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C. Peairs Wilson, Director

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A History of the Fort Hays (Kansas) Branch Experiment Station 1901-1962¹

by

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The Fort Hays Branch of the **Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station** was established in 1901. It was made possible by a gift of land from the **United States Government** to the State of Kansas. The land was a part of the Fort Hays Military Reservation. **The reservation, no longer needed for military purposes, was turned over by the Army to the United States Department of the Interior, October 22, 1889, for disposal under the Act of July 5, 1884.**

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORIZATION

In 1889 the Secretary of the Interior directed the suspension of action on this reservation to await the action of Congress in regard to it. In February, 1895, Representative **Jno. Schlyer of Ellis county** introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives of the Kansas Legislature which was adopted and concurred in by the Senate, February 8, 1895, as follows:

"WHEREAS, The experience of the settlers upon the plains of western Kansas, covering a period of more than twenty years, has demonstrated conclusively that agriculture cannot be pursued with profit under existing natural conditions, and that artificial means and methods must be substituted therefor; and

WHEREAS, The tests and experiments required to determine

the fitness of new methods applicable to these higher altitudes and limited rainfall cannot be made at the Agricultural College of the state; and

WHEREAS, The Fort Hays military reservation, at an altitude of 2000 feet above sea-level, contains a valuable body of native timber that should be preserved to posterity, and the land of said reservation is admirably adapted for such experiments in agriculture as are required in the premises; and

WHEREAS, The buildings upon said military reservation, formerly used as residences for officers and their families, barracks for troops, storehouses, etc., are large and commodious, but cannot be moved without destruction of their value, but in their position are of great value, and could be used, with little additional repairs, for the purposes of a branch of the State Normal School; and

WHEREAS, The location of a branch of the State Normal School at this place would be central and convenient for the whole of the north half of the state; and

WHEREAS, The said military reservation has long since been abandoned by the United States government as a military post; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, by the house of representatives of the state of Kansas, the senate concurring therein, That our senators and representatives in Congress are hereby requested to secure the passage of an act of

1. Contribution No. 108, Office of the Dean, Agricultural Research, Teaching, and Extension, and Director, Agricultural Experiment Station, Manhattan.

2. Dean of the School of Agriculture Emeritus and Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station Emeritus.

3. Superintendent of Fort Hays (Kansas) Branch Experiment Station Emeritus.

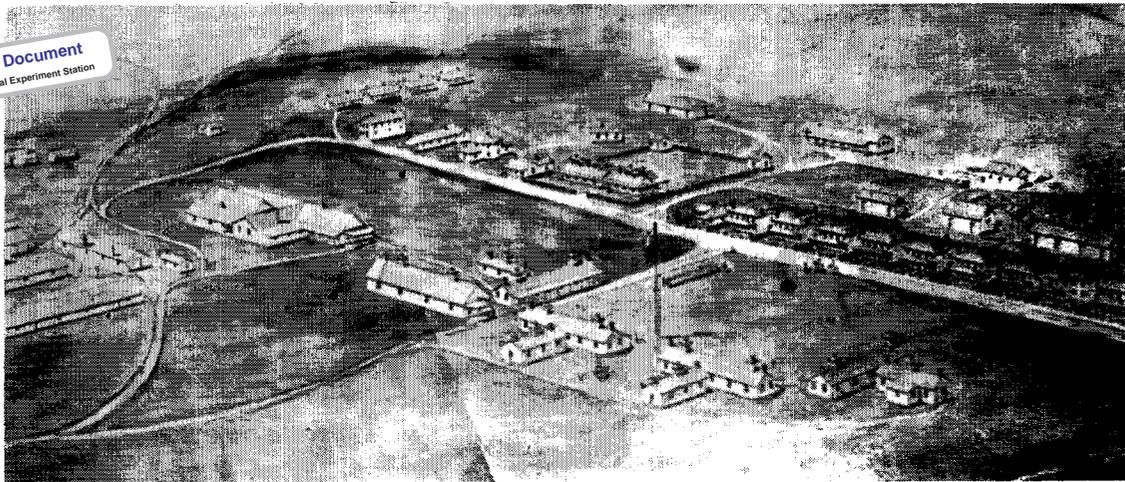


Fig. 1.—General view of Old Fort Hays.

Congress donating the said Fort Hays military reservation to the state of Kansas for the following public purposes: (1) For a western branch of the Kansas Agricultural College; (2) for a western branch of the Kansas State Normal Institute; (3) for a public park.

Resolved, further, That the secretary of state is hereby instructed to transmit a copy of these resolutions to the president of the United States senate, the speaker of the house of representatives, and to each senator and representative in Congress from the state of Kansas." (1)

On Saturday, February 23, 1895, a copy of said concurrent resolution was laid before the Senate of the United States by the Vice-president. It was referred to the Committee on Public Lands and accepted by Senate Bill 2799 introduced by Senator Martin; it reads as follows:

"Be it enacted, etc.: That the abandoned Fort Hays military reservation and all the improvements thereon, situated in the state of Kansas, be and the same is hereby granted to said state, upon the conditions that said state shall establish and maintain perpetually thereon, first, a western branch of the Kansas Agricultural College; second, a western branch of the Kansas State Normal Institute, and that in connection therewith the said reservation shall be used and

maintained as a public park; provided, that said state shall, within five years from and after the passage of this act, accept this grant and shall by proper legislative action establish on said reservation western branches of the Kansas Agricultural College and the Kansas State Normal Institute; and whenever the lands shall cease to be used by said state for the purposes herein mentioned the same shall revert to the United States."

(2)

This bill passed the Senate February 26 and the House March 2, 1895. Congress adjourned March 4 and the bill failed to receive the President's signature.

In view of the passage of Senate Bill 2799, the district land officers were advised by telegram dated March 22, 1895, that said lands were withdrawn from settlement and entry to give opportunity for further legislation.

A bill similar to No. 2799 was introduced in the 54th Congress and reported favorably to the House of Representatives by Mr. Charles Curtis from the Committee on Public Lands.

This bill did not become a law, although again reported favorably by the second ses-



Fig. 2.—Officers Quarters at Old Fort Hays, parade grounds in foreground.

sion of the 54th Congress. A similar bill was introduced in the 55th Congress and passed the Senate but did not come up in the House. It was again introduced in the 56th Congress, in the Senate by Senator Harris, and in the House by Congressman Reeder, and became a law March 28, 1900. As finally passed it reads as follows:

“A BILL granting to the state of Kansas the abandoned Fort Hays military reservation in said state, for the purpose of establishing an experimental station of the Kansas Agricultural College and a western branch of the Kansas State Normal School thereon, and a public park.

Be it enacted, That the abandoned Fort Hays reservation, and all improvements thereon, situated in the state of Kansas, be and the same is hereby granted to said state upon the conditions that said state shall establish and maintain perpetually thereon, (1) an experimental station of the Kansas Agricultural College, and (2) a western branch of the Kansas State Normal School, and that, in connection therewith, the said reservation shall

be used and maintained as a public park; provided, that said state shall, within five years from and after passage of this act, accept this grant, and shall, by proper legislative action, establish on said reservation an experiment station of the Kansas Agricultural College, and a western branch of the Kansas State Normal School; and whenever the lands shall cease to be used by said state for the purposes herein mentioned, the same shall revert to the United States; provided further, that the provisions of this act shall not apply to any tract or tracts within the limits of said reservation to which valid claims have attached by settlement or otherwise under any public-land laws of the United States.” (3)

Acting under this law the 1901 session of the Kansas Legislature passed the following joint resolution:

“SECTION 1. That the state of Kansas hereby accepts from the United States the abandoned Fort Hays military reservation, as provided in an act of Congress relating thereto, approved March 27, 1900.

SECTION 2. That the provisions of the act of Congress, ‘An act granting to the state of Kansas

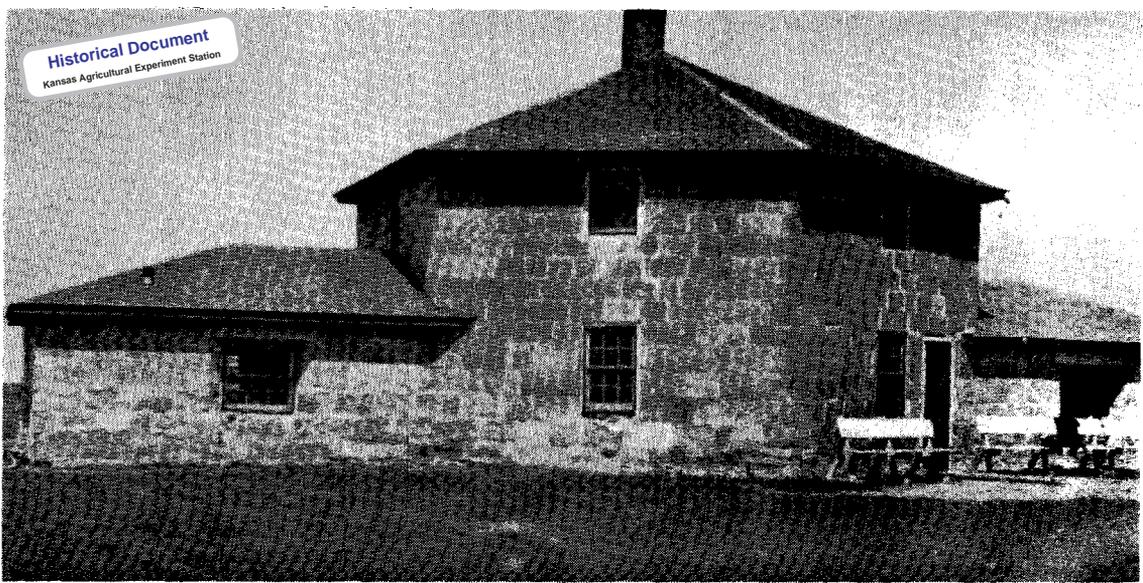


Fig. 3.—The Blockhouse, Old Fort Hays.

the abandoned Fort Hays military reservation, in said state, for the purpose of establishing an experimental station of the Kansas Agricultural College and a western branch of the Kansas State Normal School thereon and a public park, approved March 27, 1900, are hereby accepted by the state of Kansas.

SECTION 3. That upon the approval of this act by the governor, he is requested to transmit a certified copy of the same to the secretary of the interior of the United States.

Approved February 7, 1901.

Copy transmitted to secretary of interior February 7, 1901." (4)

The Legislature of 1901 passed an act in respect to the division of the reservation, making appropriations for the branch station and the branch normal school. This act reads as follows:

"Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Kansas:

SECTION 1. The board of regents of the State Agricultural College and of the State Normal School, respectively, are hereby authorized to locate and establish an experimental station of the State Agricultural College and a branch or auxiliary of the State Normal School on the Fort Hays military reservation.

SECTION 2. The following-described tracts of land lying within the limits of the reservation aforesaid, to wit: Section 36, township 13 south, range 19 west; section 31, township 13 south, range 18 west; section 1, township 14 south, range 19 west; sections 6 and 8, the east half of section 7, the north half of section 17, and the northeast quarter of section 18, all in township 14 south, range 18 west, are hereby placed under the direction of the regents of the State Normal School. It shall be their duty to lease or rent the said lands to the best advantage, and all moneys derived from rents for such lands shall be collected by the regents aforesaid, who shall deposit the same with the treasurer of the board, to be expended by the said board of regents for the equipment and maintenance of said auxiliary of the State Normal School.

SECTION 3. All the remaining lands of the reservation aforesaid are hereby placed under the direction of the board of regents of the State Agricultural College, except the north half of section 5, township 14 south, range 18 west, which with the buildings thereon, shall be used jointly as may be determined by the boards of regents of the institutions aforesaid,

SECTION 4. The said board of regents of the State Normal School shall employ a principal and such assistant teachers and janitors as

FORT HAYS BRANCH EXPERIMENT STATION HISTORY 7

the needs of the school may demand; shall prescribe the course of study, not extending over more than two years, conditions of admission, and such other regulations as may be required for its successful conduct; provided, that such course of study shall embrace only such branches as may prepare pupils for the advanced academic and professional work provided at the State Normal School at Emporia.

SECTION 5. All persons meeting the requirements for admission prescribed by the board of regents shall be admitted to said school; and on declaring their intention to fit themselves to teach in the schools of Kansas shall be exempt from all fees, save a small matriculation fee, which the board of regents may require. Students not intending to teach may be charged a reasonable fee, at the discretion of the board.

SECTION 6. Any person of good moral character over sixteen years of age, having been in actual attendance at least twenty weeks at the above-named school, and having completed the course of study prescribed by the said board of regents, shall be awarded a certificate which shall be a legal certificate to teach in any of the public schools of the state except high schools, and good for one year. Said certificate shall also admit the holder to the third year's work at the State Normal School at Emporia without examination.

SECTION 7. The president of the State Normal School shall be president of said auxiliary normal school, with such duties and responsibilities as the board of regents may determine.

SECTION 8. The sum of \$7,000 is hereby appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1902, and the sum of \$5,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1903, is hereby appropriated, for the current expenses and improvements of said auxiliary normal school, the said amounts to be expended under the direction of the board of regents of the State Normal School.

SECTION 9. The board of regents of the State Agricultural Col-

lege is hereby authorized to locate and establish on the reservation aforesaid an experimental station of the Agricultural College, and shall adopt such measures as may be necessary to place the same in successful operation and to preserve the land upon which the native timber is now growing as a public park.

SECTION 10. To carry out the provisions of section 9 of this act, the sum of \$3,000 is hereby appropriated for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1902, and \$3,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1903.

SECTION 11. All sums of money payable out of the appropriations specified in section 8 of this act shall be upon vouchers approved by the board of regents of the State Normal School; and all sums payable out of the appropriations specified in Section 10 shall be upon vouchers approved by the board of regents of the State Agricultural College.

SECTION 12. The auditor of state is hereby authorized to draw his warrants on the treasurer of state for the several sums and purposes specified in this act upon verified vouchers approved by the board of regents of the State Normal School or the State Agricultural College; provided, that no portion of the money appropriated in this act shall be expended by the board of regents until the attorney general of the state of Kansas shall first notify the governor and the board of regents that the title to the land in said reservation is unimpaired, and the land is available under the terms of the act of Congress ceding said reservation to the state.

SECTION 13. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its publication in the official state paper.

Approved February 26, 1901
Published in official State paper,
March 1, 1901." (5)

During the time the reservation was supposed to be open for settlement, some of the land was filed upon and occupied by settlers. When

the state accepted the reservation these claims constituted a flaw in the title, although deeds to the land had not been granted.

The regents taking cognizance of this situation on April 4, 1901, passed the following resolution:

"Moved by Regent Stewart to adopt the following resolution: Whereas the Legislature at its recent session passed an act accepting from the United States the tract of land known as the Fort Hays Military Reservation and whereas the grant of said land to the state of Kansas provides that it should be utilized by the State Normal School and the Agricultural College and whereas the act of acceptance provides that no money shall be expended on said land until the attorney general shall find that the state can have a good title to all of said land and whereas it has come to be knowledge of this board that a considerable portion of said land is held and claimed by private parties and that the citizens of Hays in connection with the attorney general are now endeavoring to secure the relinquishment of the present claimants on said land, therefore be it resolved that a committee of four be appointed from the board with direction to call upon the attorney general and if after consultation with him it shall be deemed best shall meet with the regents of the State Normal School at Hays next week and act in concert with them and assist the citizens there in securing the release of the claims on said reservation lands, but under no circumstances shall any arrangements be made whereby funds of this college or the state of Kansas shall be used for securing said releases or for making any improvements on said land until such time as the title of all such land shall be vested in the state. Moved by Regent Satterthwaite that the committee consist of Regents McDowell, Coburn, Stewart and Fairchild. Amendment carried. Resolution as amended carried." (6)

The matter was finally settled by the Board of Regents executing leases to the claimants to permit them to remain on the land from three to five years in consideration of which all future claim was relinquished.

DIVISION OF LAND

The military reservation as acquired by the state contained an area of about 7,200 acres. The area was divided by legislative act between the experiment station and the normal school as follows: five and three-fourths sections located principally on the north and west parts of the reservation to the normal school, one-half section on which the fort buildings were located to be used as determined by the Boards of Regents of the two institutions, and the rest of the reservation to the experiment station.

The area acquired by the Station has usually been reported as about 3,600 acres.⁴ The station land was located on the east and south sides of the reservation. It embraces about 1,400 acres of bottomland along both sides of Big Creek plus gently rolling upland, nearly all tillable and highly productive.

One of the obligations placed on the Experiment Station by the Legislature when the Station was authorized was "to preserve the land upon which the native timber is now growing, as a public park." (7)

4. Since the original divisions, a part of the area has been used for roadways, for park purposes, and for a golf course. The Comptroller's Office at Kansas State University gives the area of the station at this time (1962) as 3,254 acres.

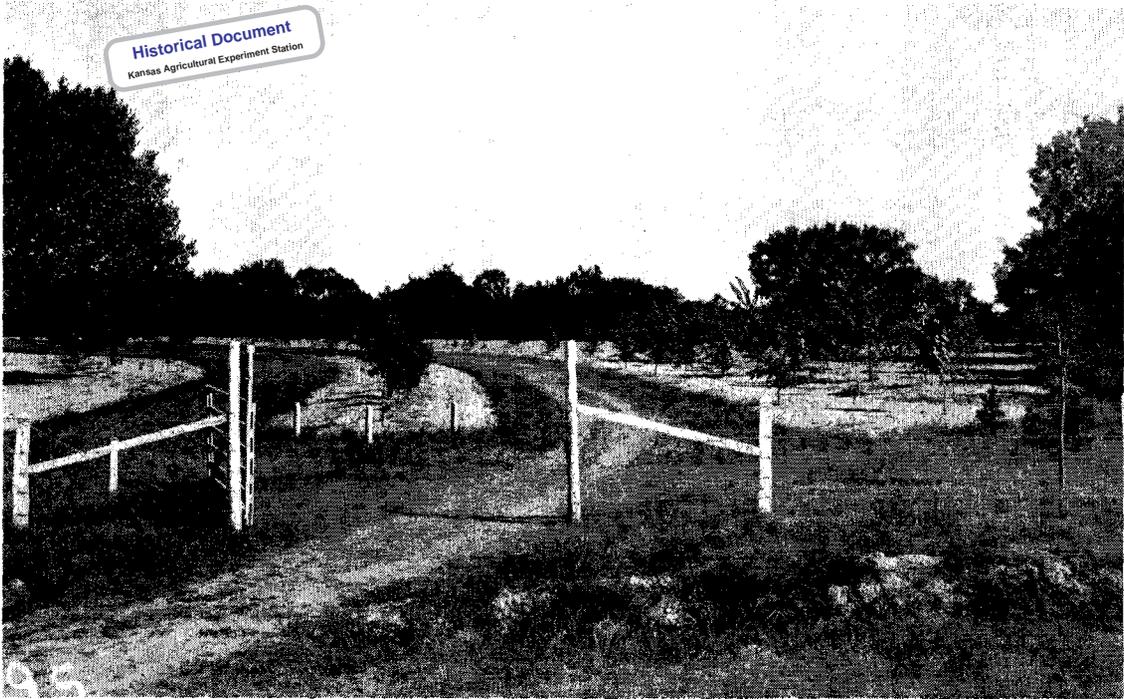


Fig. 4.—Frontier Historical Park as it appeared in 1906.

When the reservation was acquired by the state some excellent timber was growing along Big Creek. This timber was the more conspicuous because the creek banks outside the reservation had been denuded of all tree growth to provide fuel for the fort. Not only was the native timber protected, but forest trees were planted on additional creek bottomland, even during the first year of the operation of the station.

FRONTIER HISTORICAL PARK

The congressional act gave the abandoned Fort Hays Military Reservation to the state of Kansas for: first, an experiment station of the Kansas Agricultural College; second, a western branch of the Kansas State Normal School; and third, a public park. (8)

Responsibility for develop-

ment and maintenance of the park fell to the experiment station. The first step was taken in 1905 when 43 acres of land along Big Creek, where the timber had been spared, was set apart for park purposes. The Station graded the **drives**, erected gates and fences, and set out about 2,500 additional trees. About 25 acres were planted to young trees as an addition to the park. The trees set out at this time grew well. In 1913 it was reported that the growth and vigor of deciduous trees planted in the state park in 1905 were good and ranked in this order: redbud, bur oak, black walnut, honey locust, coffee bean, white elm, hackberry, persimmon, green ash, Russian mulberry, Russian olive, red elm, poplar, cottonwood, and soft maple.

A grove of Chinese elm planted in 1925 west of the

highway leading to the city later became a part of the park. Most of these Chinese elm trees escaped serious damage from the Armistice Day freeze in 1940 and they now constitute an attractive area of the park.

About 1920 the citizens of Hays became interested in developing a golf course as a part of the state park. This resulted in the Station's leasing 40 acres of its grassland to local citizens for this purpose. This area adjoined the park on the southwest side. Later an additional area of about 20 acres was added. The Station did not assume the responsibility and expense of maintaining the golf course, this being done by an organization of local citizens.

In 1931 legislation was enacted creating the state park at Hays. The Legislature of 1931 passed House Bill No. 626 which reads in part:

"An act relating to and creating the Kansas Frontier Historical Park on the Fort Hays Military Reservation, to be designated and set aside by the State Board of Regents and making appropriation for the preservation and upkeep of same. Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Kansas.

SECTION 1. The State Board of Regents shall designate and set aside for park purposes that portion of the Fort Hays Military Reservation which was the site of the buildings of old Fort Hays, together with the remaining buildings of said fort and such other portions of said reservations as the Board may deem to be of particular historical interest of which, in the judgment of said Board, may be favorably situated and well adapted for park purposes, . . . and said Board shall within six months from the

effective date of this resolution designate the boundaries of such portions of said reservation so set aside for park purposes.

SECTION 2. The portion of said reservation so set aside and designated by the Board of Regents for park purposes, together with a strip of ground along Big Creek in Sec. 4, T14, R18, which has been set aside for park purposes, shall be known as Kansas Frontier Historical Park in the Fort Hays Military Reservation, and said park shall at all times be subject to the State Board of Regents, but the general supervision and control of active custody and management thereof shall be vested in a Board of Managers, consisting of the chairman of the State Board of Regents, the secretary of the State Historical Society, the President of Kansas State Agricultural College, the Fort Hays Teachers College at Hays, Kansas, and a fifth member appointed by the governor. Said Board of Managers may, subject to revision by the State Board of Regents, make all proper and needful rules and regulations for the use, preservation, improvement, control and maintenance of said park and ground and buildings thereon, and or any portion thereof, and is not may permit such use of the grounds inconsistent with this act or with the purpose for which said grounds have been set aside." (9)

The act also carried an appropriation of \$500 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1932. Over 120 acres were taken for the Frontier Historical Park in addition to the

43 acres previously designated for park purposes. A legal description of the park as established at this time is given in the 1931 report of the Hays Station. (10)

At the time of the establishment of the Park Board the care of the park was transferred to it from the Station.