

Wyandotte Gazette, December 29, 1882

MRS. C. I. H. NICHOL'S LETTER

[Final Installment of Four Part Series]



Ruins of vine-covered well
Photo Courtesy of Bill Slaughter

Editor's Note: Clarina I.H. Nichols wrote two letters regarding antebellum (pre-Civil War) Quindaro, Kansas to the *Wyandotte Gazette* newspaper. They were divided into a four part series. This is Part IV of the series. [Part I](#) was in the *Wyandotte Gazette* of March 31, 1882. [Part II](#) was in the *Wyandotte Gazette* of June 16, 1882. [Part III](#) was in the *Wyandotte Gazette* of December 22, 1882.

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

A majority of the settlers were from the industrial classes of the rural districts of the eastern States. This was notably true of a bevy of young men - "mothers boys," considerate, affectionate, helpful; nurtured in home love, and inured to the toil, care, and responsibilities of the farm or work shop. - Beardless youths crowned with the sovereignty of a first or perhaps second vote - they had come to Kansas with the purpose of becoming woof to the warp of freedom - of putting hand and brain into the struggle for "Free Kansas." They did not wait for affairs to get settled, but went to work in their own way to settle them. They supplemented the hard toil of the day with books of physical, social, and moral science in homes improvised by their own skill. One of these bachelors homes - "Uncle Tom's Cabin," - has a historical interest apart from its uses as the intellectual center where sundry citizens, your correspondent among the number, were wont to meet for Lyceum discussion and to enjoy the wit and wisdom of its weekly journal "*The Cradle of Progress*." "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was dedicated to emancipation without proclamation, and as such one of the most convenient stations on the Underground Rail Road, which had several branches and termini in the interior of the Territory. Of the many slaves who took the train of freedom there, it was remarkable that only one and he through lack of caution in his approach for help, was ever taken back to Missouri from Quindaro. Uncle Tom's boys could tell of some exciting escapes from Quindaro to the interior, by day and by night. In '58 I carried to my native town in Vermont a pair of manacles filed by Uncle Tom's boys from the ankle of a stalwart black, who had escaped from the vicinity of Parkville, having drawn one foot from the encircling iron and brought the chain still attached to the other, in his hand. The man having learned that he was sold south attempted to escape and was at once put in irons. The night before the time set for delivery of the property, assisted by a fellow slave he got loose. The absence of a boat from the vicinity would have indicated their course so they hauled an old dug-out to the riverbank and travelled ten miles up the river where they confiscated a boat and floating down the stream, turned the boat adrift just above the Quindaro landing, where they concealed themselves in the

brush-wood at the foot of the bluff on the side of which stood Uncle Tom's Cabin in solitary but inviting hospitality.

Later, a freight wagon, with two large, dry-goods boxes, in passing Bartles, hotel on the Lawrence road, was accosted by an Indian who had known the driver as conductor of an eastern U.G. Road [underground road], with - "Hello T--, wheregoing?" "To Lawrence." "What you got in your boxes, - niggers?" "Well, what do you think?" - was the careless, smiling answer, and the trembling freight was carried leisurely and safely through. Just before setting off T-- had said to me, "If I can get by Bartles' I'm safe: but there's a fellow there who knew me at home and it would be like him to overhaul me." He was a man so reticent and quiet - trained among friends - that we had none of us suspected, till now that there was need of this, his reserve of qualifications for the emergency.

My cistern - every brick of it rebuilt in the chimney of my late Wyandotte home - played its part in the drama of freedom. One beautiful evening late in October '61, as twilight was fading from the bluff a hurried message came to me from our neighbor - Fielding Johnson. - "You must hide Caroline. Fourteen slave hunters are camped on the [Park](#) - her master among them." My cistern had been cleaned and nicely dried preparatory to a wash of cement for some undiscernable leakage. Its dimensions were 7 x 12 (square) and a rock bottom; eight feet in depth and reached from a trap in the floor of the wing; an open space between the floor and cistern's mouth - when left uncovered - affording ventilation from the outside. Into this cistern Caroline was lowered with comforters, pillow and chair. A washtub over the trap with the usual appliances of a washroom standing around completed the hiding. But poor Caroline trembling and almost paralyzed with fear of discovery her nerves weakened by grieving for her little girl transported to Texas, and the cruel blows which had broken her arm and scarred her body - could not be left alone through the night. As I must have an excuse if found up at an unusual hour, I improvised a sick room. My son sleeping on the sitting-room lounge for a patient; my rocking chair; a stand with cups, vials and night lamp beside him were above suspicion. All night I crept to and fro in slippered feet. Peering from the skylight in the rook, from which in the bright moonlight all the approaches could be plainly seen anon; whispering words of cheer to Caroline in her cell, and back again to watch and wait and whisper. At 12 o'clock - mid the cheerful crowing of cocks on both sides of the river - having taken a careful survey from the sky-light, I passed a cup of fresh hot coffee to Caroline and sitting by the open floor drank my own with apparent cheerfulness, but really in a tremor of indignation and fear; fear of a prolonged incarceration of the poor victim of oppression and indignation at the government that protected and the manhood that stayed its hand from "breaking the bonds and telling the oppressed go free." Seven o'clock in the morning the slaves-hunters rode out of town into the interior. When evening fell again Caroline and another girl of whom the hunters were in pursuit found safe conveyance to Leavenworth friends.