor, he opted to purchase his shares.
[125] "Records of the Town Company," in the *Native Sons of Kansas City Collection.*
[126] *Ibid.*
[127] "Plat Maps, 1839-1847," in *Native Sons of Kansas City Collection, 1790-1910*, The State of Missouri Historical Society, Kansas City, Missouri.

these short months changed the future of the area. Interestingly, the Town Company recorded the professions of each purchaser, and William Gilliss proclaimed himself a "gentleman."[128] This profession is unique to the list of men and suggests a change of the man himself. He no longer defined himself as an Indian trader nor did he claim a profession in any particular industry; he had yet to transform himself into the entrepreneur and businessman Kansas City would come to know.

Dr. Benoist Troost and Town-Building

One of the purchasers of five prime lots in the Town of Kansas, three of them surrounding the town square, was Dr. Benoist Troost, who would become business partners with William Gilliss. Born in 1786 in Holland, the doctor arrived with his wife, Rachel, in Jackson County, Missouri about 1835. Dr. Troost and his brother, Gerard, had received an exceptional education in Holland and France where they were trained in surgery and medicine. In addition, they were "skillfully acquainted with all the natural sciences- botany, horticulture, chemistry, geology, engineering, geography, astronomy, etc." After serving as surgeons in Napoleon's army, the brothers moved to Philadelphia where they opened a successful lead factory.[129]

While his brother moved to Tennessee to be the state's first geologist, Dr. Benoist Troost headed west with his wife, Rachel. After spending some time in St. Louis, he was convinced by a businessman who had a conversation with him at a hotel to move to Independence, Missouri and work as a doctor off the town square where "the newly arrived doctor soon gained great popularity in Jackson County and vicinity by his skill, politeness and many social

[128] "Records of the Town Company," in the *Native Sons of Kansas City Collection*.
[129] Rev. Father Benard Donnelly, "Reminiscences: Dr. Benoist L.G. Troost: Why and How He Came to Kansas City," *The Kansas City Daily Journal of Commerce*, June 6, 1875, 2.

accomplishments."[130] In 1844, his wife passed away. Dr. Troost was a frequent visitor to William Gilliss' home on Turkey Creek and had become acquainted with Mary Ann Kennerly, William's niece. A year later, a traveling Jesuit priest married Dr. Troost and Mary Ann at a neighbor's home and "the happy couple lived happily and prosperously together."[131] His new wife was thirty-three years old; her new husband was fifty-nine years old. For two years, the couple resided in Independence before moving into Gilliss' three-room log cabin on Turkey Creek, likely so Mary Ann could be closer to her family.[132] This marriage marked a pivotal connection that further established William's power and prestige in the new town.

Purchasers of lots in the Town of Kansas quickly built business houses to entice trade and travel. Travel on the Santa Fe Trail increased, and use of Westport Landing as a jumping-off point made the viability of the Town of Kansas a distinct possibility. The *Liberty Tribune* reported just months after the sale of lots that the town "is improving with a rapidity unprecedented in the history of western towns" and it predicted "it will eventually become the starting point for traders and emigrants, owing to its being on the river.[133] William Gilliss invested three hundred dollars in one of the more expensive lots at the foot of Delaware Street. The western portion of the riverfront was so narrow that there was only room for one team to pass at a time, and to the south, the bluffs rose hundreds of feet into the air. The first excavations cut into the hills so they could make room for their businesses on the riverfront.[134]

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[130] Donnelly, "Reminiscences," 2.
[131] Reverend Bernard Donnelly, *Scattered Sheets: Reminiscences of Father Bernard Donnelly,* ed. Rev. James J. Schlafly (Kansas City: Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, 1957), 37-38. See also Missouri, U.S. Marriage Records, 1805-2002, September 13, 1845, Jackson County, Missouri, digital image *Ancestry.com.*
[132] William Booker and John C. McCoy depositions, in *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[133] "Kansas," *Liberty Tribune,* November 11, 1847, 2.
[134] Charles P. Deathridge, *Early History of Greater Kansas City* (Kansas City: Interstate Publishing Company, 1927), 384.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 may have encouraged William Gilliss to build a hotel which further distanced him from his rugged trader past and propelled him toward the life of a builder and visionary of Kansas City. The influx of riverboat travel - where approximately four to five boats would land at the levee each day - encouraged him to try his hand at building a hotel around 1848. Gilliss owned prime real estate on the west side of the levee at the foot of Delaware Street. It was then functioning as a "wayside tavern and wagon yard."[135] This would be the site of Kansas City's first hotel (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. This photo, taken in August 1867, is the earliest known photograph of the Gilliss House Hotel. Description reads "Gillis Hotel and Levee (Formerly Aid Emigrant Hotel), on Levee between Delaware and Wyandotte." Courtesy Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

This was a joint venture between Dr. Troost and Gilliss. The first portion of the hotel, then called "Troost House," was a "two story brick building of very modest dimensions."[136] The construction and finances came from Gilliss, while Dr. Troost ran the daily operations for the

[135] "The Romantic Story of the Man," D.
[136] *Ibid.*

first few years.[137] It was the finest building in the Town of Kansas at the time, and the newspaper late reported that "the fame of the cuisine and the good cheer of the bar traveled up and down the river."[138] Dr. Troost acted as the hotel's manager until his popularity as a physician compelled him to focus on his medicine as the first resident doctor in the Town of Kansas.[139] By 1850, William was living at the hotel with Dr. Troost, his niece, Mary Ann, his nephew, William Barkley, a cook, and his elderly aunt, Louisa James. Three enslaved people remained in his home.[140] The decrease in the number of the enslaved actively living in the household may be due to the fact that he had temporarily diverted his attention from his extensive landholdings on Turkey Creek where he raised livestock and had focused instead on town building.[141]

The hotel was an instant success as riverboat traffic substantially increased along the levee due to the California Gold Rush and increased migration. A letter to the *Missouri Republican* in 1850 described the levee as including "four immense warehouses; several grist and saw mills; blacksmith and wagon-makers' shops; grocery and provision stores, and a magnificent and commodious hotel, the 'Troost House,' containing over one-hundred apartments."[142] When Dr. Troost left the daily operations, Gilliss renamed Troost House the Union Hotel. Despite the official moniker, the hotel was remembered in later recollections as the "Gilliss House Hotel," even though it was not renamed this until the 1860s.

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[137] William Booker and B. Hedges depositions, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[138] "A Once Famous Hostelry: The Story of the Old Gilliss House Now in Decay," *Kansas City Times*, March 23, 1890, 5.
[139] "Early Recollections," *Kansas City Star*, December 24, 1880, 2.
[140] "William Gillis," 1850 United States Census, Kaw, Jackson County, Missouri, digital image, *Ancestry.com.* Even though he only has three slaves listed in his household, all male, he oftentimes rented his other slaves out to other households. Depositions from former slaves indicate this to be the case.
[141] Depositions of William Booker and Lucretia Anderson, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. Formerly enslaved people testified that Gilliss would hire them out to others, including to John C. McCoy, for extended periods of time.
[142] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 62. The newspaper clipping, dated April 12, 1850, is listed as being in the *Native Sons Archives*.

Gilliss' nephew, William Barkley, took over daily business at the newly-branded Union Hotel around 1852, and further excavations in that year enlarged the building. The ground entrance eventually became the second story due to the excavations.[143] The hotel then was three stories tall and became, in appearance, the structure often recognized in early Kansas City riverfront photographs. By this same year, the Town of Kansas overtook Westport and Independence as the center of trade in the area.[144] These first twenty-two years of William Gilliss' time in Jackson County morphed a pioneer carpenter-turned Indian trader who came from nothing into a businessman and builder who helped build a town along the bluffs of the Missouri River.

[143] Deathridge, *Early History,* 484.
[144] *Ibid.,* 550.

"I WAS RAISED BY WILLIAM GILLISS:" ENSLAVEMENT IN A STATE OF CHANGE

Much of William Gilliss' wealth remained tied up in his impressive hotel on the levee, and after his nephew, William Barkley, failed at the business venture due to mismanagement, the Union Hotel underwent renovations that expanded the number of rooms. Always protective of his business interests and his pocketbook, Gilliss struggled to lease the building, claiming that possible renters "pretended to be acquainted with the art of tavern keeping."[145] In September 1854, his financial interests in the hotel ended when the Emigrant Aid Company of Boston, represented by agents Charles Robinson and Samuel C. Pomeroy, purchased the building and its contents for $10,000.[146] The organization, founded by charter in April 1854, was hellbent on ensuring that the Kansas-Nebraska Act did not result in the spread of slavery. Associations like the Emigrant Aid Society were a direct threat to the "peculiar institution" that had been present on the western border of Missouri since the Chouteaus established their trading post.[147]

Kansas City was established by settlers, predominately from the South, with a generational history tied to slavery. Slavery in Missouri more than doubled by 1840, and by 1850, 87,422 enslaved men, women, and children resided in the state. Between 1850 and 1860, in the height of border struggles over slavery, over sixty-two percent of the slave population was concentrated on the Missouri River and western border counties – including Jackson County.[148]

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[145] "The Union Hotel to Rent," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat,* January 10, 1854, 1.
[146] Jackson County, Missouri, Deed Book 27: 401-402.
[147] Horace Andrews, "Kansas Crusade: Eli Thayer and the New England Emigrant Aid Company," *The New England Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1962): 501.
[148] Richard B. Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas: The Influx of Black Fugitives and Contrabands into Kansas, 1854-1865," *Kansas History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 29.

White Missourians remained on high alert, distrusting of outsiders from the East who were flooding into Kansas City. A large proslavery convention in Lexington, Missouri in July 1855 declared "the enforcement of the restriction in the settlement of Kansas was virtually the abolition of slavery in Missouri."[149] The immigrants' intentions, in the minds of slaveholding Missourians, remained perfectly clear.

Thus, it was unexpected that William Gilliss, a slaveholder, would choose to sell his largest enterprise at that time to the enemy. This large sale of real estate could demonstrate his willingness to adapt to changing times, but it more than likely showed the shrewd yet enterprising nature of the businessman himself which is addressed in the next chapter. William was always looking for a way to make money, and the increased business with organizations such as the Emigrant Aid Company created more trade, business, and higher prices of land. Much of William's life is shrouded in mystery, and so, too, are the exact ways in which the enslaved members of his household perceived the tumult that consumed the area. Since at least 1820, William Gilliss held people in bondage in order to increase his material wealth and likely as a status symbol.

In most instances, piecing together the lives of the enslaved during and after emancipation is difficult at best. However, due to the multiple contestations of William Gilliss' estate after his death, there are first-hand experiences of their enslavement; this adds to the primary source evidence of regional differences of slavery highlighted in Kristen Epps and Diane Mutti Burke's research on the Missouri-Kansas border. Mutti Burke's research of the small-slaveholding household in western Missouri revealed how the household dynamics there differed from other regions, and records such as pensions and slave narratives strongly suggest that most

[149] Leverett Wilson Spring, *Kansas, The Prelude to the War of the Union* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1892), 26.

enslaved people moved with their masters westward instead of being purchased through the interstate slave trade. Despite this, most of the enslaved were separated from some family members when they arrived in Missouri and over time.[150] Their history captures Gilliss' own movement over time, starting in Illinois where slavery was illegal yet enslavement continued with the offspring of African Americans brought to the state during the eighteenth century.[151] As he moved to Missouri to trade with Native American tribes, he brought with him enslaved women, one of whom he may have had a sexual relationship with, and another who would later be sold to a Shawnee Indian chief living in Indian Territory. Even though William Gilliss never legally married, the structure of his small-slaveholding household included a quasi-mistress who ran the household affairs after his move to Jackson County. His niece, Mary Ann, fulfilled this role, and according to testimony, used her influence over the household in negative ways which stuck with the formerly enslaved well past emancipation and split an enslaved family apart.

Kristen Epps shows the daily, common interactions in the small slaveholding household, even though the "thoughts, feelings, and worldviews" of the enslaved "often remain in shadow."[152] Gilliss' formerly enslaved people and those intimately connected to them had the unusual opportunity to answer questions under the penalty of perjury about what their daily lives were like, although the questions asked did not reveal the entire structure or timeline of events. The depositions still limited the voice of these people when instructed to answer the carefully-worded questions that were meant to prove the prosecution and defense's arguments.

Regardless, the information revealed by Gilliss' small slaveholding household offers insight into an alleged relationship with an enslaved woman in Kaskaskia, discusses his move

[150] Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 40-41.
[151] Heerman, "In a State of Slavery," 114.
[152] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 6.

from the James Fork of the White River trading post among Native American tribes, and ends on the border in Jackson County, Missouri. He enslaved people for material and personal gain, and his decisions adversely affected the outcomes of their lives as free men and women. This microhistory adds to the growing body of scholarship about the small-slaveholding household. The movements and decisions of Gilliss correlates with the tremendous change underway in Missouri and in neighboring Indian Territory.

Matilda Edgar Lemons

Those bound in slavery and indentured servitude commonly had little say over their living situation or whom they chose as a partner, but there are some exceptions to this. One of the many contestations of William Gilliss' estate included an alleged son named Antoine, called "Nat" by friends and family. The question of the paternity of Antoine Gilliss was not raised in the public eye until 1894 when he, along with his oldest son, John Baptiste, sued in the Jackson County Circuit Court for a portion of William's estate. The law set a deadline of ten years after the death of the probate subject to file unless one could prove the claimant was legally insane. In that instance, the claimant had twenty-four years, and Antoine met the deadline within months.[153] The newspapers asserted that there was sufficient evidence of Antoine's mental instability, stating he had been searching for a pot of gold on his farm for years and he was afraid of witches.[154] Although the court case was destroyed, summaries of the depositions were captured in a synopsis.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 outlawed slavery in Indiana Territory, but when Virginia ceded claims to the area, the French, who were the core of Kaskaskia's population, were

[153] "Is Antoine Gilliss Insane?," *Vinita Leader*, October 10, 1895, 1.
[154] *Ibid.*

permitted by Congress to keep their slaves.[155] When Illinois became a state in 1818, the Constitution banned slavery, but the wording of the document benefitted the slaveholder. It read, in part, that "slavery and voluntary servitude shall not hereafter be introduced" into Illinois. Because of the way this was phrased, slaves and servants already in some sort of agreement with their master were exempt. Matilda, Antoine's mother, was born into slavery after 1805; a new code declared that all male slaves under fifteen would remain indentured until thirty-three years old while women would remain indentured until twenty-eight.[156] Pierre Menard held at least eighteen people in bondage by 1820, a point in time by which chattel slavery had experienced notable changes.[157] The constitution did forbid further indentures from occurring, but indentures prior to the constitution were enforced, so Matilda's own indenture stood intact.[158]

Antoine's mother, Matilda, was the property of John Edgar. A woman of beauty, Matilda was described by her son, Frank as being "white, Indian and some negro blood; a mulatto brighter than a quadroon; she had long black hair; it touched the floor when she walked."[159] The color of her skin was not uncommon for indentured servants of Illinois, after generations of intermixing with Native Americans, African Americans, and whites.

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[155] Elmer Gertz, "Black Laws of Illinois," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 56, no. 3 (1963): 458.
[156] Laws of the First General Assembly of the Territory of Indiana, 1805, Chapter 26.
[157] U.S. Census Bureau, 1820 United States Census, Randolph County, Illinois. Because slavery was outlawed in the 1818 Illinois Constitution, the way in which slaves were counted is questionable. The numbers, such as 259 slaves living in Randolph County, are likely incorrect because many counties were not given slave schedules to record information. For example, the 1825 Illinois State Census shows Pierre Menard with seven male and five female "servants or slaves" and one free male of color as part of his household. For more information about indentured servitude and slavery in southern Illinois, see Darrell Dexter, *Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois* (Cape Girardeau: Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2011).
[158] Heerman, "In a State of Slavery," 131-32.
[159] Frank Morrison deposition, Synopsis. Although the original lawsuit, *Antoine Gilliss, by his next friend, John B. Gilliss v. John Campbell, et al.*, (Div. 2, 1894) was destroyed due to its dismissal in the Circuit Court of Jackson County, Missouri, a synopsis, including seven depositions from the original case file, was transcribed. This valuable manuscript is the most compelling evidence of a possible sexual relationship between William Gilliss and Matilda.

In August 1821, Matilda entered the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Kaskaskia, Illinois with her newborn son, Antoine Samson, later called Nat, in her arms. The priest recorded the baptism in French within the pages of his records, noting Antoine was the son of "a woman named Matilda who belongs to Sir Edgard [*sic*]. The father of child is unknown."[160] It was not uncommon for children born absent from the bonds of marriage, especially those with a hint of African blood and enslaved, to have no father listed in parish records. Nevertheless, the tightknit community in southern Illinois just across the Mississippi River from Missouri likely knew who Nat's father was.

The community in Kaskaskia, Illinois of those indentured and enslaved was intimate and included a small population of people. Eighty-two-year-old Eliza Briggs was set free from her indentured servitude when she was twenty-three and lived her early life in servitude in the village of Kaskaskia. Eliza spent the remainder of her life working as a freed woman in Randolph County. "I always heard that Nat Gilliss was the son of William Gilliss," she testified. "He passed as such among the colored people but not among the whites in Kaskaskia."[161] Raphael Francis, who claimed to be ninety-five years old at the time of his testimony, declared, "I used to be a slave; William Gilliss was a clerk to my boss Menard. William [Gilliss] was the father of Nat Gilliss. Matilda, Nat's mother, was a slave, a quadroon, one fourth negro. William and Matilda lived together and kept house in Kaskaskia; they were never married."[162] William Gilliss arrived in Kaskaskia prior to 1818, worked as a carpenter with his brother, John, and was introduced to Raphael's slaveholder, Pierre Menard. By 1820, Gilliss was employed by Pierre

[160] Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Kaskaskia, Randolph County, Illinois), "Baptisms, First Communions, Marriages, 1815-1851," 45.
[161] Eliza Briggs deposition, Synopsis.
[162] Raphael Francis deposition, *Ibid.*

Menard of Menard & Valle to trade with local Natives. During Antoine "Nat" Gilliss' childhood, his alleged father relocated along with the tribes to southwest Missouri.[163]

The structure of society for an indentured servant in Illinois and the conditions and outcomes allotted to those who were released from servitude was a different system than the South. After the alleged sexual relationship with Gilliss which resulted in the births of two children, Matilda's conditions in and out of slavery dramatically worsened. She entered into relationships with a white man named Lemons, a white man named John D. Osborn, a free mulatto named Frank Morrison, and lastly with Michael Brandemore. In total, Matilda gave birth to ten children between these four men and Gilliss. One of Matilda's children, Frank Morrison, readily admitted that William Gilliss and his mother never married but claimed the couple had two children, Antoine and Pamelia. He testified, "She just took up with these different men and lived with them as long as they could agree and then quit and took up with the others; white and colored folks married that way at the time."[164]

The structure of slave society in Illinois did differ from the South, but its complicated nature was similar to many border states, including Maryland and Missouri. Alexis Bienvenu was born into slavery in 1809. Alexis' thirty-three-year indenture was later transferred to Hypolite Menard, Jr., Pierre Menard's nephew.[165] As early as the 1820s, William Gilliss arranged to purchase Alexis and took him to the James Fork of the White River in southwest Missouri. Delayed manumission, like that of Matilda, Alexis, and others indentured under laws interpreted and upheld by the slaveholders, created a complicated slave society worth examination. As one observer in Illinois wrote, slavery was a part of society, and "where it

[163] Marra, *Cher Oncle*, *Cher Papa,* 253.
[164] Frank Morrison deposition, Synopsis. Pamelia, Antoine's sister and alleged daughter of Gilliss, died many years prior to the lawsuit and is mentioned little in what survives of the original court case.
[165] Record Book T, 1842-1843, Office of the County Clerk, Randolph County, Illinois, 371.

exists, it is not less pernicious in its effects, nor less criminal in its principle, nor less productive of misery and debasement to its subjects, than where it is universal."[166]

Even though both Matilda and Alexis concluded their indentures at twenty-eight and thirty-three years old as the 1805 law outlined, other indentured servants' masters interpreted the law in ways that allowed for slaveholders to keep their enslaved for much longer than the law allowed. Most indentures entered into record in Illinois courthouses included enslavement until the person reached their sixties, and in some other cases, the indentures were much longer. For example, Jean Pierce, nineteen, was indentured to Wright Pierce in Randolph County, Illinois until he reached ninety-nine years old.[167] Matilda and Alexis both were raised during a time of change in a state where slavery was outlawed but indentured servitude continued, and they were examples of those who, at one time, were caught in a system where blurred lines complicated their futures.

Matilda's slaveholder, John Edgar, proved to be an important ally of Matilda's throughout her life. Edgar was born in Ireland and fought for the British during the American Revolution. He switched loyalties while in the British Navy, and he and his wife were intimate with George Washington and his family.[168] The Edgars arrived in Kaskaskia in 1784 and built the largest mansion in the Territory. James H. Roberts recalled when the residence still stood, describing it as modest in "modern" terms; it was a one-story home in French style with a porch wrapping the entire exterior.[169] Through trade and his extensive landholdings, John Edgar,

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[166] "Illinois is a Slaveholding State," *Alton Observer,* August 17, 1837, 2.
[167] Randolph County, Illinois Register of Negroes, County Clerk, Randolph County, Illinois. Registry of indentured servants began in the county in 1809 and are incomplete. Records for Matilda and Alexis could not be located. See also Darrell Dexter, *Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois* (Cape Girardeau: Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2011), 75.
[168] James H. Roberts, "The Life and Times of General Edgar," in *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1907*, ed. E.B. Greene (Springfield: Phillips Bros. State Printers, 1908), 67.
[169] *Ibid.,* 68.

described as "tall and portly," became one of "the leading and most enterprising merchants in the Territory."[170] He also held an extensive number of the enslaved. In 1820, his household included two male slaves and twelve "free colored persons," with most of them likely still under indenture contracts.[171] These indentures were often executed in order to ensure that slaves did not run away. Like Illinois, Maryland had a delayed form of manumission that slaveholders in Randolph County such as John Edgar and Pierre Menard arranged in order to keep the peace and their bound labor intact. Historian Max Grivno explained, "As the antebellum decades progressed, growing numbers of African Americans found themselves laboring under a diverse array of agreements, some verbal and unenforceable, others written and binding, that moved them toward freedom."[172]

It is likely that John Edgar hired out Matilda to William Gilliss, a bachelor who would have required the domestic labor of a housekeeper. Rhoda, one of William's formerly enslaved women whom he brought from St. Louis to the Ozarks and later Jackson County, recalled the arrangements of his household structure in her time with him. While she did the cooking and lived in the kitchen, two enslaved women, Olive and Matilda, "lived off some distance and were making cheese for [Gilliss]."[173] It is impossible to know for certain whether the Matilda

[170] Roberts, "The Life and Times," 70.
[171] U.S. Census Bureau, 1820 United States Census, Randolph County, Illinois. By the 1825 Illinois State Census, Edgar's enslaved property had drastically decreased to five male and one female "slave or servant." It remains unclear whether his contracts had run out on his slaves, if he emancipated them or if he had rented out the indentured servants documented in 1820.
[172] Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor Along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 116-17.
[173] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517. See also Rhoda Jones deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. Both cases mention Matilda being present at James Fork of White River, yet there is no other record of her within the trials. This could be seen as additional proof that this Matilda is the same woman, as she did not go with Gilliss like the others enslaved to Jackson County, Missouri.

mentioned is the same woman who allegedly fathered two of his children, but the timeline of Gilliss' movements does make it possible.[174]

As Diane Mutti Burke found when examining small-slaveholding households in western Missouri, "A few slave women pragmatically entered into long-term sexual liaisons with their masters, perhaps gambling that the relationship would improve both their own and their children's lives."[175] In some circumstances, such as with Sim Younger born in 1850 in Independence, Missouri, enslaved women were able to bridge the line with the master who sexually exploited them. Sim's mother had two children, and when his father and slaveholder, Charles Younger, died, his mother was left a farm and arrangements for her children to be sent to school in Ohio. In Charles Younger's will, he freed them as well.[176]

The nature of Illinois servitude in which freedom from indenture was a distinct possibility after years served further complicated the dynamics of the mixed household. Eliza Briggs remembered that Matilda was a slave "after Nat was quite a boy" when she was then freed.[177] Frank Morrison, born well after his mother's relationship with Gilliss, claimed William "always recognized Nat as his son" and "for 10 or 12 years he and Matilda were living at their house in Kaskaskia Bottoms except when William was away trading with Indians."[178] It is well-documented, however, that William spent the majority of his time at James Fork of White River in southwest Missouri. Frank claimed that William would frequently return to visit his brother, John, and these visits may have coincided with his visits to Matilda's home. Frank readily

[174] Extensive searches in records at Kaskaskia, including the Catholic baptismal register, show few women of color with the name Matilda, and none of them correlate in age to Matilda Edgar. It is, however, possible that he purchased an enslaved woman in St. Louis or elsewhere.
[175] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 188.
[176] Sim Younger, interviewed by George K. Bartlett, Federal Writers' Project Slave Narrative Project Vol. 10, 380.
[177] Eliza Briggs deposition, Synopsis.
[178] Frank Morrison deposition, *Ibid*. Other witnesses, including Raphael Francis, claimed Gilliss and Matilda lived together in Kaskaskia, but Eliza Briggs stated she "never heard of [Matilda] and William living together."

admitted that his mother, Matilda, lived with multiple men, both white and Black, throughout her life and claimed that this was how "white and colored folks married at the time."[179] At first glance, it could be interpreted that it was acceptable practice for interracial marriages to occur. Frank likely meant that because of the restrictions of interracial relationships and marriage, if an interracial couple wished to live together, they did so under public scrutiny. In the case of Matilda, she worked as a housekeeper in white households and had sexual relationships with the men who employed her.

Unlike the positive outcome for Sim Younger, who was freed and educated under the guidance of his father's will, there is no evidence past the alleged recognition of Antoine as his son that demonstrates continued financial or moral support. Antoine did take the Gilliss surname, an ongoing, open recognition of his white paternity. Matilda's story, like most of the histories of the enslaved, is fragmented at best; however, some portions of her life give a narrow glimpse into the conditions of a freed woman of color in nineteenth-century Illinois.

By 1824, Matilda worked in the household of John D. Osborn, and records indicate that this arrangement was tumultuous. As William Gilliss labored at his trading post and fathered three children with three different Native American women between approximately 1822 and 1830, Matilda moved into James Osborn's home in Kaskaskia in July 1824 to work as his housekeeper.[180] Her two children, Pamelia and Antoine Gilliss, were with her.[181]

Little scholarship has examined indentured servitude and the life past emancipation for women in Illinois prior to the Civil War, and the WPA Slave Narratives lend little help due to the

[179] Frank Morrison deposition, Synopsis.
[180] Mathilda Lemon v. James D. Osborn (1829). Box 38, Randolph County, Illinois Civil and Criminal Court Records, 1809-1860.
[181] 1825 Illinois State Census, Randolph County, Illinois. The record shows one male person of color (Antoine) and two female persons of color (Matilda and Pamelia). The only white in the household is Osborn.

fact the focus was on the traditional slaveholding southern states. However, a study of the pre-emancipation Black community of Savannah, Georgia, found that free women continued, like Matilda, to suffer the same exploitation common of enslaved women.[182] Historian Whittington B. Johnson argues that free women in many places outnumbered free Black men, and this "forced some women to either remain unmarried, marry slaves, or become mistresses of whites, all of which could contribute to economic hardships."[183]

The violence within the Osborn residence gained the attention of neighbors in Kaskaskia and has left a rare permanent record of the conditions under which Matilda and her two children lived. Her employer and father of at least one of her children, James D. Osborn was an educated white bachelor who arrived in Kaskaskia by 1820. At approximately eleven o'clock at night on August 13, 1827, Hugh Woods, a bachelor, was stirred by loud noises and commotion coming from Osborn's house. Woods grew concerned and said that he "could distinctly hear the voice of Osborn making violent threats" against Matilda and her children.[184] Another neighbor, Jacob Feaman, also claimed he heard the fighting. Just one day later, Osborn was arrested for disturbing the peace as a result of "threatening, quarreling and fighting" with Matilda. A day later, he posted bail.[185]

This action triggered an investigation by a grand jury into the inner workings of the household. Matilda was indicted for "unlawfully living in an open state of fornication together with one James D. Osborn" while living with him "against the good manners and morals of the

[182] Whittington B. Johnson, "Free African-American Women in Savannah, 1800-1860: Affluence and Autonomy Amid Adversity," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (1992): 261.
[183]Johnson, "Free African-American Women," 263.
[184] Jacob Feaman v. James Osborn (1827). Box 36, Randolph County, Illinois Civil and Criminal Court Records, 1809-1860. See also Frank Morrison deposition, Synopsis. Morrison stated his mother, Matilda, had two children with James Osborn.
[185] *Ibid.*

people." She was not alone; Osborn, too, was charged with fornication. All sex outside of marriage in the nineteenth century was criminalized in statutes relating to fornication and adultery. She was also charged with disturbing the peace.[186] Matilda's bail of one hundred dollars was paid for by her former slaveholder, John Edgar.[187] This suggests an ongoing relationship past emancipation with her former master but also shows the limited resources a formerly enslaved, single woman had in a proslavery town like Kaskaskia. The cases were eventually dropped in March 1828 when the star witness, Hugh Woods, left town for Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, and could not be located by the prosecutor.

Because there were few cases to compare to Matilda's which formally charged a former slave and a white man with fornication, many questions remain as to how unique this situation was at the time. But, relationships from the perspective of the formerly enslaved whose stories do exist suggest enslaved people faced coercion and the threat of violence if they did not comply to sexual advances.[188] This, too, could have been the case for Matilda. Even though she was a free woman, she was left with limited options. Close living and working conditions in this type of servitude increased the chances that a female slave would garner the unwanted attention of a male member of the household.[189]

Matilda's beauty, noted in more than one record, contributed to the attention given to her by more than one man and made her vulnerable to predation. Harriet Jacobs, a formerly enslaved woman who successfully resisted the sexual advances of her master, escaped bondage after seven

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[186] People v. Matilda Lemon (1828), Box 37, Randolph County, Illinois Civil and Criminal Court Records, 1809-1860. See also *Feaman*, Box 36. Cases were separated by person and by charges, but all of these cases stem from the August 1827 events. Interestingly, this law which allowed for prosecution of two people of the opposite sex living together without being married is still against the law. See Illinois Compiled Statutes 720 ILCS 5/11-40, Sec. 11-40.
[187] *Lemon,* Box 37.
[188] Fay A. Yarbrough, "Power, Perception, and Interracial Sex: Former Slaves Recall a Multiracial South," *The Journal of Southern History* 71, no. 3 (2005): 565.
[189] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 187.

years in hiding. One of the strategies to repel her master included becoming sexually involved with a white man in the neighborhood with whom she had two children. She wrote in her slave narrative, "If God has bestowed beauty upon [a female slave], it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave."[190]

Matilda suffered in the invisible bondage a free woman of color experienced past emancipation; however, this woman was not as docile as one may have assumed. In July 1824, Matilda moved into James Osborn's home with Antoine and Pamelia to work as his housekeeper at the weekly salary of one dollar and fifty cents. From the record, Matilda indicated with her simple "x" next to her name that Osborn had not paid her any of her wages even though she asked for the money repeatedly and he "faithfully promised" to pay her. When she entered the home, there was no kitchen nor any supplies for her to do her job, so Matilda sought out to purchase a stove and materials to execute her duties.[191] For four and a half years, she labored as his maid, gave birth to two of his children, and suffered physical abuse. In January 1829, Matilda marched into the Randolph County courthouse in Kaskaskia and filed a civil lawsuit against James Osborn. By this time, she was the mother of four children, two allegedly with Gilliss and two others with Osborn.[192] She could not sue for child support or alimony, but she did see possibilities in a lawsuit over unpaid wages.

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[190] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself,* ed. L. Maria Child (Detroit: History Press, 1861), 46.
[191] *Lemon,* Box 37.
[192] *Ibid*. The children are not mentioned in the court case, but records from December 30, 1832 show Matilda baptized "Marie, about seven years old" and "Richarde, about four years old." This places their birth dates as approximately 1825 and 1828. See Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Kaskaskia, Randolph County, Illinois), "Baptisms, First Communions, Marriages, 1815-1851," 139.

Some historians have suggested that sexual relationships between slaves and white men were sometimes agreed upon, and it is unclear whether Matilda and John were in a consensual relationship at any time.[193] It could be argued that due to her color and his whiteness they were unable to enter a legal marriage and were forced into fornication in order to be together. More than likely, Matilda was a victim of the colored lines drawn for her in a society that continued slavery under the name of indentured servitude. After indentured servitude contracts ended, a single woman with two light-skinned children had few options left for survival – especially when indentured contracts could be transferred between masters quite easily in Illinois.[194]

What is more compelling is that Matilda was even allowed to testify in the first place. In 1827, just two years prior to her lawsuit, Illinois passed a law making it illegal for Blacks or biracial men and women to testify in court against a white person.[195] This lawsuit for 450 dollars raises interesting questions which remain unanswered. It could be that Matilda had white allies such as John Edgar, a powerful and wealthy Kaskaskian, to support and defend the legality of her testifying in court.

James Osborn immediately defended himself and filed in the court just weeks later that he would take the deposition of John Dowling, a former resident of Kaskaskia who moved to Galena, Illinois; he swore that Dowling was present when a contract of one dollar per month was made with Matilda. Perhaps to make his true feelings known, Osborn's first question of the three he proposed he would ask in the deposition read, "Are you acquainted with the beautiful and accomplished Mulatto Girl at Kaskaskia called Matilda Lemon?"[196] No official deposition was

[193] Yarbrough, "Power, Perception, and Interracial Sex," 565.
[194] Gertz, "The Black Laws of Illinois," 458.
[195] "An Act concerning practice," approved February 2, 1827, in *The Revised Laws of Illinois* (Vandalia: Robert Blackwell, 1827), 320. Section 3 states, "A negro, mulatto, or Indian, shall not be a witness in any court, or in any case, against a white person. A person one fourth part negro blood shall be adjudged a mulatto."
[196] *Lemon,* Box 38.

filed in the court record; however, a notice of agreement was signed by both parties. The case was dismissed with no mention of the agreed upon amount.[197]

The trail of Matilda disappears in records after the baptism of the three children she had with Frank Morrison, a free biracial man with whom she lived with shortly after the lawsuit until about 1836.[198] Frank testified that his mother died "many years" prior to his deposition, but the date is not given.[199] Matilda's story ends as abruptly as it began, as it is not clear whether she was able to improve her life past the contracts made with white men for her services both domestic and sexual. Regardless, her oldest son, Antoine, left Kaskaskia about 1881 to settle in Indian Territory in what would become the city of Tulsa where he died in 1905.[200]

Antoine's death notice mentioned little about his own life but much about his father. Ironically, the newspaper falsely claimed he was a Delaware Indian and that his father "was, at one time, the owner of Kansas City."[201] There is no mention of familial connections, including his mother, two spouses, siblings, and children that undoubtedly molded the man into who he was.

"Aunt Rhoda," the Enslaved Cook

Rhoda Jones, enslaved by William Gilliss, worked as a cook and took care of his children, Sophia and Mary, before being sold to Captain Joseph Parks, chief of the Shawnees. Like many of the enslaved, Rhoda did not possess the ability to recall dates or even when she

[197] *Lemon,* Box 38.
[198] Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Kaskaskia, Randolph County, Illinois), "Baptisms, First Communions, Marriages, 1815-1851," 119. Francois "Frank" Morrison was born in 1829 to Matilda and Frank; two more children, Francoise and Matilda, were born in 1833 and 1836. It should be noted that these are the only children she baptized with a father listed, likely due to the fact that Frank was also a person of color. See *Ibid*, 136 and 189.
[199] Frank Morrison deposition, Synopsis.
[200] "Twenty-Four Years in Tulsa," *The Indian Republican* (Tulsa, OK), April 28, 1905, 11.
[201] "Father Owned Kansas City," *Tulsa Daily Democrat*, April 28, 1905, 8.

was born. Moses Grandy, born in North Carolina in the late 1700s, was no different than many of the enslaved at the time. He wrote, "Slaves seldom know how exactly old they are; neither they nor their masters set down the time of a birth; the slaves, because they are not allowed to write or read; and the masters, because they only care to know what slaves belong to them.[202]

Grandy's family was separated in bondage after numerous sales which dictated the life story of these men and women. Time was relative; there was little reason to know the age of a person unless one was looking to sell or profit from the sale of an individual in bondage. This, too, was true of all of William Gilliss' enslaved people. Most were unaware of their birthdates. In the years after emancipation, they were able to recall events with impressive accuracy but were unable to say with certainty the length of time which had passed or how many years it had been since an event had occurred. The few people who knew the year of their birth were told often by their mothers a date equated to a moment in time in the national historical record. On the other hand, the ages of the enslaved were documented by slaveholders on census records and on tax records where they listed the value of their human property based on age, sex, and health. These factors greatly influenced slaveholders such as William Gilliss as he migrated from southwest Missouri to Jackson County, Missouri in spring 1831.

Gilliss' motivations for the move were clear; he traded with the Native American tribes who relocated from southwest Missouri to Indian Territory. The Delawares moved from near Gilliss' trading post at White River to land, according to John McCoy, "lying between the two rivers westward twenty leagues to the Kaw reservation. . . None of their settlements extend[ed] down lower than about eight miles from the mouth of the Kaw."[203] William worked to relocate

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[202] Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Formerly a Slave in the United States of America* (Boston: Oliver Johnson, 1843), 5.
[203] McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer,* 240.

the Piankashaws, Peorias, Shawnees, and Delawares to this new land in what would be Kansas Territory but then was simply Indian Country just west of the Missouri border.

Gilliss may have been unmarried, but he was never alone. Traveling with him to this new land where he settled south of Turkey Creek were his two children by Native American women, Sophia, born about 1822, and Mary, born about 1824.[204] While living at James Fork of the White River, these children were taken care of by an enslaved cook, Rhoda. Olive, also enslaved, was tasked with making cheese.[205] These women, along with Olive's husband, Alexis, and her four children – all enslaved – were forced across the state to western Missouri where Gilliss lived in a three-room log cabin and those enslaved lived in a one-room cabin nearby.[206] Rhoda Jones, called Aunt Rhoda by the enslaved community, was born in the latter part of the eighteenth century in Pennsylvania.[207] Gilliss purchased Rhoda from a man in St. Louis named Joseph Moore sometime after 1820, and there is no mention of her having her own children.[208]

Missouri and the unorganized territory to its west were undergoing tremendous change as Gilliss made his next move. After the Indian Removal Act of 1830, agents, missionaries, and traders increased their wealth with their association to tribes.[209] Reverend Thomas Johnson, founder of the Shawnee Indian Mission and Methodist minister, arranged in 1830 to administer to the relocated Shawnee tribe. A year later, Reverend Isaac McCoy, father of Kansas City and

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[204] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. Much like the enslaved, these Native American children did not know their birthdates, but the most reliable testimony of the two most prominent cases attached to Gilliss' estate came from Joseph Philibert, Gilliss' clerk for most of his time in southwest Missouri.
[205] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Ibid.* See also Rhoda Jones deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[206] William Booker deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[207] 1865 Kansas States Census, Shawnee, Johnson, Kansas. Rhoda listed her date of birth as 1793 and her place of birth as Pennsylvania.
[208] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[209] Gary L. Cheatham, "'Kansas Shall Not Have the Right to Legislate Slavery Out,'" *Kansas History* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 41.

Westport founder, John McCoy, established a Baptist mission with the help of Johnston Lykins. A Quaker mission followed in 1837.[210]

It was William Gilliss' promise to the mothers of his two children, Sophia and Mary, to educate his daughters after he removed the Native American tribes to Indian Country and settled on Turkey Creek.[211] John McCoy later recalled, "William Gilliss, an Indian trader, who had intermarried and had a family in the tribe and had resided with them many years, removed from White River, Mo., with the tribe to their new homes, and remained with them about a year."[212] Laws did not permit whites to live within Indian territory except by license, but that did not stop Gilliss from profiting off of the tribes. By 1833, about 1,050 Delawares relocated from Ohio and Missouri lived just east of Gilliss' landholdings in Jackson County, Missouri.[213]

Rhoda had charge of William's children, and the arrival of Louisa James impacted her future within the family.[214] In about 1832, Rhoda, Louisa, and the two children moved to "the little place" near Westport on Isaac McCoy's land where the children went to school.[215] While living near Westport with Rhoda, Mary Gilliss Rogers recalled, "We were all poisoned except for the black woman."[216] There could be several explanations for this event, and due to the fact that Rhoda was not sold away immediately suggests that she was not to blame for the incident. The children and Louisa James moved back to William's home on Turkey Creek for about a year. There, they had the affection of their father but were despised by Mary Ann, Gilliss' niece.

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[210] Kevin Abing, "Before Bleeding Kansas: Christian Missionaries, Slavery, and the Shawnee Indians in Pre-Territorial Kansas, 1844-1854," *Kansas History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 57.
[211] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. See also John McCoy, William Myers and Rhoda Jones depositions, *Ibid.*
[212] McCoy, *Tales of an Old Timer,* 240.
[213] Alan F. Farley, "The Delaware Indians in Kansas: 1829-1867," *The Trail Guide* 1, no. 1 (September 1955): 7.
[214] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. See also William Booker, John McCoy and Joseph Philibert depositions, *Ibid.*
[215] Mary Gilliss Rogers deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
[216] *Ibid.*

The influence that Mary Ann had on the household is without question, as women would use the power they had over the enslaved in substitute for the little power they had in general society.[217]

William Booker, one of Gilliss' enslaved boys, remembered that while Gilliss treated the girls "kindly," Mary Ann Kennerly insisted that the children leave (See Figure 5). "Mrs. Kennerly did not think much of them," Booker testified. "[She] scolded them and called them nasty Indian bitches when she was mad at them."[218] About one year after returning to the cabin on Turkey Creek, the girls were sent away with little bundles of clothes to the Baptist Mission. They never lived with their father again.[219]

Figure 5. Mary Ann Troost in 1859. This oil painting was painted by George Caleb Bingham. Courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

[217] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 55.
[218] William Booker deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470.
[219] Mary Gilliss Rogers deposition, *Ibid.*

The structure of this small slaveholding household changed as labor demands dictated. Mrs. James' presence and the absence of the children made Rhoda's role in the home unneeded. The well-utilized system in the small slaveholding household of hiring out the enslaved gave businessmen like William Gilliss the flexibility of hiring out an enslaved labor force for financial gain.[220] In turn, Rhoda was hired out in approximately 1835. "I was first hired to [John] McCoy and then lived at Mr. Saudon's [*sic*] two or three weeks, when I come to Mr. Joseph Parks and have remained here since that time," Rhoda explained.[221] Lucretia, an enslaved woman also held by Gilliss, was hired out three different times, and William Booker, another of his enslaved, was hired out to Joseph Guinotte.[222] This indicates Gilliss oftentimes used the slave hiring system for financial gain.

Joseph Parks, a man of mixed white and Shawnee ancestry, was born in 1794 and was the chief of the Hog Creek Band of the Shawnee who had been forced to relocate from Ohio. The government expected these tribes migrating west to be civilized, adopting white practices like Christianity, agricultural practices, western dress, and speaking English.[223] According to Kristen Epps, missionaries laid the groundwork for the expansion of slavery into the West when they brought slaves with them. In 1832, Thomas Johnson took his enslaved west of Missouri, and Indian agent Richard Cummins brought his slaves there.[224]

Some Native American tribes displaced to lands west of the Missouri state line embraced slavery. At least three tribes - the Shawnees, Potawatomis and the Wyandots - all owned enslaved people.[225] It is no surprise that William Gilliss was familiar with Joseph Parks, the

[220] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 93.
[221] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470.
[222] Lucretia Anderson, William Booker and Rhoda Jones depositions, *Ibid.*
[223] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 37.
[224] Abing, "Before Bleeding Kansas," 56-58.
[225] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 38.

undisputed leader of the Hog Creek Band of the Shawnee. Kristen Epps places Parks' ownership of slaves around 1843 when he purchased a man named Stephen.[226] Depositions of the formerly enslaved Rhoda, former clerk Joseph Philibert, William Myers, John McCoy, and others indicate that Rhoda was enslaved by Captain Joseph Parks as early as 1834.[227]

Parks associated with many whites once he settled west. He owned a trading house in Westport situated on a lot purchased from John McCoy in 1834.[228] This lot would later become the site of Kansas City's oldest building, Boone's Trading Post, commonly known today as Kelly's Westport Inn.[229] Kristen Epps explained, "His ability to engage effectively with the white community, and assimilate into the slaveholding society on the border, led to his success as a Shawnee leader."[230] Parks became a mason, a member of the Methodist church, worked as an interpreter at Fort Leavenworth, and, as Shawnee chief, became the liaison between the Shawnees and the government.[231] As leader of the Shawnees, Parks set an example for other tribal members. These wealthy men who were a part of the leadership of Native American tribes and the missionaries had by the 1840s brought a few dozen enslaved people west of the boundaries of Missouri.[232]

There are some examples of enslavement within Native American tribes. After several attempts to escape the bondage of slavery in Kentucky, Henry Bibb was sold to a Cherokee man near the border between Oklahoma and Kansas. He was accustomed to the evils of what he

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[226] Abing, "Before Bleeding Kansas," 59.
[227] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470. Rhoda testified that she was hired out to several people but indicated when she left Gilliss' home to go to Joseph Parks' house, Mary Ann was still married to George Kennerly. This places the sale of Rhoda to sometime between 1833 and 1834, as he deserted her at this time. William Myers also testified that he saw Rhoda at Gilliss' home on Turkey Creek between 1831 and 1833.
[228] Jackson County, Missouri, Deed Book P: 400.
[229] Abing, "Before Bleeding Kansas," 60.
[230] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 40.
[231] *Ibid.,* 39.
[232] *Ibid.,* 46.

deemed "plantation life" and found bondage within the Native American tribe much improved from his past enslavement. Bibb claimed he was given clothing and plenty to eat; he wrote, "If I must be a slave, I had by far rather be a slave to an Indian than to a white man, from the experience I have had with both."[233]

This was clearly not the universal opinion of every enslaved man and woman held in bondage by Native Americans. By 1843, a sixteen-year-old boy named Stephen enslaved by Parks was working as a blacksmith at the Fort Leavenworth agency.[234] The financial value of this young man cannot be understated. After Stephen ran away in 1848, Captain Parks offered a 150-dollar reward for the return of twenty-year-old Stephen who "speaks the Shawnee language well. . . He is supposed to have gone in company with a free negro by the name of John Scott, who has been lurking some time in the neighborhood of Westport."[235] The proximity to freedom on the border was too much to resist for the enslaved such as Stephen and Henry Bibb. No matter the conditions of the small slaveholding household, freedom was tempting, especially for those who had no family connections in the new land where they were removed. In addition, the conditions that the enslaved experienced were different. Because there was a small amount of enslaved people west of Missouri's border, it was hard to have any sense of a slave community or support system for those held in bondage there.[236] Rhoda was accustomed to isolation as she survived enslavement in the Ozarks where she was surrounded by a few white traders, Native Americans, and a sprinkling of enslaved people brought there by her slaveholder, William Gilliss.

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[233] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Self-pub., New York, 1849), 150.
[234] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 40.
[235] "$150 Reward," *Liberty Tribune,* May 28, 1848, 3.
[236] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 106.

Stephen's story does not end in Kansas. He was arrested in McHenry County, Illinois in July 1848 but was quickly taken "by a mob of residents" who sent him to Canada. Parks petitioned the government for compensation for his lost property, citing that it was the duty of the United States to "protect the property of said tribes."[237] Just one month later, attention once again fell upon the enslaved of Joseph Parks when a child named John Munday, son of a blacksmith to the Shawnee, died. The Westport newspaper reported, "It is said that a negro woman who was employed by Chief Parks as a cook became offended at something the child said to her and she poisoned him." Parks allegedly sold this enslaved woman immediately.[238] The woman sold was not Rhoda, as she remained in servitude within the Parks family well past this period of time.

Conditions did not improve throughout Rhoda's time as an enslaved cook of Joseph Parks. As the Territory opened to legal (white) settlement in 1854, Chief Joseph Parks headed to Washington to arrange an agreement with the government. In the end, the Shawnees relinquished most of their 1.6 million acres. They were left with 160,000 acres and parceled this remaining acreage into 200-acre allotments for each Shawnee man, woman and child.[239] The situation for everyone grew contentious. As antislavery settlers began moving into Kansas Territory to ensure it would be a free state, the enslaved, including those purchased by Natives, were often taken by abolitionists and some were taken by Southern men claiming they owned them.[240] Although slavery was never widespread, pinpointing the exact number of the enslaved is difficult due to increased white settlement and inaccuracies of early census data. The first census, conducted in

[237] "Wednesday, March 27, 1850," *Weekly National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), March 30, 1850, 8.
[238] Adrienne Christopher, "Captain Joseph Parks, Chief of the Shawnee Indians," *Westport Historical Quarterly* 5 no. 1 (July 1969): 16.
[239] "Treaty With the Shawnee," proclaimed November 2, 1854 (10 Stats., 1053).
[240] Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 23.

February 1855, counted 193 slaves and 151 free Blacks, although Kristen Epps places the number even higher due to the increase in the population as more settlement occurred.[241] W. Sherman Savage estimated that approximately 400 enslaved people resided in the territory in 1856.[242]

The first governing body after Kansas was open to white settlement was established in 1855 and became known as the "Bogus Legislature" due to the extensive voter fraud which occurred. John Stringfellow, founder of Atchison, Kansas, and the speaker of the house for this proslavery legislature, openly declared, "Slaves are now, and have been for years, in the Territory. I need not say to you that no lawyer, unless an Abolitionist, will pretend that any positive law is necessary to make slavery legal."[243] Slaveholders like Joseph Parks found this to be the unwritten law of the land; thus, slavery continued.

When a rival legislative body elected mostly antislavery men in 1857 and rescinded the proslavery laws of the Bogus Legislature, they failed to completely outlaw slavery.[244] Southern immigration into the Territory declined, and Northern immigration increased. However, when the Native American tribes were relocated to modern-day Oklahoma, there was no exclusion of slavery there.[245] Captain Parks adopted much of the culture of the white men with whom he associated, including William Gilliss and Thomas Johnson, and he was unwilling to surrender his chattel property.

Captain Joseph Parks, chief of the Shawnees, would not live to see the Civil War. In April 1859, he was laid to rest in the Shawnee Indian Mission cemetery. A crowd of his tribe and

[241] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 7.
[242] W. Sherman Savage, "Slavery in the West," in *African Americans on the Western Frontier*, eds. Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardaway (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 10.
[243] "Spirit of the Missourians," *The Liberator,* April 10, 1855, 1.
[244] Cheatham, "'Kansas Shall Not,'" 157.
[245] Abel, *The American Indian,* 22.

his white friends assembled two miles west of Westport, Missouri at his "neat and comfortable residence" in Kansas Territory.[246] "It was a sight not often seen," the newspaper reported. "There were blended together civilization and savage life."[247]

When an enumerator headed to the former residence of Joseph Parks in the hot summer of 1860, he found that his granddaughter, Catharine, and her husband, John T. Swatzell, had inherited the home and a portion of the land. Just a few households away, the enumerator scribbled down the names of Rhoda Jones and Allen Jones, fifty and forty years-old, living in a home with thirty-year-old Martha, sixteen-year-old Eliza, and one-year-old Elvira.[248] At first glance, it appears that Rhoda has been emancipated; however, this was far from the case.

Prior to 1861, Wyandot William Walker and other Native American leaders freed their enslaved people.[249] Captain Parks did not take this step, nor did his family. In 1859, the appraisers of his estate listed his property, including "1 negro woman, Rhoda, $100; 1 negro man, Allen, $300; 1 negro man, John, $200; 1 negro man, Sam, $1,000; 1 negro woman and children, $1,000."[250] The mistake made by the enumerator was understandable. According to the census, there were only two enslaved people living in Kansas in 1860.[251] The enumerators were not given a slave schedule to fill out, thus many enslaved people still in bondage, including Rhoda, were listed in the general population census data.

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[246] "Funeral of an Indian Chief," *Quad-City Times* (Davenport, IA)*,* April 15, 1859, 2.
[247] *Ibid.*
[248] U.S. Census Bureau, 1860 United States Census, Wyandotte County, Kansas Territory. The genealogical connection to everyone in the household is not clear; however, Martha Jones is shown to have been born in Kentucky while Eliza Jones is listed as being born in Kansas. This suggests that this is evidence of a small slaveholding household that had been intact since at least 1844, but the relationship between each member is ambiguous. The ages also are in question, as these enslaved people did not know their birthdates and likely guessed in the presence of the enumerator.
[249] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 119.
[250] "Slavery in Johnson County," *The Olathe News-Herald,* May 2, 1902, 1.
[251] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 117.

The administrators of Joseph Parks' estate returned to court in July 1862 to file an affidavit of the updated inventory of the estate:

> The woman, Rhoda, and the man, Allen, were manumitted. The negro man, Sam, ran away and affiant has no knowledge of his whereabouts, and that the man John and the women and children are by the laws of this state free, so that no property exists in them available to the estate.[252]

Although the admission of Kansas as a free state in January 1861 marked an end to Rhoda's enslavement, she was likely emancipated at some point between 1859 and 1862. She was a free woman living in a free state with the power to remove herself from the neighborhood near current-day Shawnee, Kansas where she had been for over twenty-five years. Even after manumission, she chose to stay and work for the family that once enslaved her.[253] She remained with the family until at least 1875.

Like so many of the formerly enslaved, Rhoda's full story cannot be told as the records run dry, and the trail runs cold. She outlived at least two of her former slaveholders and survived bondage for the majority of her life. Her legacy has not made it into the pages of history books, but her life can be pieced together due to the two prominent men who once held her in bondage. Rhoda Jones was born in Pennsylvania, sold in St. Louis, worked as an enslaved cook, moved to trading post, pushed to the western edge of Missouri at the future site of Kansas City, and became one of the few hundred held in bondage in Kansas Territory.

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[252] "Slavery in Johnson County," 1.
[253] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. See also Rhoda Jones deposition, *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517.
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A Small Enslaved Family: Alexis, Olive, and the Children

Slaveholders, in general, did not pay attention to the invisible borders between states, nor did they abide by the laws within them. Matilda Edgar, the once-enslaved woman who allegedly gave birth to two of Gilliss' children, lived her entire life in Illinois as an indentured servant until set free by the laws at the age of twenty-eight. Others, however, did not take into account the laws of the land. Weak laws against kidnapping made it easy for human trafficking across the border between Missouri and Illinois.[254]

The historiography has shifted over the past several decades to lend a stronger voice to minorities, including women, the enslaved, and Native people, who populated the region. These stories are limited but help tell the story of slavery on the border.[255] In the case of William Gilliss, the records which do exist help tell the story of enslavement and gives evidence of the movements of the enslaved and the relationships which existed during that time. The situation with Alexis, an indentured servant held under Illinois law, showed how the loose interpretation of the law allowed for him to be relocated and enslaved by William Gilliss.

Human trafficking occurred at the highest echelons of society, indicating that most slaveholders believed they had the right to move the enslaved wherever they saw fit, regardless of the laws in each jurisdiction. Berenice Therese Menard, Pierre Menard's daughter and known as "the Mother of Kansas City," married Francois Chouteau in Kaskaskia in 1819.[256] About 1822, the couple became permanent residents at the mouth of the Kansas River at the future site of Kansas City.[257] The arrival of William Gilliss to Jackson County, Missouri in 1831 would not

[254] M. Scott Heerman, "'Reducing Free Men to Slavery': Black Kidnapping, the 'Slave Power,' and the Politics of Abolition in Antebellum Illinois, 1830-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 2 (2018): 268.
[255] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 9-10.
[256] Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Kaskaskia, Randolph County, Illinois), "Baptisms, First Communions, Marriages, 1815-1851," 171.
[257] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 15.

have been the first time they would have met, as Gilliss was inevitably connected professionally and personally to Pierre Menard at Kaskaskia and at his trading post.

Pierre Menard purchased a healthy enslaved child, about five years old, named Aspasia from Baptiste Gindreau. Born in 1808 in Kaskaskia, she was about the same age as Berenice. Around 1821, she was put, according to court records, "into the possession of [Pierre Menard's] daughter who married Francois Chouteau."[258] The court case which followed claimed that Aspasia was brought over the state line from Illinois to Missouri where she was enslaved in St. Louis. By this time, the Chouteaus lived permanently in what would become Kansas City, but they traveled for both business and personal reasons back to St. Louis. Bringing her over the state line created an opportunity not readily available in Illinois, as Missouri courts allowed for a slave to sue for freedom.[259]

After six years of enslavement in Missouri, Aspasia sued as a poor person, claiming an action of assault and battery as well as false imprisonment. In turn, Francois Chouteau returned Aspasia back over to Pierre Menard in Kaskaskia, Illinois.[260] Because Aspasia was born after the 1787 Northwest Ordinance where slavery was outlawed, the St. Louis court found that she was entitled to her freedom.[261] Menard appealed to the Supreme Court; however, his case was dismissed in 1831.[262]

The case of Aspasia sent a clear message to slaveholders in Missouri who purchased the enslaved in Illinois with the prospect of moving them across the state line; moving indentured servants in Illinois into Missouri came with risks if one did not protect chattel property in

[258] Aspasia, a free woman of color, v. Francois Chouteau and Pierre Menard, Case No. 24, St. Louis Circuit Court (March 1828).
[259] Heerman, "'Reducing Free Men to Slavery,'" 268.
[260] *Aspasia*, Case No. 24.
[261] *Ibid.*
[262] Pierre Menard, plaintiff in error, v. Aspasia, defendant in error, 30 U.S. 505 (1831).

writing. When William Gilliss made an arrangement with Hypolite Menard, Pierre's nephew, to purchase a man named Alexis in Kaskaskia, Hypolite documented the transaction. Although the complete picture of Alexis's life in and out of enslavement is limited, the records open one's eye to the complicated nature of enslavement along both eastern and western borders of Missouri.

It remains unclear when William Gilliss purchased or hired his first enslaved person, but it remains likely that his desire for an increase in enslaved labor began when he transitioned from carpenter in Kaskaskia to a trader employed by Pierre Menard in southwest Missouri in 1820. There, Olive and her children along with her husband lived and worked under Gilliss' direction.[263] There is no mention specifically as to what Alexis did while enslaved by Gilliss. Olive's son, Lewis, was the oldest of her children and was not the son of her husband, Alexis, indicating that their relationship may have begun while enslaved by Gilliss.[264] Lewis was born "below Ste. Genevieve," so Gilliss may have purchased Olive near there.[265] Across the river from Kaskaskia in Ste. Genevieve County, located along the Mississippi River, slaves composed twenty-five percent of the population in 1820.[266]

The way in which Gilliss' enslaved people lived and worked is a prime example of the small slaveholding dynamic which made up a majority of borderland slavery that has only recently been studied. This enslaved family, headed by Olive and Alexis, was unique in some aspects; however, their futures, like those of all enslaved people, were dictated by the needs, successes and movements of their master, William Gilliss.

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[263] Joseph Philibert deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470. Olive's location along with her husband and children are also extensively mentioned in the depositions of Rhoda Jones, Lucretia Anderson, and William Booker.
[264] *Ibid.* Depositions of Lucretia Anderson and William Booker, children of Olive, indicate that Lewis was a "half-brother." This is one piece of evidence that indicates that Olive had more than one spouse resulting in children.
[265] Lewis Gilliss deposition, *Ibid.*
[266] U.S. Census Bureau, 1820 United States Census, Ste. Genevieve County, Missouri.

The records for Alexis are unique simply because of their existence. Alexis, born into slavery in 1809 in Indiana Territory, was the property of Michel Bienvenu and the son of Victoire.[267] Alexis's thirty-three-year indenture was later transferred to Hypolite Menard, Jr., Pierre Menard's nephew.[268] This indenture was transferred to William Gilliss, who moved Alexis from Kaskaskia, the only town he would have known, to the James Fork of the White River in southwest Missouri. Alexis was described as well-behaved, five feet nine inches tall, of dark skin tone and fluent in French.[269]

Laws in Illinois did not prohibit the transfer of one "indenture" to another owner; thus, indentured contracts were often transferred between slaveholders over time. However, removing an indentured servant across the state line to Missouri was risky, as with the case of Aspasia. Pierre Menard certainly warned Gilliss of the risks of doing so after his failure to keep Aspasia enslaved, and Menard helped secure the arrangement of the purchase of Alexis.[270] In order to make this legal, Alexis was interviewed by the courts and accepted the transfer.[271]

Gilliss' need for Alexis could be twofold. For one, his trading post required extensive labor as goods were received from Kaskaskia. Secondly, he held an enslaved woman in childbearing years who had a least one son named Lewis. Although most small-scale slaveholders had little influence over the romantic matches of the enslaved, the sheer remoteness of southwest Missouri in the 1820s left few options for Rhoda, Matilda, and Olive.[272]

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[267] Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (Kaskaskia, Randolph County, Illinois), "Baptisms, Marriages, Deaths 1759-1815," 267.
[268] Record Book T, 1842-1843, Office of the County Clerk, Randolph County, Illinois, 371.
[269] *Ibid.*
[270] William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, January 1, 1841, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 427, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[271] Darrell Dexter, *Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois* (Cape Girardeau: Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2011), 68.
[272] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 203.

When Gilliss' trade partners relocated west, he was steps behind them. In spring 1831, Gilliss moved with his enslaved people to Jackson County, Missouri. The area blended various groups of people, including Northerners, Southerners, Native Americans, and the enslaved.[273] The marriage between Alexis and Olive began at the James Fork trading post, and they had three children who moved with them to Jackson County: Lewis, Jane, and Alexander.[274] Olive had two more children with Alexis named Lizzie and Victoria before Rhoda was sold to Captain Parks around 1834 (See Figure 6).[275]

After relocating to Jackson County, Gilliss' small slave household was typical of the region at the time, as white settlers hailing from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee arrived. Just shy of 3,000 people lived in Jackson County by 1830, and sixty households included 193 slaves.[276] His personal household changed from living with other traders and his clerks to living with family members who arrived from his home state of Maryland.[277]

Just as was the case with Rhoda, William Gilliss' niece, Mary Ann, had influence over the affairs of this family. John McCoy recalled, "[Mary Ann] was about twenty [in 1833]. She is a woman of energetic character- strong mind and a comely person. I regard her as having a high temper- she is as shrewd as anybody."[278] Absent a traditional wife, Gilliss utilized Mary Ann in

[273] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 9.
[274] Lewis Gilliss deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470. Joseph Philibert's deposition also claimed that when they moved, Olive had a child, "John or Wash or John Washington, perhaps six months old." There is no further mention of this child, so he likely died. Lewis was a half-brother and not the biological son of Alexis.
[275] Rhoda Jones deposition, *Ibid.*
[276] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 30.
[277] Depositions indicate that Sylvester Saucier and Joseph Philibert lived for a time at Gilliss' cabin on Turkey Creek. Shortly after they left, Mary Ann, her husband, and Louisa James, Gilliss' aunt, moved from Maryland to Missouri. The 1840 census indicates by this time, Mary Ann, Louisa James, and Mary Ann's brother, Joseph Barkley, were living in the household.
[278] John McCoy deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470.

the role as mistress of the house. As William turned to buying land and later town building, he turned to Mary Ann to run the daily operations of the home.

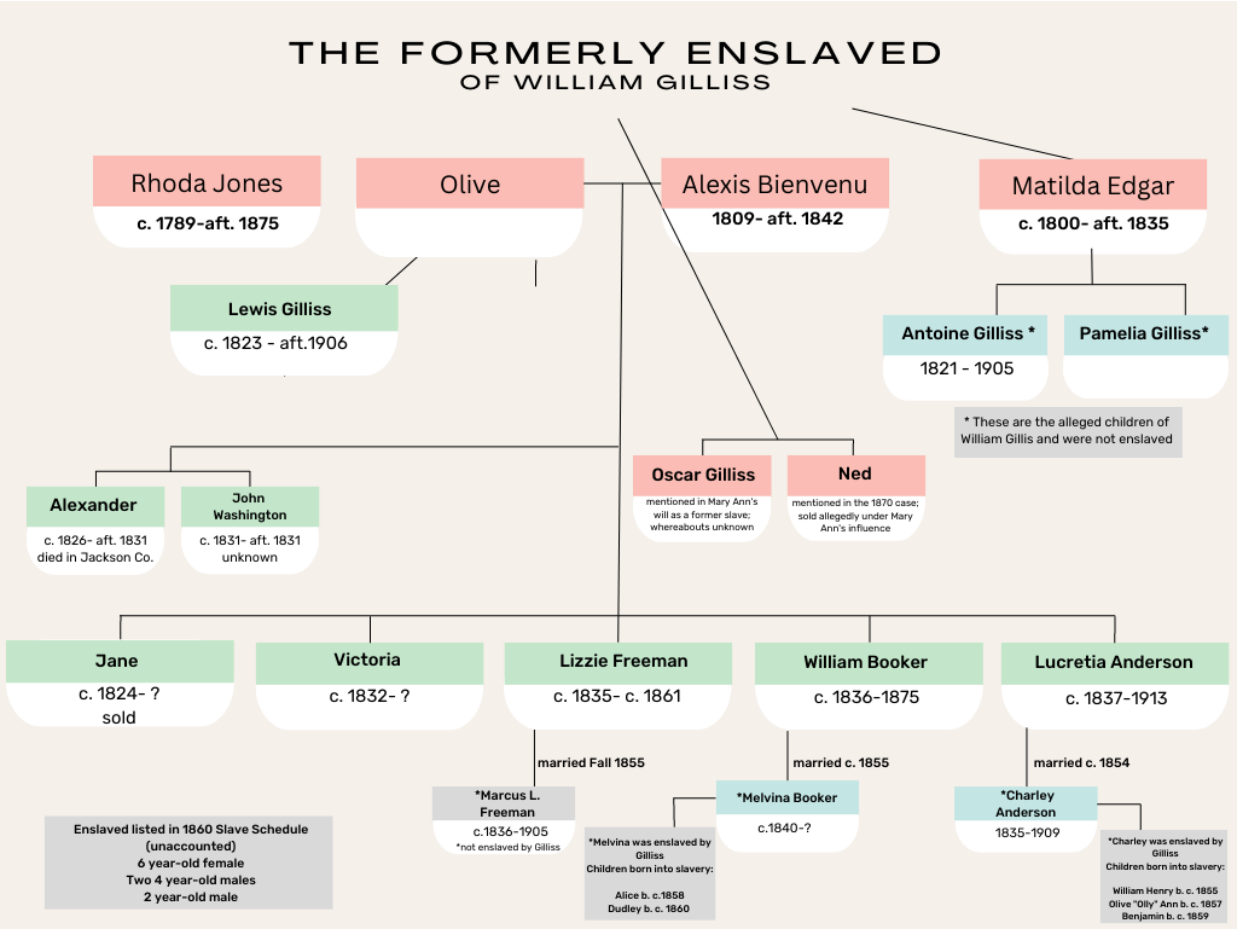

Figure 6. The Formerly Enslaved Laborers of William Gilliss by family group. By Author.

The depositions of Gilliss' formerly enslaved offer an interesting microstudy of a small slaveholding household; however, these depositions, like the WPA Slave Narratives, are flawed with the biases of the whites which controlled the line of questioning. When Mary Gilliss Rogers and Sophia Gilliss sued the estate administered by Mary Ann Troost in 1870, the plaintiff's lawyers asked questions designed to attack Mary Ann's character. The crux of the case was that the daughters claimed "the said William Gilliss was under improper restraint and under influences

from the said practices, enticements and allurements of the defendant, Mary A. Troost."[279] Hence, the questions asked to the formerly enslaved revolved around the relationship between Mary Ann and her uncle and not directly around the events which the enslaved found to be of importance. For example, when the lawyers questioned William Booker, one of Olive and Alexis's children, they wanted to establish a time period for when events happened; however, Booker was unaware of his age and could not establish a timeline much to the lawyer's chagrin. After a series of questions of the year he first made the acquaintance of Mary Ann, Booker finally declared, "I don't know, sir; I have no idea. All I cared about was a little something to eat and time to rest."[280]

The small slaveholding household was directed, according to the formerly enslaved and others intimate with the Gilliss residence, by Mary Ann. Some slaveholders recognized parent-child relationships even as they treated the enslaved as property.[281] In the case of the Gilliss household, Olive assisted Mary Ann in the household affairs as she raised her son, William, and her daughters, Jane, Lizzie, Victoria, and Lucretia. Alexis, along with Olive's son, Lewis, assisted on the Gilliss landholdings on Turkey Creek.[282] Olive's family, for the most part, remained intact for many years. These enslaved women served as domestic servants within the household where gender conventions were generally adhered to.[283] The spread of slavery grew as white settlement moved in along the border, as the population of slaves in Missouri more than

[279] *Rogers* 51 MO 470.
[280] William Booker deposition, *Ibid*.
[281] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 59.
[282] U.S. Census Bureau, 1840 United States Census, Jackson County, Missouri. Gilliss listed nine slaves: one male 25-35 (Alexis); one male 10-23 (Lewis); one male under ten (William); one female 36-54 (Olive); and three females under ten (Lizzie, Victoria and Lucretia). Missing in this census is Jane, Olive's oldest daughter. Her absence could be simply due to Gilliss hiring her out. He was known to do this with all of his slaves.
[283] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 53.

doubled between 1830 and 1840.[284] In Jackson County, a large increase in the slave population in 1840 led to the highest combined wealth in the entire state a decade later.[285]

Mary Ann's role within the Gilliss household on Turkey Creek gave her tremendous power over the enslaved. The gender conventions of the time called for women of social standing to be docile, unassuming creatures who, as mistresses, were able to operate within a system which gave them control. William Booker claimed Mary Ann had "an awful cross temper," and when angry at her uncle, she "could make him do just what she wanted done."[286] Lucretia explained that Mary Ann "controlled the servants. . . [William Gilliss] did as she told him. She used all the influence over him that she could. She ruled him altogether as though he were her husband."[287] The formerly enslaved, on the other hand, spoke highly of Gilliss, stating he was a kind to them.[288]

The displeasure which the enslaved felt toward Mary Ann may constitute the reason that Alexis, the thirty-one-year-old indentured servant and father of at least four of Gilliss' enslaved children, sought out a new contract with newly-widowed Berenice Menard Chouteau. Before the death of her husband, the Chouteaus purchased large tracts of land in the East Bottoms and began cultivating it.[289] Much like William Gilliss, Berenice relied upon slavery for business, agricultural, and personal needs.[290] She wrote her father, stating that "Alexi" was looking for a

[284] Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri," 29.
[285] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 46.
[286] William Booker deposition, *Rogers* 51 MO 470.
[287] Lucretia Anderson deposition, *Ibid.*
[288] *Ibid.*
[289] Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 77-78.
[290] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 21.

new master. “I wish very much to have this black man because he is very good and I do not have enough men for my farm to make any progress,” Berenice complained.[291]

Berenice’s mention of Alexis in her letters shows that she was well aware of the arrangement her cousin, Hypolite, had with Gilliss, but she seemed naïve of the contractual obligations the law of Illinois outlined for indentured servitude. Certainly, employing a strong, well-behaved slave who could speak her native French was appealing, especially with the shortage of laborers at the time. Just as quickly as Berenice requested her father talk to her cousin so she could “get” Alexis, she wrote to her father:

> Alexi has left from Mr. Gilliss the 13th of the present month. About Alexi – I will not go out of my way for him any more. I desire that Polite tells me what he is asking. If the price is agreeable to me, I will keep him. I think Mr. Gilliss has given him a time, that he should serve but two years.[292]

Where Alexis went is unclear, but the letter itself demonstrates that Gilliss understood the contractual agreement made to release Alexis from service, and this date coincides to Alexis’s thirty-third birthday when he would, by law, be freed. In addition, the letter indicates that, in some regard, Alexis felt in control of his future employment. Even though Jackson County’s population at the time was steadily growing, there was a shortage of labor and Alexis likely wanted to ensure he stayed near his children no matter how volatile the situation was at Gilliss’ homestead.

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[291] Berenice Chouteau to Pierre Menard, May 9, 1840, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 1065, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri. See also Dorothy Brandt Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 175-76. William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, January 1, 1841, in the *Pierre Menard Collection,* Letter 427, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.

[292] Berenice Chouteau to Pierre Menard, August 23, 1840, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 1099, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri. See also Dorothy Brandt Marra, *Cher Oncle, Cher Papa,* 177.

Less than six months later, Gilliss wrote Pierre Menard, asking for "the bill of sale for the boy Alexis. . . It is necessary that I should have it."[293] Perhaps he needed the bill in order to hire out Alexis, but the bill of sale would not allow for him to sell him legally as a "slave for life." The gradual emancipation statutes in Illinois left most African Americans in situations that blurred the boundary between slavery and freedom, and Alexis was no exception.[294] Regardless of his intentions, he did follow through with the terms of the contract when he arrived at the courthouse in Jackson County on May 3, 1842 and put pen to paper, declaring Alexis was discharged from servitude and "set said negro as perfect liberty as if he had been born free."[295] Three months later, Hypolite Menard, Jr. formally confirmed the end to Alexis's indentured servitude in Illinois by making it public record in the courts.[296]

The trail of Alexis ceases after his emancipation, an unsettling reminder of the hard realities when tracing the genealogies of African Americans. Alexis was an anomaly on the border, one of the earliest freedmen who walked the land after being held in bondage in two states. Just eight years later in the 1850 Census, only thirty-eight people of color in Jackson County were free, whereas 2,969 remained in servitude, including Alexis and Olive's children.[297]

After Gilliss successfully sold his interest in the Union Hotel for $10,000, he used the money to continue building an impressive mansion on his landholdings near Turkey Creek.[298] Construction on a portion of the home may have begun as early as 1842, but the mansion that was recalled in the memories of those who visited there did not come to fruition until the mid

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[293] William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, January 1, 1841, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 427, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.
[294] Heerman, "In a State of Slavery," 116.
[295] Jackson County Recorder of Deeds, Jackson County, Missouri, Book 8, 310 (1842).
[296] Record Book T, 1842-1843, Office of the County Clerk, Randolph County, Illinois, 371.
[297] U.S. Census Bureau, 1850 United States Census, Jackson County, Missouri.
[298] John Adams, Lucretia Anderson, William Booker and Mark Freeman depositions, *Rogers* 51 MO 470.

1850s.[299] The home, coined "Woodlawn" by Gilliss and referred to as "the stone house" by the enslaved, was one place where he spared no expense. Styled after a southern plantation house, Woodlawn's design included brick covered in sandstone plaster that looked like marble when it rained. The second story windows were adorned with stained glass.[300] The rear ell, perhaps the first edition of the home, included a gallery on the first and second floors. Little cabins for the enslaved were nearby.[301] Mary Ann, an exceptional gardener, beautified the yard, known as the nicest in the country (See Figure 7). [302]

Figure 7. "Front of Gillis Home 2727 Holly St. in 1909." This is only photograph known to exist of William Gilliss' home and was taken shortly before it was torn down. Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.

[299] "'Finest House in Town,'" *Kansas City Star,* September 1, 1907, 16. The date of the construction of the home is not clear, but the construction on a large portion, likely adding a front addition to the previously existing structure (then converted into the ell) about 1854. Construction continued for many years.
[300] *Ibid.* See also "On the Old Gilliss Farm, its 611 Acres Assembled for $1,310, William Gilliss, Adventurer, Settled into the Life of a Country Gentlemen and Played His Part in the Village Affairs of Early Kansas City," *The Kansas City Star,* January 31, 1925, 1.
[301] "A Mansion in the Olden Days," *Kansas City Times,* February 15, 1913, 11.
[302] John Adams deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.

The interior was roomy enough to have frequent long-term guests; laborers including John Adams, a carpenter, stayed on the premises as work continued on Woodlawn from 1856 to 1859.[303] The house was built to be impressive with materials brought from St. Louis, a three-story black walnut winding staircase carved in a serpentine design, five-feet wide fireplaces and ten well-furnished rooms for Gilliss, Louisa James, Dr. Troost and Mary Ann.[304] Mary Virginia Jarboe arrived in Kansas City in 1862 and recalled the grandeur of the home. "[William Gilliss] wanted to own the finest house in the district, and he did," she recalled.[305] While most of the servants stayed in the cabins nearby, some of the servants, including Lucretia, would stay in the "big house" with her sister, Jane, in the room Louisa James occupied.[306]

Olive's children, "raised by William Gilliss," were of the age of marriage by the time they located back at Woodlawn at current-day 27th and Holly Street in about 1853.[307] Lewis, the oldest, married an enslaved woman who lived on the Blue River, and Lucretia married a man named Charley Anderson who by that time was purchased by Gilliss.[308] Lewis, then a young man in a small slaveholding household, had to look abroad for a marriage. The study of slave mobility within the household is more recent. Lewis's abroad marriage, defined as marriages where partners resided in different households, is a prime example of these challenges the enslaved faced.[309]

As the enslaved held by William Gilliss became young adults, the need to look outside of his small slaveholding household for partners was necessary, as this was the case in all small-

[303] John Adams deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[304] "A Mansion in the Olden Days," *Kansas City Times,* February 15, 1913, 11. See also "'Finest House in Town," *Kansas City Star,* September 1, 1907, 16.
[305] "Finest House in Town," 16.
[306] Lucretia Anderson deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[307] *Ibid.*
[308] Lewis Gilliss and Lucretia Anderson depositions, *Ibid.*
[309] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 2.

slaveholding households. Mark Freeman arrived in Jackson County from Shelby County, Kentucky, with his mother, sister, and his slaveholder, Thomas Bayne, in 1852, right as William Gilliss began to look for a new purchaser of the Union Hotel.[310] Thomas Bayne took a job running the hotel. There, Mark learned to cook.[311] He also met Lizzie, the Gilliss' enslaved house servant there.[312] In the spring of 1855, Mark's slaveholder, Thomas Bayne, relocated with his enslaved to Jefferson County, Kansas Territory. "I stayed for a few months, and then with his permission went back to Kansas City and married and rented my time for $200 a year for seven years until I was emancipated," Mark later explained.[313] The small number of the enslaved within Gilliss' household forced men and women to look abroad for partners. Couples such as Lizzie and Mark found ways to stay connected despite separate living conditions.[314] Some situations, like Mark's, allowed for the enslaved to hire out their own time and choose for whom they would work.[315] The same was true of Henry Bruce. In 1855, he was hired out to a large tobacco factory in Missouri and told his slaveholder he did not want to go because he "had heard [the factory manager] was a hard man to please."[316] Although he was still sent to the factory, he received fair treatment due to the insistence of his slaveholder.[317] This slave mobility was important to the system in place, and it gave more freedom to the enslaved as they traveled from

[310] Marcus Lindsay Freeman, "Marcus Lindsay Freeman, Reminiscence of a Former Slave," in Slaves and Slavery Collection, c. 1895, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
[311] Freeman, "Marcus Lindsay Freeman."
[312] Mark Freeman deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. Interestingly, Mark never states his first wife's name in the court case, but the approximate birthdate of Lizzie makes her the most likely candidate. There is a chance that Victoria was his spouse, but the mention of her was minimal.
[313] Freeman, "Marcus Lindsay Freeman." See also Mark Freeman deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. Mark stated that he married in the fall of 1855 when Gilliss lived at Woodlawn.
[314] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 200-201.
[315] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 105.
[316] Henry C. Bruce, *The New Man: Twenty-Nine years a Slave, Twenty-Nine years a Free Man: Recollections of H.C. Bruce,* (York: A.G. Brown, 1880), 70.
[317] *Ibid.,* 71.

one place to another. Mark would visit his wife about twice a week while hired out. A portion of his income until emancipation went to his slaveholder.[318]

Marriages outside of the home gave the enslaved some aspects of freedom as men traveled to visit their wives and children; however, abroad families were also more likely to be separated through hiring, sales, and divisions in property.[319] This, unfortunately, was the case for several of the enslaved that spent decades serving William Gilliss and his niece. Between 1850 and 1860, sixty-two percent of the slave population in Missouri resided on the Missouri River and western border counties.[320] By the late 1850s, there was a decrease in the number of slaves in Jackson County due to the clash of proslavery parties and antislavery settlers; this made many slaveholders sell their slaves, and many enslaved chose to take their first opportunity to escape to freedom.[321] The tensions on the border and Mary Ann's influence motivated William Gilliss to split this small family apart. Mary Ann "took charge of the whole place and had her way about it, and when she said to sell a servant, it had to go," William Booker declared. "She had my sister Jane and brother Lewis and mother sold while I was there."[322] The financial benefit coupled with the age and condition of the enslaved may have dictated the decisions made in the Gilliss household. When Gilliss focused on the construction of his home, it was necessary to keep the young males in his custody.

There was one exception to this: the sale of Lewis, Olive's oldest son. In 1857, after about thirty years of enslavement under Gilliss, Lewis was sold to a man who took him South.[323]

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[318] Mark Freeman deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[319] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 216.
[320] Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri," 29.
[321] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 120.
[322] William Booker deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[323] Lewis Gilliss deposition, *Ibid.* The birth of Lewis's son, Lee, in about 1863 in Mississippi suggests this was his destination after sold.

Slave traders on the border had connections with firms in southern cities such as New Orleans, making the threat of being "sold South" a possibility.[324] Lewis's conjecture was that Mary Ann was not comfortable with an abroad marriage where he traveled to the Blue River to see his wife. Even with a distance between them of about five miles, Lewis tried to visit his wife two or three days a week. Lewis explained, "I asked Mr. Gilliss to buy me a pony. He gave me ten dollars. He was then persuaded I was going to run off."[325] Owners, in general, accepted abroad marriages because it would increase slaveholdings through the birth of children.[326] Lewis, however, married outside of Gilliss' household, so any children born to his wife would be in the possession of her slaveholder. By 1860, his slave holdings reached its highest at fourteen enslaved men, women and children.[327] Dr. Troost died at Woodlawn in 1859, so it was probable that the increased number was also the result of a transfer of some of the enslaved from Troost to Gilliss.

Tensions along the border between western Missouri and Kansas Territory heightened as more antislavery settlers moved to the area. In order to build a town, early investors reliant upon enslaved labor had to put aside their differences with eastern capitalists in order to ensure business transactions took place. Eastern investors such as Kersey Coates, an agent for the Philadelphia Emigrant Aid Society, arrived on the levee with his wife in 1856.[328] Despite their

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[324] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 62.
[325] Lewis Gilliss deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[326] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 202.
[327] U.S. Census Bureau, 1860 United States Census, Slave Schedules, Jackson County, Missouri. The census indicates that Gilliss had three families and their children. Three males under thirty and three females in their twenties are present along with eight children ranging from six years old to one year old. Adults include Charley Anderson (25), William Booker (25), Lucretia Anderson (23) and Melvina Booker (20). Four of the eight children can be accounted as part of these family units. The other adult male, adult female and four children listed are unknown. The male could be Oscar Gilliss, mentioned in Mary Ann's will.
[328] Theodore S. Case, "Biographical Sketch of Kersey Coates" in *In Memoriam: Sarah Walter Chandler Coates, Published as a Loving Tribute by Her Children, Laura Coates Reed, John Lindley Coates, Arthur Chandler Coates.* (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1898), 40.

polarized viewpoints on slavery, Gilliss and Coates formed a partnership on the eve of the Civil War when the population of the city reached 4,418.[329]

The Trail to the Free State of Kansas

Kansas City as a whole sided with the Union during the Civil War, and just forty miles away was a sympathetic town - Lawrence, Kansas - willing to take in the enslaved. Lawrence was a station on the Underground Railroad, and the sympathetic community was open to aiding escaped slaves.[330] Options for slaveholders in western Missouri such as William Gilliss were limited. Some chose to try to preserve their chattel by removing to Texas. Others chose voluntary manumission and others, including William Gilliss, chose to stay in Missouri, determined to keep their enslaved property. However, Gilliss was forced to surrender his enslaved people when a band of Jayhawkers approached his home in 1861.[331] Between 1860 and 1863, Missouri's Black population decreased by 41,000 due to Union occupation during the Civil War; the majority of those settling in Kansas during this period were from Missouri.[332] A Protestant minister and resident of Lawrence wrote, "For a time it seemed as if [freedmen] would overwhelm us with their numbers and their needs. But they were strong and industrious, and by little effort work was found for them, and very few, if any of them, became objects of charity."[333] Hundreds of those seeking freedom, including Gilliss' formerly enslaved, chose

[329] Theodore A. Brown, *Frontier Community: Kansas City to 1870* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), 130.
[330] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 140.
[331] Detailed information regarding Gilliss' experience with jayhawkers is provided in the next chapter.
[332] Katie H. Armitage, "'Seeking a Home Where He Himself is Free:' African Americans Build a Community in Douglas County, Kansas" *Kansas History* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 159.
[333] Richard Cordley, *Pioneer Days in Kansas,* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1903), 138.

Lawrence as their adopted home. By 1865, there were over 2,000 African Americans in Lawrence.[334]

Mark Freeman remembered when the tides were turning and war was on the horizon. He was hired out the majority of his time in western Missouri, and for a portion of his time, he was employed by Dr. Johnston Lykins, a former Baptist missionary-turned mayor and promoter of Kansas City.[335] He also worked for Robert Van Horn, editor of the newspaper. He recollected, **"**I was working in the printing office for Van Horn and [Abeel] on the *Kansas City Journal* at the time of the firing on Sumter, and worked the press when they were getting the extras for the occasion. I remember the excitement well."[336] In about 1862, Mark headed to Lawrence, Kansas with many other Black refugees. Mark immediately landed a job as head cook at the Eldridge Hotel in Lawrence, and after the loss of his wife, Gilliss' formerly enslaved house servant, he married Mary Ann Jones at the hotel in 1863.[337] When William Clarke Quantrill raided Lawrence on August 21, 1863 and murdered 170 men and boys, as many as twenty African Americans were killed; the Eldridge Hotel was a target.[338] Mark survived the raid, and according to local newspapers, became one of the "distinguished colored men" of the community, working for over twenty years at the hotel as a "well-known cook" and helping launch the first African-American band in the city.[339]

An abroad marriage of Gilliss' enslaved woman, Lucretia, to Charley Anderson continued well past the confines of slavery. Charley and Lucretia Anderson arrived in Lawrence

[334] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 167.
[335] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 132.
[336] Marcus Lindsay Freeman, "Marcus Lindsay Freeman, Reminiscence of a Former Slave."
[337] "Mary Ann Freeman," *The Topeka Plaindealer,* December 14, 1900, 3.
[338] Armitage, "'Seeking a Home," 156.
[339] "Colored Band," *Lawrence Daily Journal,* October 1, 1870, 3; "Thanksgiving Dinner," *The Kansas Spirit* (Lawrence, KS)*,* November 30, 1872, 5; "A Brilliant Affair," *Topeka State Journal,* February 14, 1889, 1.

on October 20, 1861 and settled in the southern portion of the city with their three children, William Henry, Olive, and Ben.[340] After working for some time as a porter and driver, Charley opened a grocery store in Lawrence – the first ever opened by an African American.[341] Charley was one of the "best and most worthy colored citizens" in Lawrence and was elected in 1870 to serve as a delegate for the Republican party.[342] The couple was survived by seven daughters and six sons.[343]

William and Melvina Booker along with their children, Alice and Dudley, followed his sister and brother-in-law to Lawrence where they settled in North Lawrence.[344] Melvina gave birth to four children in Lawrence, appropriately giving the middle name "Freeman" to a son born after emancipation.[345] In 1875, William Booker died in Topeka, and when Melvina went to claim his body, she found another woman named Maria at the mortuary. William Booker lived two lives – one in Lawrence with his wife and six children – and one with Maria in Topeka with a young daughter named Lillie.[346]

One of Gilliss' enslaved returned to Kansas City. Lewis Gilliss was sold South by William Gilliss in 1857 after asking for a pony to help him more easily travel to his wife.[347] He, along with his mother, took the steamboat *David Tatum* to their new home. "I went South with my mammy," Lewis later told the *Kansas City Star.* "When we passed Ste. Genevieve, my

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[340] Charles S. Gleed, *Kansas Memorial, A Report of the Old Settlers' Meeting Held at Bismarck Grove, Kansas, September 15th and 16th, 1879* (Kansas City: Ramsey, Millett & Hudson, 1880), 211; Lucretia Anderson deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[341] "Obituary – Charley Anderson," *Lawrence Daily World,* May 24, 1909, 1.
[342] "Boy Drowned," *Lawrence Daily Journal,* July 10, 1869, 3; "City Republican Convention," *Lawrence Daily Journal,* March 29, 1870, 3.
[343] "Death of Lucretia Anderson," *Jeffersonian Gazette* (Lawrence, KS), June 25, 1913, 8; "Obituary – Charley Anderson."
[344] 1865 Kansas State Census, Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas, *Ancestry.com.*
[345] *Ibid.*
[346] "Mr. William Booker," *The Daily Commonwealth* (Topeka, KS), August 7. 1875, 4; U.S. Census Bureau, 1870 United States Census, Shawnee County, Kansas.
[347] Lewis Gilliss deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.

mammy showed me the cabin where I was born and an ole field where she worked."[348] He claimed he and his mother, Olive, worked on Allan Davis' plantation above Natchez, Mississippi until the close of the war.[349]

Lewis returned to Kansas City in 1866 with a wife named Fannie and a two-year-old son, born in Mississippi, named Lee, and an encounter with his former slaveholder helped land him on his feet. Lewis stated his mother, Olive, returned to Jackson County with him, but records indicating her fate are lost.[350] A year later, Lewis crossed paths with his old master on the streets of Kansas City. Perhaps due to a guilty conscience, William Gilliss gave Lewis a town lot in East Kansas, a subdivision platted by a handful of town founders in the current-day neighborhood of Columbus Park.[351] Lewis worked as a porter, expressman, and teamster in Kansas City while living at Fifth and Campbell.

Lewis Gilliss was not forgotten by Mary Ann Troost. She sat down with a group of lawyers to execute a last will and testament months before her death in 1872, and the five-page document outlined every detail of her estate - a lesson undoubtedly learned after the battle over her uncle's finances two years prior. Item Fifteenth read:

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[348] "Another Son of Gilliss," *Kansas City Star,* January 24, 1896, 2.
[349] *Ibid.* See also U.S. Census Bureau, 1860 United States Census, Slave Schedules, Adams County, Mississippi. A man listed as "Allen Davis" is present in Adams County, the location of Natchez, with 105 enslaved people.
[350] U.S. Census Bureau, 1870 United States Census, Jackson County, Missouri. There is no indication of Black woman named Olive or Olivia living in Jackson County, Missouri or in Kansas in 1870, but Lewis told the *Kansas City Star* in 1896 that his mother returned with him from Mississippi back to Kansas City.
[351] Jackson County Recorder of Deeds, Jackson County, Missouri, Book 50, 343 (1867); Jackson County Plat Book, "East Kansas," Jackson County, Missouri, Book 1, 120. The subdivision ran from First Street south to Independence Avenue and stretched from William Street (now Holmes) to Gillis Street. A street named Mary Ann was included but later renamed Harrison Street. Lewis claimed in his deposition that Gilliss gave him a lot, but the deed records show Gilliss sold it to him for $400. It is more likely that Gilliss gave him the lot, as Lewis did not have this type of capital.

> I give and devise to Louis Gillis who is a negro man and was the slave of my uncle William Gillis Lot Two (2) in Block Seventy-One (71) in said East Kansas and to Oscar Gillis who was also a slave of my uncle and who is a mulatto I give and devise Lot One (1) in block Seventy-One (71) in said East Kansas an addition in the City of Kansas.[352]

Mary Ann Troost was present at the courthouse when Lewis Gilliss gave his testimony just two years earlier. While the other formerly enslaved claimed there was an improper relationship between William Gilliss and Mary Ann, Lewis testified that he never saw anything of concern.[353] Her gift of a lot gave Lewis two town lots side-by-side in a small African American community.

Bonds within the community of the enslaved gave them the strength to overcome the separation from their families and the daily struggles of their lives.[354] After losing his son and his wife, Lewis stayed in the neighborhood and at one time lived on Gillis Street.[355] He did not have any family living nearby, but he formed his own network of African Americans in Kansas City who took care of him in his advanced age.

Slavery in Memory

Some slaveholders did treat their slaves well, and the formerly enslaved of Gilliss remembered their treatment by him as positive; however, this sentiment was exhibited in trials where white men directed the line of questions. Mark Freeman recalled that his slaveholder, Thomas Bayne, treated him kindly. When African Americans fled to Kansas during the Civil War, hundreds took the path up the Kansas River on their way to Lawrence, indicating that most of the

[352] Jackson County Wills, Jackson County, Missouri, Volume A 1869-1886, 18 (1872). No further records or mentions of Oscar Gillis could be located.
[353] Lewis Gilliss deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[354] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 70.
[355] U.S. Census Bureau, 1900 United States Census, Jackson County, Missouri. Only one "s" in "Gillis Street" was legally signed, as many Kansas Citians mistakenly spelled his name incorrectly.

enslaved took the first opportunity they could for freedom. "They were destitute," Mark Freeman recalled. "Mr. Bayne assisted them in many ways. He invited them to come out to his woodland and carry all the wood they needed for fuel, free of cost."[356]

Thomas Bayne may have been kind to these refugees, but he was not better than the racial prejudices of the era. When he recalled his memories of slaves in Kansas in 1895, he was not apologetic of holding humans in bondage:

> I am not ashamed having owned slaves of course we knew that we had a great responsibility on our hand but was willing to meet it. . . It was not of great profit but was rather convenient to have your own labour but it is no use to write on this subject – the Northern people don't know understand what slavery was and never will.[357]

Thomas Bayne offered no remorse thirty years after the Civil War, and most descriptions of the enslaved in the Kansas City newspapers and recollections show little remorse for the institution itself. In many cases, it was romanticized post-war as part of the imagery of the "Lost Cause," which shifted blame of the Civil War from slavery to states' rights and reinforced racial segregation.[358] Although it will never be known, this rationalization was likely the same perspective for William Gilliss and Mary Ann Troost. Even if they showed empathy before or after emancipation, it did not erase their decades of enslavement. He, along with all slaveholders, had the chance to manumit enslaved property before and during the war, yet chose not to do so. To William Gilliss, the financial loss was too great.

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[356] Freeman, "Marcus Lindsay Freeman."
[357] Thomas Bayne to Zu Adams, Slaves and Slavery Collection, September 11, 1895, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka Kansas.
[358] Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border,* 2.

The historiography has shifted over the past several decades to lend a clearer voice to women, slaves, and Native people who populated the western border.[359] Primary source documentation providing a clear voice of African Americans is limited, and the depositions discovered in court cases over William Gilliss' estate provide a significant understanding of the small slaveholding household which relied upon mobility, abroad marriages, and slave hiring. Through their testimonies, the formerly enslaved, prominent Kansas Citians, former traders, and Native Americans recalled events within William's household and business dealings nearly forgotten from the historical record.

Historian Lynn Morrow first examined the court cases and focused mainly on Gilliss' role as a trader in southwest Missouri and his relocation to Jackson County, Missouri. A reexamination of these cases and the testimonies show that those resettling in a new, unfamiliar location on the western border relied upon their relationships from the past to guide their future. William Gilliss directly influenced and depended upon relationships with Native American tribes, enslaved people, and his extended family in his adult life. Gilliss' time in Illinois validated the power of involuntary servitude, and his move to Missouri where slavery was "legal" and largely supported further strengthened his belief that his own self-advancement entitled him to enslave a family and dispossess others within the same familial unit.

[359] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery,* 9-10.

"A MAN OF NOTORIOUS DISLOYAL SYMPATHIES AND OF GREAT WEALTH:" RUMBLINGS OF WAR AND THE GROWTH OF KANSAS CITY

In just over twenty years of living in Jackson County, Missouri, William Gilliss participated in removing Native Americans to Kansas Territory, purchased over one thousand acres of land with wealth amassed in part from his enslavement of more than a dozen people, invested in a fledgling Town Company, and prospered as the town grew from fewer than three-hundred to over 2,500 people by 1852.[360] When the town was incorporated as the "City of Kansas" in 1853, both William Gilliss and Dr. Benoist Troost were listed as trustees until the state legislature granted a charter February 22, 1853.[361] His involvement in the growth and development of the city was integral as he used his wealth accumulated as a trader in southwest Missouri to carve a permanent home for himself and his extended family.

The future of the town was unknown, but the location of Kansas City made it promising. The first elections for mayor and six city councilmen commenced, and William Gilliss' nephew, William Barkley, was elected as one of the council members. William S. Gregory became the city's first mayor.[362] To mark the occasion of the incorporation of the city, Senator Thomas Hart Benton was invited to the town to give an address. On May 4, 1853, the mayor and others, including William Barkley, met the senator on his boat and escorted him to the city's finest (and

[360] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 507.
[361] *Missouri Session Laws, 1842, 1853, First and Second Sessions* (Jefferson City: James Lusk Printers, 1853), 244.
[362] Milton J. Payne, "Early Municipal Government of the City of Kansas," in *Encyclopedia of the History of Missouri, Volume 1,* ed. Howard L. Conard (New York: Haldeman, Conard & Co., 1901), 617. Gregory was only mayor of Kansas City for a few months, as it was discovered that he lived outside the city limits. Living within city limits was established by charter, and ironically, Gregory helped write it.

only) hotel where William Gilliss was waiting.[363] Overlooking the bluffs, surveying the hills jutting out from behind the levee, Senator Benton predicted:

> Here, gentleman, where the rocky bluff meets and turns aside the sweeping current of this mighty river; here, where the Missouri, after running its southward course for nearly 2,000 miles, turns eastward to the Mississippi, a large commercial and manufacturing community will congregate, and less than a generation will see a great city on these hills.[364]

This early prediction would come true.

Just over one year later, the Kansas-Nebraska Act would bring business to Kansas City as settlers moving west into Kansas Territory used the levee as a jumping-off point. Even though many of these settlers were against slavery, economic interests joined men on both sides - proslavery and free - to work with each other for the sake of commercial growth.[365] The town was founded by men, who, for the most part, relied upon enslaved labor, and the majority of the town in 1854 was composed of people who accepted enslavement as a right. These men also were keenly aware that in order for their riverfront town to survive and thrive, they must soften their political viewpoints and cater to everyone who landed in their city on their way to settlement in the hinterland.

For men like William Gilliss, this plan worked for several years. But neutrality could not continue as violence heightened through the Civil War. Little scholarship notes the neutrality Kansas City tried to maintain during the 1850s, and only recently have historians grappled with this complicated topic. As Jeremy Neely points out, scholars tend to pay attention to the Border

[363] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 508.
[364] Payne, "Early Municipal Government," 617.
[365] Jeremy Neely, "'The Original and Genuine Kansas:' Robert Van Horn, Kansas City, and Civic Rivalry in the Civil War Era," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 44 no. 3 (Autumn 2021): 168.

Wars along the Missouri-Kansas line and less about the battle for business between these border towns.[366] Gilliss, like so many other proslavery men of Kansas City, did not escape this period unscathed and certainly suffered property and financial loss. His story during this period involves the use of martial law by General Thomas Ewing who hoped to suppress the guerrilla warfare along the border. Unlike many others banished from their homes, Gilliss recovered financially, and his return to Kansas City continued his town-building enterprises and solidified his legacy as one of Kansas City's richest men.

Business Neutrality in Midst of Bleeding Kansas

As Kansas City grew as a jumping-off point for trade and travel, leading businessmen saw the need for a weekly newspaper in order to communicate their interests and placement within western expansion. In the summer of 1854, William Gilliss, Benoist Troost, Milton J. Payne, Milt McGee, Robert Campbell, and others gathered at Gilliss' hotel to organize stock in the company. Equipment was purchased, and by September 1854, the weekly newspaper known as the *Kansas City Enterprise* commenced business with investment of the founders of $1,000.[367]

The newspaper appeared at a critical junction in the city's history. Kansas Territory opened to legal settlement after the Kansas-Nebraska Act was enacted in May 1854, and just four months later, Gilliss sold Kansas City's first hotel, known commonly as the Gilliss House, to the New England Emigrant Aid Company for $10,000.[368] On the surface, Gilliss selling this

[366] Business neutralism in Kansas City has minimal scholarship and is mostly focused on the Civil War era. See Theodore A. Brown, "Business 'Neutralism' on the Missouri-Kansas Border: Kansas City 1854-1857," *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 2 (1963): 229-41; Joe Klassen, "The Civil War in Kansas City," *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin* 6 no. 2 (January 1960): 134-150; Jeremy Neely, "'The Original and Genuine Kansas': Robert Van Horn, Kansas City, and Civic Rivalry in the Civil War Era," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 44 no. 3 (Autumn 2021): 166-81.
[367] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 89.
[368] Jackson County, Missouri, Deed Book 27: 401-2.

operation to the enemy seemed strange; however, men such as Gilliss overlooked the inconvenience of their intentions and professed neutrality in order to secure their financial investments.

In addition, 1854 marked a series of improvements of the roads in Kansas City as the town continued to cater to immigrants heading west. Three major roads existed at the time in the city: one to Independence, one to Wyandotte in Kansas Territory cut through the bluffs near Broadway, and a third road to Westport which commenced from the foot of Grand Avenue at Westport Landing (See Figure 8). The bluffs required engineering skill in order to safely remove them and continue progress of carving out the city's streets as growth continued, and it would be two more years before grading – including removing some of the city's highest bluffs - would occur.[369]

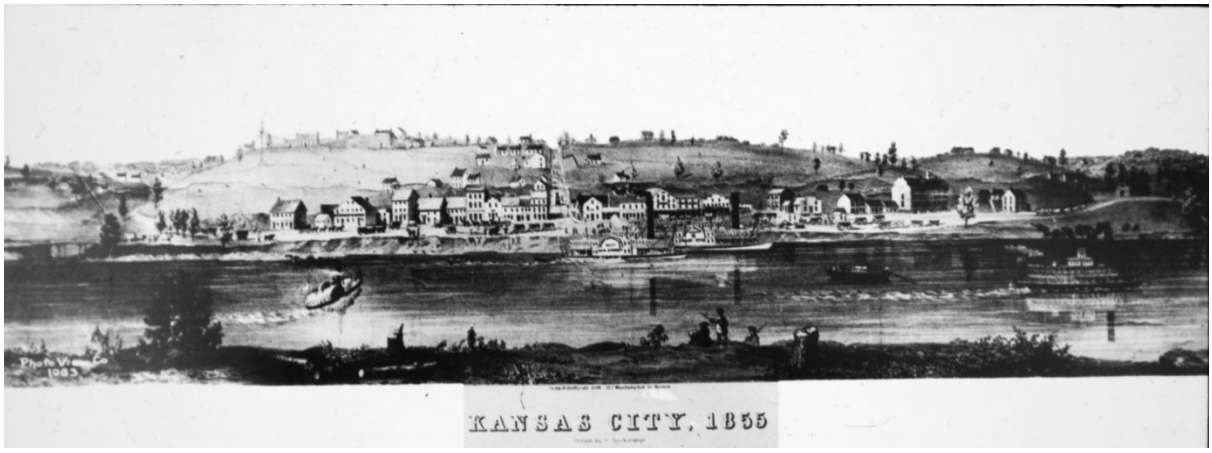

Figure 8. Kansas City in 1855, a panoramic drawing by F. Buckeridge. Courtesy of Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

[369] Payne, "Early Municipal Government," 618-19.

The problem that Kansas City's leaders encountered was they were largely pro-slavery Southerners who sought to trade with the West and encourage investment from the East.[370] Starting in 1854, this juxtaposition required careful negotiation with the city's leaders and the business interests of organizations such as the New England Emigrant Aid Company who pursued economic development in Kansas Territory and founded the town of Lawrence. In order for Kansas City to remain the hub of trade and business in the area, men like William Gilliss had to temper their proslavery sentiments and needed a spokesman who would communicate the commerce opportunities in Kansas City to distant markets.

Robert T. Van Horn offered business leaders a model they required for future public relations. Born in 1824 in Pennsylvania, Van Horn arrived in Kansas City in July 1855 after Gilliss and partners sold him the *Kansas City Enterprise* for $500.[371] Business leaders relied on Van Horn to publicize the city as a place of commerce and trade, regardless of the city's proslavery tendencies. Other towns such as Independence, Westport, Weston and St. Joseph threatened Kansas City's hold on commerce, but none could compete with the city's convenient location at the convergence of the Missouri and Kaw Rivers.[372] Van Horn's mission, therefore, was to communicate how the city was in a better position than other towns nearby.[373]

In order to remain the center of trade, Kansas City had to appeal to every traveler, businessman, and farmer, and tensions surrounding slavery could not be ignored. The town of Westport, four miles to the south, and the town of Independence, twelve miles east, publicly and

[370] Theodore A. Brown, "Business 'Neutralism' on the Missouri-Kansas Border: Kansas City 1854-1857," *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 2 (1963): 233.
[371] Jeremy Neely, "'The Original and Genuine Kansas': Robert Van Horn, Kansas City, and Civic Rivalry in the Civil War Era," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 44 no. 3 (Autumn 2021): 169-70.
[372] Glaab, "Business Patterns," 157.
[373] *Ibid.,* 170.

violently opposed antislavery settlers moving into Kansas Territory.[374] With the help of Van Horn's eloquence, Kansas City proclaimed in the *Enterprise* their neutral stance toward travelers. In December 1855, the *Enterprise* printed, in no uncertain terms, that the citizens of Kansas City, including Benoist Troost, Robert Van Horn, Jesse Riddlesbarger, and others would protect every "law-abiding citizen or stranger." They endorsed the Kansas-Nebraska Act and resolved:

> That as slaveholding and pro-slavery men, we do not desire to excite animosity between the citizens of Missouri and the settlers of Territories west of us, but to cultivate friendly relations, and to grant them all the immunities to which they are entitled by virtue of that comity which should exist between citizens of a common country.[375]

Rising tensions threatened this resolution of peace. In March 1856, the steamboat *Genoa* docked at Westport Landing with a load of goods to be delivered to Kansas Territory. The goods were opened up, allegedly by proslavery men from Lexington and Independence, and searched at one of the commission merchants' warehouses on the levee. Van Horn used his powerful words to condemn the actions, stating they were "jealous of our prosperity" and wished to "remove trade from this place to Leavenworth and other towns."[376] The increase in violence along the border continued to threaten Kansas City's stronghold on trade, and the city's leaders felt inclined to hold another meeting of citizens in order to combat the negative press. Signed by Dr. Benoist Troost, Robert Van Horn and sixty other citizens, the resolution declared, "We will call upon our neighbors and pro-slavery breathern [*sic*] of Jackson County to cooperate with us in

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[374] Brown, "Business 'Neutralism,'" 232.
[375] "Public Meeting," *Kansas City Enterprise,* December 22, 1855, 2.
[376] "A Card," *Kansas City Enterprise,* March 25, 1856, 2; "Outrage in Kansas City," *Kansas City Enterprise*, March 29, 1856, 2.

supporting the laws of the country."[377] Regardless of the pleas for peace, a wagon commissioned by Kansas City's Northup & Chick was robbed past Westport on its route to the west, further evidence of the rising tensions along the border.[378] Events in Kansas City and along the border did not communicate a message of peace or help business matters, yet men like Robert Van Horn continued to insert themselves in business affairs in hopes of making Kansas City the hub of trade goods.[379]

Despite the dangers brewing on the Missouri-Kansas border, a slew of migrants continued to utilize Kansas City in their travels to distant lands. Various businesses outfitted caravans on the Santa Fe Trail and worked at receiving and storing goods. Jesse Riddlesbarger was a well-known Virginia-born proslavery man whose wealth and power brought the Mechanic's Bank of St. Louis to Kansas City. Riddlesbarger's daughter, Harriett, married William Gilliss' beloved nephew, William Barkley, in 1853 and the two went into business together on the riverfront as "receiving, forwarding and commission merchants" in December 1855, further showing the reliance upon staying neutral despite misgivings of settlers' politics as they arrived in the area.[380]

A witness to the dangers at the crossroads of Kansas City in April 1856 was a well-educated newlywed from Pennsylvania named Sarah Chandler Coates. Her husband, future investor and real estate dealer in Kansas City, Kersey Coates, was sent to the area in 1854 by Philadelphia businessmen connected to the Emigrant Aid Company to invest in real estate. He

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[377] "Citizens' Meeting," *Kansas City Enterprise,* July 5, 1856, 2.
[378] "Robbery," *Kansas City Enterprise,* August 3, 1856, 2.
[379] Neely, "'The Original and Genuine Kansas,'" 168.
[380] "J. Riddlesbarger & Co.," *Kansas City Enterprise,* January 2, 1856, 1. See also Missouri, U.S. Marriage Records, 1805-2002, Jackson County, Missouri, 1827-1872, "Mr. William G. Barkley," June 22, 1853, *Ancestry.com*.

looked to Leavenworth and Lawrence as a place to settle but found Kansas City to be a strategic site for his investments.[381] The New England Emigrant Aid Company considered Kansas City to be the place of embarkment for all settlers of Kansas Territory regardless of any ill-will toward their mission.[382] Coates' wife, Sarah, did not understand her husband's vision. When she arrived and watched the activity on the levee, she witnessed "half-drunken Indians from over the Kaw" and "fifty or sixty armed Southerners" arriving on the levee and screaming, "Death to all the d---d Yankees!" Due to the fears of the newlywed couple, they slept with guns under their pillows and a rifle nearby.[383] Despite her initial fears, Sarah Coates would make Kansas City her home with her husband – the business opportunities offered were too immense. One hundred new buildings were erected in 1856, and trade with Utah and Kansas Territory centered in Kansas City even with the threat of violence.[384]

The small city needed business leaders to organize and communicate messages for the common good. In 1857, the Chamber of Commerce was organized by men synonymous to Kansas City's growth and included Dr. Johnston Lykins, Milton Payne, Thomas H. Swope, Coates, Van Horn, Theodore S. Case, Dr. Troost, Gilliss, and ten other early boosters.[385] The acceptance of an abolitionist tied to the Emigrant Aid Company, Kersey Coates, further indicates a sign of neutralism in Kansas City. This organization acted as the government body for the city before the war."[386] The true objective of this organization was to work and attract local railroad

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[381] Albert H. Hindman, "Kersey Coates Put Faith – And Money – in City," *Kansas City Times,* September 15, 1966, 16D.
[382] Thomas H. Webb, *Information for Kanzas Immigrants* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1855), 7.
[383] Laura Coates Reed, ed., *In Memoriam: Sarah Walter Chandler Coates, Published as a Loving Tribute by Her Children, Laura Coates Reed, John Lindley Coates, Arthur Chandler Coates* (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1898), 42.
[384] "Kansas City, &tc," *Kansas City Enterprise,* September 20, 1856, 2.
[385] Chamber of Commerce of Kansas City, *Where These Rocky Bluffs Meet,* (Kansas City: Smith-Grieves Printers, 1938), 14.
[386] Glaab, "Business Patterns," 172.

campaigns in order to ensure Kansas City was not left out of this new transportation; railroads, the men knew, would eventually replace steamboat and wagon trains as the avenues to the west.

A series of negotiations, including multiple railroad campaigns, worked to establish Kansas City as a growing city of commerce for the future. The first railroad chartered in the state was the Missouri Pacific Railroad in 1850. The railroad started in St. Louis, and a decision had not been made as to where the line would land on the western border.[387] The first time the railroads were mentioned by Kansas City's leaders was in 1854 when Benoist Troost, a councilman, worked with the mayor "to offer right-of-way privileges to the management of the Pacific Railroad of Missouri."[388] The money for railroads came from capitalists in the East, and Kansas City's connection to them was Kersey Coates. In November 1856, Coates joined the directors of the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad Company.[389] One year later, voters approved $75,000 in order to ensure the arrival of the Missouri Pacific Railroad in Kansas City.[390]

While Kansas City focused on its future, the community lost one of its biggest supporters. On February 8, 1859, Dr. Benoist Troost died in an upstairs bedroom at William Gilliss' home, Woodlawn, just south of the city where Troost resided with his wife, Mary Ann (See Figure 9). The will named Mary Ann executor of the estate and left everything to her, with the exception of ten dollars bequeathed to his grandchildren, Margaret, Mary, and Nathan.[391] Robert Van Horn mentioned his death in his newly-christened *Daily Journal of Commerce,* stating, "He was one of the early settlers of this city, and in all circles has been considered one of the most amiable and

[387] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 127-128.
[388] *Ibid.,* 86.
[389] *Ibid.,* 117.
[390] Neely, "'The Original and Genuine Kansas,'" 173.
[391] Missouri, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1766-1988, "Benoist Troost," Jackson County, Missouri Will Book 31, pg. 247, September 25, 1857, *Ancestry.com.*

influential of our citizens. His name in connection with the early history of our city, will always be held in remembrance."[392] This was to be true, as Troost Avenue on the east side of Kansas City grew to be one of the most recognizable street names tied to racial redlining in the 1950s.

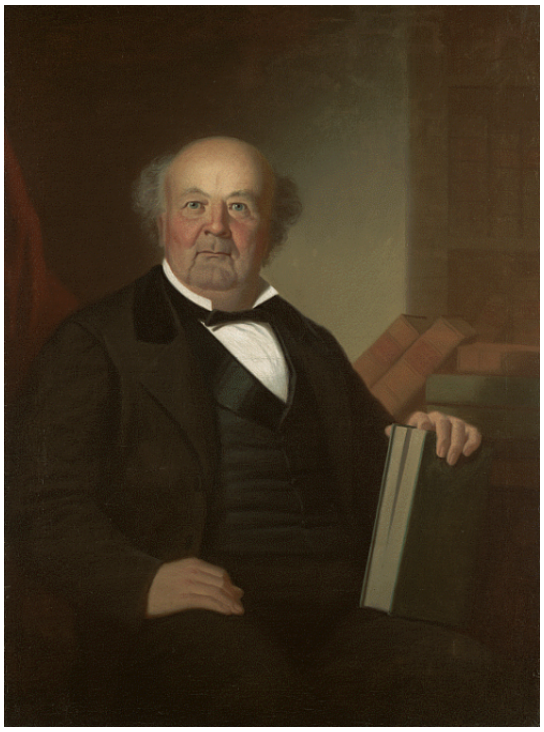

Figure 9. Dr. Benoist Troost, ca. 1859. This oil painting on canvas was painted by George Caleb Bingham. Courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

The population of Leavenworth, founded in 1854, and the population of St. Joseph to the north surpassed Kansas City in population by 1860, and their campaigns for the railroads were a direct threat to business leaders in Kansas City.[393] Regardless, William was doing well financially. In 1859, his property was estimated worth $89,150, making him the second richest man in the city.[394]

[392] "Death of Dr. Benoist Troost," *Daily Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, MO), February 1, 1859, 1.
[393] Brown, *Frontier Community,* 130.
[394] Glaab, "Business Patterns," 167.

Leaders were passionate about bringing the railroad to Kansas City, but ongoing plans for the railroads were sidelined with the outbreak of the Civil War. and the city itself could no longer remain neutral in the throes of the turmoil. Despite William Gilliss' role as one of the city's leading businessmen, his association with men who talked of secession as well as his ongoing reliance upon enslaved labor made him a target of the Union occupation who worked to try to eliminate proslavery groups along the border.

The Civil War in Kansas City: 1861

The population in Kansas City reached 4,418 in 1860, and the focus for the future remained railroad promotion despite the outbreak of the Civil War.[395] It was estimated by historian Albert Castel that one-third to one-half of those living in western Missouri in 1861 were loyal or neutral.[396] Border towns such as Leavenworth capitalized on the chaos in the region by diverting river traffic and trade to its port northwest of the Kansas City, and by the time the Civil War began, years of border ruffians interrupting the lives in Missouri and Kansas made talks in Missouri of secession even more dangerous. William Gilliss claimed to be a staunch, law-abiding Union men; however, his wealth, slaveholding, and past decisions made him vulnerable to attack, physically and financially, throughout the war.

The Civil War meant that remaining neutral was increasingly difficult. At the onset of the war, a residence at Second and Walnut raised a secessionist flag. Robert Van Horn, then mayor of Kansas City, saw the dangers firsthand and asked for help from the federal government. By June 1861, five companies of soldiers were stationed in Kansas City, but most soon returned to

[395] Neely, "'The Real and Genuine Kansas,'" 173.
[396] Albert Castel, "Kansas Jayhawking Raids into Western Missouri in 1861," *Missouri Historical Review* 54 no. 1 (October 1959): 10.

Leavenworth.[397] Larger cities like St. Louis were guarded by Union soldiers the entire war, and Kansas City was able to deter guerrilla activity within the city due to Union forces establishing "durable and sizeable occupations."[398] In addition, Van Horn raised a group of volunteer home guard units and later became an officer in the Twenty-Fifth Missouri Volunteer Infantry.[399] The soldiers set up at the southwest corner of Tenth and Central, and the foundation for Kersey Coates' hotel project was boarded over and used as a Union stable. The area became known as Camp Union.[400]

The danger in the countryside, especially near rebel sympathizing towns such as Westport, could not be ignored by William Gilliss. Around early 1861, William moved into a Kansas City residence built earlier by Wilkins Wheatley, a wholesale businessman. The house sat at the northeast corner of Fourth and Locust Streets (then known as High Street). The large two-story brick home faced west and had "a commanding view of the vicinity."[401] Mary Ann followed her uncle, and they would venture occasionally out to Woodlawn which was under the care of hired men and the fourteen enslaved men, women, and children.

Despite the war, Gilliss was still focused on ensuring his financial success wherever possible. In June 1861, a wholesale business dealer named Franklin Conant became overwhelmed with immense debts accumulated over time and exacerbated by the decrease in Kansas City's population. Conant owed Gilliss over $3,500, and Mary Ann Troost had lent him over $1,500. Local antislavery businessman Kersey Coates also had various notes due, and in

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[397] Henry C. Haskell, Jr. and Richard Fowler, *City of the Future* (Kansas City: Frank Glenn Publishing, 1950), 38.
[398] Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 208.
[399] Neely, "'The Original and Genuine Kansas,'" 176.
[400] Carrie Westlake Whitney, *Kansas City Missouri: Its History and Its People, 1808-1908, Vol. 1* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1908), 194.
[401] Nettie Thompson Grove, ed. *State Centennial Souvenir Number and Program, 1821-1921.* (Kansas City: Missouri Valley Historical Society, 1921), 111.

order to secure their financial interests, Coates and Gilliss opted to purchase Conant's storehouse estimated to be worth $30,000.[402] The business, run by one slaveholder and one former agent of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, became known as Gilliss & Coates.[403] At the corner of Sixth and Main Street, Gilliss & Coates became the second largest dry goods business in the city.[404]

Despite Gilliss' willingness to remain neutral during this tumultuous time and his deep connections to leaders such as Van Horn and Coates, his property was not safe from the marauding of jayhawkers. An infamous man attached to the jayhawkers was Marshall Cleveland, and his actions directly impacted Gilliss' lifestyle and the lives of the enslaved in his household. Allegedly born Charles Metz, Cleveland hailed from New York and headed west where he was arrested in Missouri, charged with crimes, and sent to the penitentiary where he escaped. Cleveland had no personal vendetta with Missourians or any true moral issue with enslavement which would explain his actions.[405] Notorious Charles Jennison founded Kansas' first home guard, the Mound City Sharp's Rifle Guard, in February 1861, and its creation gave Jennison the opportunity to continue the chaos of past border war struggles.[406] One of his officers was Marshall Cleveland, and despite "posted bills" declaring a reward for him "dead or alive," no one dared to turn in the man.[407] In June 1861 as Kansas City's home guard was established and troops from Leavenworth under the command of Captain W.E. Prince arrived, Jennison captured a small group of enslaved people in Independence and entered Kansas City. He was "greeted by

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[402] Jackson County Recorder of Deeds, Jackson County, Missouri, Book 37, 492-94.
[403] Coates., *In Memoriam,* 167.
[404] Lathrop Bullene, *Lathrop Bullene, 1826-1915* (Self-pub., Lawrence, 1916), 34.
[405] Stephen Z. Starr, *Jennison's Jayhawkers: A Civil War Cavalry Regiment and Its Commander* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 21.
[406] *Ibid.,* 36.
[407] S.M. Fox, *The Early History of the Seventh Kansas Calvary,* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1910), 7.

no cheers from the honest and undeluded portion of our population, who from the beginning of the rebellion, had firmly adhered to the government of our Fathers," George Caleb Bingham wrote.[408] Jennison's presence in Kansas City was unsolicited and unwelcomed; his reputation during the Border Wars included destruction of property and murder.

Throughout the summer of 1861, jayhawker bands, including Jennison and Cleveland, traveled outside of Union-controlled Kansas City and plundered the area.[409] Both men marched into Morristown, Missouri with forty-five Jayhawkers in July 1861 and took property worth $2,000. Men such as Cleveland were ruthless and, according to Stephen Z. Starr, "endangered the exiguous hold of the Federal government on the loyalty of Missouri and became an intolerable nuisance."[410] On a Sunday in September, twelve or thirteen armed soldiers arrived at Woodlawn when William was home. At the lead was Captain Cleveland. Gilliss reported:

> I was home when my negroes were taken. . . Men armed with rifles or some sort of guns and pistols some of which they pressed to my breast within a foot of me. They demanded my keys and ransacked my house opening my drawers and taking such things as they wished. . . I was under arrest all the time.[411]

The torches were not lit, and the house survived the attack. However, the jayhawkers took the most valuable of Gilliss' chattel property. Kansas City's newspaper suspended publication during this time, but Leavenworth captured the event:

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[408] C.B. Rollins, ed., "Letters of George Caleb Bingham to James S. Rollins, Part V," *Missouri Historical Review* 22 no. 1 (October 1938): 52.
[409] Castel, "Kansas Jayhawking Raids," 2.
[410] Starr, *Jennison's Jayhawkers,* 22.
[411] State of Missouri v. William D. Ragan, James Ragan, Mary Ragan, Amanda Ragan and Priscilla Knowles. Box 43, Folder 58, No. 343, Jackson County Criminal Court, Jackson County, Missouri (September 1861).

> Capt. Cleveland, with thirteen men, made a descent on a Mr. Gilles [*sic*], a noted secessionist in Kansas City a few days ago and captured fourteen negroes with horses, wagons and plunder, as they were passing through the Border Ruffian town of Westport. Cleveland took possession of the town, visited the Hotel, kept by one Harris, a traitor, and took from him one dragoon revolver and thirty two dollars to pay part of the expense of transporting the negroes to the land of freedom. They kept possession of the town until they had passed the negroes through in safety.[412]

Captain Marshall Cleveland arrived in Lawrence, Kansas with Gilliss' fourteen enslaved people on September 17, 1861, claiming they were taken "from a man who had contributed his money and horses to the secession army."[413] There is no evidence to indicate this was true, as Gilliss maintained neutrality and pled his loyalty to the Union. Cleveland continued his pillaging along the border, and he even returned back to Kansas City and robbed the Union Bank and Northup & Co.[414] When Jennison organized the infamous Seventh Kansas Calvary in November 1861, Cleveland was made commander of Company H which "consisted mostly of criminals and ruffians." However, after a fight with Daniel R. Anthony, a commander of the Seventh Kansas, had Cleveland leave the service within weeks.[415]

Gilliss enlisted the help of soldiers in Kansas City in order to protect his property, but to no avail. After soldiers stationed at his home left when nothing happened after a few weeks, Woodlawn was again ransacked, and "beds and bedding, carpets, chairs, rugs, horses, grocery, sofas, and a general assortment of household goods and furniture" valued at $2,000 were taken. Some of the property was found in a field a quarter mile from his home near his mills he rented

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[412] "Contrabands," *The Daily Conservative* (Leavenworth, KS), September 19, 1861, 2. The man "Harris" mentioned was John "Jack" Harris, operator of the Harris House Hotel in Westport.
[413] "Contrabands Arriving," *The Republican* (Lawrence, KS), September 19. 1861, 3.
[414] "Bold Robbery," *Weekly Atchison Champion*, November 23, 1861, 2.
[415] Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), 58.

to E.R. Fry while the bulk of it was recovered at the home of Priscilla Knowles in Kansas.[416] The property was allegedly taken by her sons and daughters, but they claimed they were just keeping it safe until William Gilliss or Mary Ann Troost could recover it. Knowles and her children were charged with theft, but they claimed that the property was removed by jayhawkers and strewn about the path near the Shawnee Road.

Martial Law and Banishment

Irregular warfare continued, and Major Daniel R. Anthony with the Seventh Kansas Calvary arrived at Kansas City in September 1861.[417] Just outside the city, Margaret Watts Hays, whose husband was a colonel in the Confederate Army, reported that in November her home was ransacked, her carriage taken, and eleven slaves carried away.[418] These actions by the military did little to help the situation along the border, and the presence of Kansas troops in Kansas City was unwelcomed due to prior border struggles. Reports did reach General Henry W. Halleck, commander of the Department of the Missouri, who ordered the Kansas troops out of the state, but the damage to property had been done. The Seventh Kansas acted "with great inhumanity and without discrimination between loyal and secessionist Missourians."[419]

Scholarship has focused on the use of martial law in Missouri in the past, as the policies enacted are still debated today. The effect of these policies on civilians was harsh and tied to the need to keep civilians safe in a place where irregular warfare made that nearly impossible. The

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[416] *State of Missouri*, Box 43, Folder 58. The case includes depositions of Gilliss, Troost, the Ragans and a soldier, Alexander Fowler, sent to protect the property.
[417] Klassen, "The Civil War," 141.
[418] Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36.
[419] Dennis K. Boman, *Lincoln and Citizens' Rights in Civil War Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 209.

use of martial law and orders which banished citizens, confiscated property, and gave the military complete control of the city has been extensively studied, and William Gilliss' role within these controversial policies lends a personal account of special orders not yet revealed.

Troops from other states arrived and behaved much differently than the local militia who, for years prior to the Civil War, wreaked havoc on citizens and their property. These troops, one former Union officer reported, "inherited none of the prejudices or revengeful feelings engendered by the Kansas free state war."[420] George Caleb Bingham, an artist-turned-politician and Union Army officer, wrote in January 1862, "If Jennison were brought to trial and punished as he deserves to be, it would do more for the Union cause in the western portion of our State than the presence of the Union army."[421]

By 1863, the situation in Kansas City was at a boiling point due to irregular warfare, and as the acts of violence targeting Union soldiers by bushwhackers such as William Clarke Quantrill continued, Union leaders stationed in the city were forced to use extreme measures in order to squash the threats by eliminating the domestic supply line. Women were front and center to this support, and they worked to aid guerrillas by providing essentials such as food and clothing.[422] Businessmen like William Gilliss, whose loyalty to the United States was questioned by the government due to their Southern sympathies, could no longer claim neutralism. The longer the war dragged on, neutralism was impossible because of the pressure to remove all threats.[423] As the situation intensified and controversial policies still debated today were enacted, William Gilliss and his family were forced to leave the city – banished through special orders.

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[420] Daniel Geary, "War Incidents at Kansas City," in *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1909-1910,* ed. George W. Martin (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1910), 287.
[421] Rollins, "Letters of George Caleb Bingham," 46.
[422] Leeann Whites, "Forty Shirts and a Wagonload of Wheat: Women, the Domestic Supply Line, and the Civil War on the Western Border," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 no. 1 (2011): 61.
[423] Fellman, *Inside War,* 52.

Southern sympathies at any level, even to those who sided with the Union, made men like Gilliss targets of the Union as tensions heightened. Accusations of disloyalty to the Union, too, was a problem in other contested areas as guerrilla activities intensified. How the Union should handle guerrilla warfare was an ethical dilemma.[424] In April 1863, General Orders No. 100 included directions for commanders to protect citizens who remained loyal and "throw the burden of the war, as much as lies within its power, on the disloyal citizens." This included citizens like William Gilliss who were seen to be disloyal and "known to sympathize with the rebellion without aiding it."[425] These "laws of war," known as the Lieber Code, proved a pathway to controversial orders issued in Missouri, but the code also reiterated the need for protecting loyal citizens.[426]

William Gilliss continued in the dry goods business, the second largest in the city, with Coates under the firm name Gilliss & Coates, but the question of his loyalty to the United States led to his forced removal from the firm. Kersey's loyalty was certainly never questioned as he was a known abolitionist, but the new code of war, especially in a city under martial law, created a situation that put the Union in a position which required them to reassess their connections to people who some viewed as disloyal. William profiting from government contracts could have been an issue. Lathrop Bullene wrote in his memoirs of the event:

> Mr. Gilliss was a strong sympathizer with the cause of the South, and as such gave public expression of his views, in consequence of which [Gilliss & Coates] was closed by the court-marshal and the firm were notified that they could not resume business so long as Mr. Gilliss was connected with it. They thereupon proceeded to look for someone who would buy the Gilliss interest.[427]

[424] Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence,* 182.
[425] War Department, Adjt. General's Office, General Orders No. 100, April 27, 1863.
[426] Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence,* 180.
[427] Bullene, *Lathrop Bullene,* 34.

Lathrop Bullene connected with his brother, Thomas, and agreed to buy Gilliss' two-thirds interest. On May 1, 1863, the new firm opened as Coates & Bullene. This was the beginning of one of Kansas City's most well-known department stores, Bullene, Moore & Emory which would become Emery, Bird, Thayer & Company (EBT).[428]

The increased irregular warfare around Kansas City resulted in the decision for the Union to appoint a commander over the entire region. In June 1863, General Thomas Ewing, Jr. was appointed to the newly-established District of the Border and quickly learned of the numerous problems which existed in the area. A man more concerned with his political rise and less adept to commanding a large area during a war, Ewing learned he only had 4,400 men to target the ongoing guerrilla conflict and protect Kansas City.[429] The guerrilla warfare, led by William Quantrill, needed to be exterminated on the Missouri-Kansas border; this resulted in antiguerrilla policies dictated by General Thomas Ewing, Jr.[430]

One of the largest concerns of the District of the Border was the domestic supply line, where women continued to aid guerrillas by feeding, harboring, and clothing them. Thousands of pro-Confederate civilians were more than willing to give aid to the several hundred irregular fighters roaming the countryside. Ewing issued General Orders No. 10 which directly affected the civilians in the area and ordered the arrest of those aiding irregulars. This included women and children, and the plan was to deport them to Arkansas.[431] Four young women, relatives of the guerrillas, were killed when a makeshift prison collapsed in Kansas City near Camp Union. On August 21, 400 guerrillas led by Quantrill stormed Lawrence, Kansas and killed at least 170

[428] Bullene, *Lathrop Bullene,* 35. No records in the Jackson County Recorder of Deeds exist from this 1863 transaction, which could be because the area was under martial law and some records were lost.
[429] Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence,* 209.
[430] *Ibid.,* 210.
[431] Jeremy Neely, "Moral Bushwhacking and Political Quantrellism: Thomas Ewing Jr. and the Clamor of Guerrilla Politics," *Civil War History* 29 no. 2 (2023): 25.

men and boys. This event stands as the most devastating massacre of civilians during the Civil War.[432]

The events stunned a nation at war, and General Thomas Ewing was under pressure to put a stop to the guerrilla violence. On August 25, 1863, he issued General Orders No. 11, banishing about 20,000 civilians from Jackson, Cass, Bates, and part of Vernon Counties with orders to leave within fifteen days. This expulsion of anyone who could not prove loyalty to the Union did not include Kansas City or areas within one mile of four garrisons.[433] Union soldiers burned homes in the region to prevent resettlement, and the goal of squashing the domestic supply line and driving the guerrilla activity was complete.[434]

Lesser known is the fact that General Thomas Ewing, Jr. did not stop there, and he took this opportunity to remove citizens suspected of their disloyalty. Two days later on August 27, a list was compiled and titled "List of Rebels in Kansas City." This list comprised of fifty-three families and placed William Gilliss' name as the third listed along with his niece, Mary Ann Troost. Special Order No. 64 targeted these well-known Kansas Citians who were allegedly "sympathizers."[435] Days later, Ewing issued General Orders No. 12, declaring that the houses of these people banished would be used for the families of Union refugees.[436]

The reception of Special Order No. 64 was mixed. The *Daily Journal of Commerce,* staunchly Republican during the Civil War, announced the order, noting that the sixty-four people, including Gilliss, were not accused of directly aiding guerrillas but were "publicly

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[432] Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence,* 211.
[433] Neely, "Moral Bushwhacking," 28.
[434] Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence,* 214.
[435] "List of Rebels in Kansas City, MO," Missouri Union Provost Marshal Papers Relating to Citizens, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri. A copy of Special Order No. 64 exists within a letter. See Major. P.B. Plumb to Col. J.O. Broadhead, September 1, 1863, *Ibid.*
[436] "General Orders – No. 12," *Leavenworth Times,* September 18, 1863, 1.

regarded either as positively disloyal in speech or sentiment, or as in sympathy with the rebellion." General Thomas Ewing, Jr., the newspaper wrote, "regards the presence of such individuals as highly prejudicial to the peace of the border, and as liable to result in the extending of aid and comfort to the guerrillas whom he is endeavoring to exterminate."[437] Special Order No. 64 gave Gilliss, Troost, Barkley, and other well-known citizens ten days to vacate; they were not allowed to relocate to any neighboring county. Many of them, including William and Mary Ann, moved to St. Louis. This left little time to arrange any business affairs, but unlike so many of those banished in General Order No. 11, Gilliss and Troost had a distinct advantage: they had money and the means to relocate. Regardless, Gilliss claimed he received a threatening letter two days after his banishment. "I received through the post office an anonymous letter, threatening my life if I did not leave immediately," he wrote to General J.M. Schofield. He complained that the military took possession of his farm, residence, and lots in Kansas City, and denied him "the privilege of renting or receiving any benefit of them, depriving me of all means of support." He further asked for investigation into his disloyalty and for the banishment to be revoked.[438] Gilliss had little legal recourse; General Order No. 12 allowed for the houses of those banished to be used by Union refugees, and no contracts or rents on houses would be upheld.[439]

George Caleb Bingham, who would famously humiliate General Thomas Ewing, Jr. years after the war with a painting that exaggerated General Order No. 11, was quick to condemn the actions of Ewing. Although he admittedly did not know William well, Bingham wrote a letter in defense of "an old and respected citizen." Gilliss carried the letter with him to St. Louis. The letter, in part, reads:

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[437] "Ordered to Leave," *Daily Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, MO), September 1, 1863, 2.
[438] William Gilliss to Major General J.M. Schofield, October 8, 1863, Missouri Provost Marshal Papers Relating to Citizens, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri.
[439] "General Orders – No. 12," *Leavenworth Times,* September 18, 1863, 1.

> [I] know that [Gilliss] is regarded as some of the best and most reliable Union men of Kansas City, who know him intimately, as a pure man, a good citizen, and who, written in words or otherwise has ever been disloyal to our government. While I was connected with the post at Kansas City, it was, on one occasion, necessary for him to prove his loyalty in order to recover some property which had been stolen from him, and this he did to the satisfaction of those then in command. From all the facts in your possession, I am strongly of the opinion that the disloyalty of Mr. Gillis consists alone in his wealth. He has been jayhawked at different times to the amount of some 20 or 25,000 dollars and the scoundrels who have been preying upon his substance have, in my opinion, procured his banishment, that they may strip him of the remainder of his estate.[440]

William's pleas for leniency and his claim of loyalty were ignored. Was he targeted by General Thomas Ewing, Jr. and others due to his wealth as Bingham suggested? This could have been the case, as supplies for refugees were limited during the Civil War, and his properties served the Union cause well. His status as a known slaveholder played an equal role. Ewing's General Order No. 12 specifically allowed for houses of those banished in Kansas City used by families of Union refugees.[441] It is not clear whether William's houses were occupied by them.[442]

General Ewing went a step further, and when weather turned cold, he allowed for "loyal citizens to cut firewood" on the lands owned by rebels. These permits were revoked in November when Ewing was reassigned away from the area, but citizens continued to cut wood on William Gilliss' property.[443] In the spring of 1864, about fourteen people were indicted in the

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[440] George Caleb Bingham to Colonel James Broadhead, September 16, 1863, Missouri Provost Marshal Papers Relating to Citizens, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri.
[441] General Orders No. 12, August 28, 1863, Missouri Provost Marshal Papers Relating to Citizens, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO.
[442] August Haynor deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. Gilliss tried to protect his property by placing people he trusted as caretakers. August Haynor, a German immigrant who arrived in Kansas City in 1858, lived at Woodlawn through 1862.
[443] Special Orders No. 7, H.H. Williams, November 12, 1863 revoked the order. A letter dated April 13, 1865 indicates that the Order No. 7 was never enforced. There is no known special order allowing firewood to be cut from properties of those banished, but the Provost Marshal papers indicate that General Order No. 12 was interpreted to include the use of property to procure firewood. See Dr. Joshua Thorne to Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr., January 1, 1864, Missouri Provost Marshal Papers Relating to Citizens, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, MO.

criminal court for trespass and grand larceny for taking wood from William's land, and what followed indicates the tensions which still existed over suspicions of disloyalty.[444] Ewing insisted that the wood was taken under special order by him, but no order was ever issued. He claimed that Gilliss was "a man of notorious disloyal sympathies and of great wealth" and stated "proceedings ought to be stopped by military order."[445] At the time, Colonel Chester Harding, Jr. (son of the famous artist of the same name) of the 43rd Missouri Infantry was placed at the Commanding Post at Kansas City and investigated claims that the grand jury and the court was disloyal. Five of the men on the grand jury were found to be rebels, and one was a man who rented land from William Gilliss. Colonel Harding found that orders were revoked and many of indicted men stole wood. Matters were complicated by a series of people pointing fingers at others. "There is so much bitterness mixed up with local and political differences in the minds of people on the border, that it is difficult to arrive at the truth," Colonel Harding wrote.[446]

This case demonstrates the complicated nature of martial law and its greater effect on citizens. Under military orders, "loyal destitute refugees" were allowed to obtain permits to cut wood on Gilliss' property. This order also mandated that the local courts stop prosecution as the courts were seen as "obstructing and opposing the military authorities."[447] This, along with

[444] No record indicates exactly how many people charged were found guilty, but in a letter dated February 3, 1865, Col. Chester Harding stated there was one conviction at that time; a fine of twenty-five dollars was issued.
[445] General Thomas Ewing, January 3, 1865, Missouri Union Provost Marshal Papers, 1861-1866, Jefferson City, Missouri.
[446] Colonel Chester Harding to "Sir," February 3, 1865, Missouri Union Provost Marshal Papers, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri. S.M. Fox was listed on the grand jury, and he rented lands and mills from Gilliss. David Tate of Hickman Mills was also listed on the grand jury. Tate harbored William Quantrill in his home near New Santa Fe in March 1862, and his home was burned and a skirmish ensued. This skirmish is documented in several accounts of Quantrill's time in Missouri during the Civil War and in official papers. See "Report of Colonel Robert B. Mitchell," Second Kansas Cavalry, March 24, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Serial 8,* ed. Robert N. Scott (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), 348; William Elsey Connelly, *Quantrill and the Border Wars* (Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1910), 244-254.
[447] Special Orders No. 7, January 7, 1865, Missouri Union Provost Marshal Papers, 1861-1866, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri.

General Order No. 11 and Special Order No. 64, made it clear that all citizens of Kansas City were under the control of the Union occupation.

William Gilliss and Mary Ann Troost spent from September 1863 until the end of the Civil War in St. Louis living in rented rooms on Broadway. Interestingly, several banished Kansas Citians chose St. Louis – headquarters of the Department of the Missouri – as their temporary home.[448] Suppressing disloyalty in St. Louis was just as important as it was in Kansas City, and St. Louis also removed suspicious, disloyal citizens.[449] However, men such as William Gilliss were far removed from their connections in Kansas City where his loyalty was constantly questioned. Even more importantly, these Kansas Citians were even further removed from their sources of income. After banishment and until the close of the war, William was unable to rent his properties.

Turning Back to Town Building

The population of Kansas City plummeted during the Civil War to about 3,500, but there was hope of a promising future.[450] There was a possibility that Leavenworth would beat Kansas City in trade during the Civil War and in railroad negotiations, due in no small part to the federal garrison there. Leavenworth boasted it was well on their way to becoming a metropolis, and businessmen in Kansas City needed to act. Although little of this history involves William Gilliss directly, his contribution in early railroad negotiations and his commercial interests in the city made the railroad a pertinent piece of his ongoing financial success.

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[448] "William Gillis," U.S. City Directories, 1822-1895, St. Louis City Directory, 1864, *Ancestry.com.* Other people from Kansas City who were banished and moved to St. Louis were William S. Gregory, John C. McCoy and Jesse Riddlesbarger.
[449] Louis S. Gerteis, "A Friend of the Enemy: Federal Efforts to Suppress Disloyalty in St. Louis During the Civil War," *Missouri Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (April 2002): 181.
[450] Whitney, *Kansas City Missouri,* 203.

Some railroad gains were made in Kansas City prior to the Civil War. In 1860, a contract was drawn up to build a spur running north from Kansas City, across the river, to Cameron, which sat on the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad. Local business leader Charles Kearney, president of the Kansas City & Cameron Railroad, worked diligently to build this line from Kansas City across the river and allow for lines to connect to Chicago and the world beyond.[451] Kansas City was in direct competition with Leavenworth for the bridge, and both cities required capital from the East in order to build the first span across the river. Kearney sent Theodore Case and James W. Reid to speak to investors, and when it was learned that Leavenworth had a contract in the works, he called on Kersey Coates to help in the business negotiations. The plan worked, and with the help of Congressman Robert Van Horn, funding for a bridge over the Missouri River into Kansas City was secured.[452]

The railroad line from Cameron to the north bank of the Missouri River opposite Kansas City was completed in November 1867. Present at the celebration was Charles Kearney, president, and William Gilliss, "the oldest citizen of that place, and one of the founders." Gilliss ceremoniously drove the last spike into the ground, and leaders looked across the river at the city's endless potential.[453]

As railroad planning continued, William Gilliss turned to his interests in town building despite his advanced age. He would walk the four blocks from his home at Fourth and High Streets (Locust) to a small office space where he would stay well into the evening, working on the management of his extensive real estate interests, renting, selling, and building houses. Everything was superintended by Gilliss and "done under his own direction and

[451] Whitney, *Kansas City Missouri,* 251-52.
[452] Haskell and Fowler, *City of the Future,* 46-47.
[453] "Kansas City and Cameron Railroad," *Daily Kansas Tribune* (Lawrence, KS), November 23, 1867, 2.

management."[454] Starting in 1867, Gilliss enlisted the help of Asa Beebe Cross in constructing a row of buildings in current-day City Market. Cross was virtually unknown at the time but would eventually become one of Kansas City's most coveted architects, designing the Gilliss Opera House, City Hall, the Junction, Union Depot, and many other recognizable early structures. Cross was hired to design a building at Gilliss' property situated in the Market Square (City Market) on the northwest corner of Fourth and Walnut Streets. This collection of buildings held a prime location in the city's center and became known to locals in the city as the "Gillis Block."[455] The construction project made headlines; William reportedly paid $18,000 for the "splendid new building" which was one of four planned by him.[456]

Advanced age did catch up to William Gilliss, and his health caused him to reconsider his busy career. In the spring of 1868, Gilliss suffered a stroke which subsequently affected his motion and speech, and he often complained of rheumatism.[457] Although he did recover, Francis Black noted, "He was not as sprightly in going often about."[458] He continued working on his building projects in the Market Square and chose one of his lots to build "a fine residence." Grading had commenced, but Mary Ann Troost was less than thrilled about the plan; she did not want to start over and furnish a new home.[459] A recent addition on their house at Fourth and High Street made the home more than comfortable, and she established "a miniature botanical garden" on the property. The residence was beautiful, but there was a problem. Gilliss complained about how many stairs he had to climb at his city residence. Grading of the hills near the riverfront caused this home and others in the neighborhood to be twelve to fifteen feet above

[454] J.D. Crafton and Francis M. Black depositions, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[455] Asa Beebe Cross deposition, *Ibid.*
[456] "Local and Miscellaneous," *Daily Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, MO), May 9, 1867, 4.
[457] Bernard Donnelly deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[458] Francis Black deposition, *Ibid*.
[459] Bernard Donnelly deposition, *Ibid.*

the street grade. Because of this, the house had to be entered from the back and was accessible by a large, makeshift wooden staircase.[460]

Although his health was declining, William Gilliss was not inclined to slow down or turn down a chance to make financial gains. New York real estate developer William T. Coleman arranged to buy a substantial portion of William's large estate. In May 1869, Gilliss sold portions of two parcels of land he purchased in 1833 and 1834. One of the parcels, purchased in 1834 for $150, was then on the border of the southern city limits and included just over forty-eight acres and fetched him $24,085.[461] The other parcel, eighty acres just south of the city and near Woodlawn and current-day Penn Valley Park, sold for $10,000.[462] Even though he vacated Woodlawn before the Civil War, he did not intend to sell it.

The prices Gilliss fetched in these real estate transactions demonstrates the growth of the city that began shortly after the war and was brought about due to the successful negotiations with the railroads. The railroad was the future, and Kansas City's businessmen saw this coming for over ten years and were well-prepared.[463] A suspension bridge – the first over the Missouri River – would lead traffic and commerce into Kansas City. This bridge, formally known as the Hannibal Bridge and informally as the Kansas City Bridge, took two and a half years to build and was engineered by Octave Chanute.[464]

On July 3, 1869, the Hannibal Bridge opened with a large celebration of over 30,000 people present.[465] The city was on its way to becoming a metropolis, and land values would

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[460] Bernard Donnelly and Charles Fields depositions, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470. See also Grove, ed. *State Centennial Souvenir,* 111.
[461] Jackson County Recorder of Deeds, Jackson County, Missouri, Book 86: 139.
[462] *Ibid.*, Book 68: 54.
[463] Haskell and Fowler, *City of the Future,* 42.
[464] *Ibid.,* 47-48.
[465] "Kansas City Bridge Celebration," *The Daily Journal of Commerce,* July 6, 1869, 1.

skyrocket as a result. There was a man absent in the crowd; William was sick. He certainly heard of the celebration and likely read with pride about it in the newspaper, but his days were numbered. Just over two weeks later, William Gilliss died inside his home.[466] Upon his death, he was said to be worth about $500,000.[467]

[466] "An Old Citizen Gone," *Daily Journal of Commerce* (Kansas City, MO), July 20, 1869, 1.
[467] Bernard Donnelly deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.

CONCLUSION

William Gilliss was widely remembered as being the man who built an impressive ten-room mansion he coined "Woodlawn" south of his three-room cabin on Turkey Creek where he and his niece, Mary Ann entertained. "We used to think it a palace," Mary Jarboe recalled in 1907. "[Gilliss] had built the house mainly, I think, to gratify his vanity."[468] Yet, this home often mentioned in the memories of Kansas Citians only served as his primary residence for just over five years of his life. Even his fine home, Woodlawn, would not last the test of time. Gilliss, with a vision of the future, could not predict the outcome of some of the building projects he carefully superintended and ensured were built to last. By 1913, Woodlawn's sandstone plaster was falling off, the porches were sagging, and the windows covered with boards.[469] Woodlawn met the bulldozers just a few years later. The same fate met his other buildings over time as visible signs of the founders steadily faded away.

The crucial years after his move from southwest Missouri to the incorporation of Kansas City demonstrate complex layers of his life that involve controversial topics involving marginalized groups such as Native Americans and enslaved people. He did, in more ways than one, earn his fortunes off the backs of others. His enterprising nature allowed for complex building projects such as the Gilliss House Hotel, and he was able to ensure more money made it into his pockets by remaining neutral in politics during the battle between towns to capture riverfront traffic. He tempered his Southern ideals in order to conduct business with men such as Kersey Coates, although this could not continue through the Civil War. His status in society as a

[468] "Finest House in Town," *The Kansas City Star,* September 1, 1907, 16.
[469] "A Mansion in the Olden Days," *Kansas City Times,* February 15, 1913, 11.

wealthy man made him a target of the Union, but his keen business sense survived and thrived for the years following.

Neighbor and former first mayor of Kansas City, William S. Gregory recalled:

> He was very active for a man of his age [and] was a man of even mind. [He had] large capacity, education limited. [Gilliss was] capable of making trades as close as any man. [He] was a mechanic by profession [and] had keen discernment. He could detect a flaw in any work. I remember he detected a bracket one eighth of an inch out of plumb at a distance of one hundred feet, just before his death.[470]

William Gilliss' life offers insight as one of the many complex early settlers of the Kansas City region who utilized controversial policies in order to enrich themselves. He successfully morphed from an orphan who could not read to a barely literate frontier trader to a wealthy town builder. After his death, his will left the bulk of his half-million dollar estate to Mary Ann Troost, who had lost her husband ten years earlier (See Figure 10). What followed were two complex court cases stemming from Gilliss' abandoned Native American children. Gilliss had recognized two of the children in his will, writing:

> About thirty-two years ago I had living with me at my residence two young girls some six, seven or eight years old who were part Indian. . . These girls were called Sophia Gilliss and Mary Gilliss: To each of these two girls if they or either of them be living I give ten dollars.[471]

Because Gilliss left his two daughters ten dollars in his will, they did not inherit any additional money or property. However, a case from 1875 had a different outcome. The children of

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[470] William S. Gregory deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.

[471] Missouri, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1766-1988, "William Gilliss," Jackson County, Missouri Will Packets, No 3-1170 and Miscellaneous, 1820-1885, February 27, 1868, *Ancestry.com.*

William's daughter, Nancy, sued and were given one-third of his estate.[472] Mary Ann Troost died in 1872 while visiting a friend in Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania; she was laid to rest there in an unmarked grave. Although she had numerous friends and family members, the litigation over the estate would overshadow any plans for a large memorial for her, and her grave would remain unmarked for over thirty-five years. She would often tell friends that "she did not come to Kansas City; it came to her."[473]

Figure 10. Portrait of Mrs. Benoist (Mary Ann) Troost at an advanced age. Photo courtesy of the Jackson County Historical Society.

Mary Ann Troost's will, written just over a month before her untimely death, gave specific directions as to how to dispose of the expansive estate from both her husband and her

[472] *Boyer,* 58 MO 510, 517. For a summary of these cases, see also Michael R. Bredhoft, "The Contested Will of William Gillis: Insights into Life in the Early Kansas City Region," *Kawsmouth* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Autumn 1999).
[473] "Mary Ann Troost,", *The Kansas City Times,* January 10, 1872, 4.

uncle. It is especially intriguing that Mary Ann willed two lots to two "former slaves" of her uncle. Her nephews and nieces were willed prime real estate lots, and she purposefully left her own brother, William Barkley, "nothing."[474] Barkley left Kansas City during the Civil War never to return. William Gilliss told friends that his nephew "had broken his confidence" even though he gave him "a fine education." He started him in business ventures twice, and Barkley walked away after they failed. "He sold his property and the old gentleman had little to do with him afterwards," Bernard Donnelly, a friend and real estate partner recalled.[475]

Mary Ann also made specific arrangements to give Kansas City a parcel of extremely valuable real estate in trust "for a home and place for the maintenance and education of poor children" that would "be called 'The Gilliss Orphan Asylum.'" She ordered all additional real estate be disposed of "to build and construct in a substantial manner and good style an Opera House" that should cost "not less than one hundred thousand dollars and not more than one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."[476] The Gilliss Opera House opened in 1883 and brought class and style to what was once a frontier town.[477] Its proceeds went to finance the Gilliss Orphan Asylum, an organization that survives today and was a fitting tribute to man who started out as an orphan himself. This, along with a small stretch of road called "Gillis Street" on the east side of downtown Kansas City, are all that are left in the memory of a man whose life was splashed in headlines across the country when court cases drug the litigation of his estate out for decades.

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[474] Missouri, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1766-1988, "Mary A Troost," Jackson County, Missouri, Will Record, Vol A, 1869-1886, November 28, 1871, *Ancestry.com*.
[475] Bernard Donnelly deposition, *Rogers,* 51 MO 470.
[476] Missouri, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1766-1988, "Mary A Troost," Jackson County, Missouri, Will Record, Vol A, 1869-1886, November 28, 1871, *Ancestry.com*.
[477] "The Gillis Opening," *Kansas City Star,* September 11, 1883, 1.

The disputes over his estate, although enlightening and pivotal in the study of William Gilliss, overshadowed any story of his achievements and advancements in the city's history. Historians in the past glanced over his life and bought into the fanciful stories of a war hero-turned-trader and town builder who lived his life as a bachelor. In actuality, William Gilliss' life encompassed the controversial events of his era, events that must be grappled with in order to understand how a town grew out of the rocky bluffs along the Missouri River.

William Gilliss often quoted others to his friends and acquaintances, adding both humor and opinions to various situations he approached. In 1840, William quoted a portion of one of Lord Chatham's speeches, writing to Pierre Menard, "Nothing short of changing minds and measures will render our country prosperous."[478] Today, the words are still palpable but for very different reasons than Gilliss intended originally.

[478] William Gilliss to Pierre Menard, in the *Pierre Menard Collection*, Letter 1093, July 23, 1840, State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.

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