



*Potawatomi Indian Mission, St. Marys, Kansas, ca. 1865–1869.*

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# Uniontown and Plowboy– Potawatomi Ghost Towns: Enigmas of the Oregon-California Trail

*by Tom Ellis*

**U**niontown is a ghost town on the Oregon–California Trail with a short, complex history. The establishment of Uniontown near a historic location known as Plowboy was a government-encouraged attempt at both commercial expansion and social engineering. Government Indian agents attempted to unify semi-autonomous bands of the Potawatomi—now known as the Prairie Band and the Citizen Band—under one administration as the tribe endured relocation and treaty manipulation. It was an experiment that ultimately failed. Uniontown did not stand the test of time either as the tribal center for the unified Potawatomi or as a commercial center and growing town on the Oregon–California Trail. Plowboy continued, as it had before the establishment of Uniontown, as a locus of community activity until the 1880s, when it officially ceased to exist.

Located in the Indian territory that subsequently became Kansas, Uniontown and Plowboy are both gone now—ghost towns with little to show but their names in the chronicles of Kansas and western history. This article illuminates the origins and demise of these two places linked by location, trading history, government Indian policies, and westward migration on the Oregon–California Trail. Uniontown is the name that appears most often in references by Oregon–California Trail travelers. Plowboy’s origins and existence are less well chronicled but significant to the history of Uniontown. Because Uniontown is the more recognized trading center, it is appropriate to begin our narrative with a sketch of Uniontown before discussing its neighboring community, Plowboy.

In 1849, excluding military posts in the West, Uniontown was the last major civilian center of commercial activity and supply on the Oregon–California Trail and a significant settlement along the trail between the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast. It was near important crossings on the Kansas River. Today, a small frontier cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places located across the road from the Green Wildlife area points to its location.<sup>1</sup> It was

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1. The Green Wildlife area is north of the West Union Road exit from I-70 in Shawnee County. There is another Uniontown in Kansas which still exists. It was first established in 1858 as Turkey Creek in Bourbon County. The name changed to Uniontown in 1871. In 1851–1852 a post office for a place called Uniontown existed in Wyandotte County. Neither is related to Uniontown in Shawnee County. “Kansas Post Offices, 1828–1961,” Kansas Historical Society, [kshs.org/geog/geog\\_postoffices/search/placename:Uniontown](https://kshs.org/geog/geog_postoffices/search/placename:Uniontown).



The Uniontown Cemetery in Shawnee County, shown here, houses the remains of many who died during the cholera epidemic of 1849–1850, including white settlers and a mass grave of twenty-two Potawatomi. The population of Uniontown declined dramatically but soon rebounded due to traffic on the Oregon–California Trail.

once a place important to tens of thousands of emigrants and gold seekers, missionaries, and Potawatomi Indians. How could it evaporate so suddenly?

During its short existence, Uniontown was at the heart of the busiest crossing of the Kansas River. Travelers on the Oregon–California Trail left comments in their diaries about stores, bakeries, and beer shops they found. On May 18, 1849, George Miffling Harker wrote, “To-day we journeyed through a beautiful country—arrived at this place, *sometimes called Uniontown*, a trading post for the American Fur Company, and several individual fur companies, among the Pottawatomie Indians.”<sup>2</sup> Uniontown was established in 1848 as an Indian Pay Station and trading post on the Oregon–California Trail. Tragically, cholera ravaged the region and was particularly bad along the Oregon–California Trail.<sup>3</sup>

Disease killed or drove away most of the population in 1849 and 1850. The Potawatomi were particularly savaged by cholera.<sup>4</sup> Uniontown was almost deserted with only the physician and three traders remaining. But traffic on the trail remained robust, and Uniontown soon bloomed again as a trading center. At its peak it had sixty buildings and nearly three hundred residents including a physician, two blacksmiths, a wagon maker, gunsmiths, and a saw mill operator. By December 1852, its light had faded again, as another cholera outbreak ravaged the area. Although Uniontown was created suddenly, its demise followed several fits and starts, and by 1858 it disappeared when the Potawatomi Pay Station closed.<sup>5</sup> There is little question that the closing of the pay station

2. Emphasis added. “Diary of George Miffling Harker,” in Daniel Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas* (Holton, Kans.: The Gossip Printery, 1979), 2:3.

3. Ramon Powers and Gene Younger, “Cholera on the Overland Trails, 1832–1869,” *Kansas Quarterly* 5 (Spring 1973): 37.

4. William G. Cutler and Alfred T. Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, 1883), available online at <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/shawnee/shawnee-co-p2.html>. Although many historians use the plural Potawatomis, the current leadership of the Citizen Band Potawatomi prefer the plural and singular spelling to be the same.

5. “Uniontown,” *Kansapedia*, Kansas Historical Society, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/uniontown/12228>.

was the final blow. In its heyday, 1848–1852, Uniontown could be thought of, in today’s vernacular, as a truck stop on the Oregon–California Trail, but there is little physical trace of its past glory.<sup>6</sup>

**P**lowboy is a much less recognized community, yet it was a mile and a half away from Uniontown, where roads to the river ferry on the Kansas River and the road to the west along the south side of the river diverged. Although never incorporated as a town, Plowboy was a place of commerce and settlement near Uniontown, and in fact it was “sometimes called Uniontown.” If Uniontown can be compared to a twenty-first-century truck stop, Plowboy can be compared to the small town near the exit ramp. It was a historic crossroads where every road—the California–Oregon Trail, the Military Trails from Fort Leavenworth and eventually Fort Riley, and the Mormon routes to Salt Lake City—converged.<sup>7</sup>

For a half-century, Plowboy was a locus of commerce on the south side of the Kansas River between Topeka and where the Oregon–California Trail crossed the river. In his diary entry in the spring of 1849, William Kelly described a place near Uniontown as “a little straggling suburb of wigwams.” That same spring, Kimball Webster also noted in his diary that he passed several small nearby settlements of Indians before reaching Uniontown.<sup>8</sup> These would have been Potawatomi and many of the traders were mixed-race Potawatomi or white traders married to Indian women.

Although Plowboy was the crossroads, Uniontown was where the government created an official trading center. Once that happened, Plowboy became a straggling suburb with historical links to transportation and commercial activity. There were at various times three or more ferries

operating on either side of Plowboy within a couple of miles, not including the rocky fords, one of which was between Uniontown and the Darling Ferry on the Oregon–California Trail. All of these spots are close to the trading post, originally founded by the American Fur Company as Chouteau’s trading post, almost twenty years before Uniontown was established. Likely, Plowboy was first settled by those with close association with the American Fur Company—among them, Métis Potawatomi traders and entrepreneurs.

Plowboy existed as a settlement and a center of commerce for more than a decade before Uniontown became officially designated and remained important to area citizens long after Uniontown faded. Both places are prominent in the history of the Potawatomi people, but during Uniontown’s existence, it overshadowed Plowboy. Uniontown was where government agents located white traders, and Plowboy was where Potawatomi made their homes and farms and where mixed Potawatomi and French entrepreneurs lived.

Geography and location are fundamental to the history of Uniontown and Plowboy. A government survey of Shawnee County in which Uniontown and Plowboy were located after its organization in 1854 described the land as “‘bottom land, 31 per cent; upland, 69 per cent; forest 8 per cent; prairie, 92 per cent.’ The timber . . . consists of elm, cottonwood, black walnut, oak, sycamore, box elder, hickory and ash . . . [and] is confined to bottoms of the Kansas River and the numerous creeks and streams tributary to it.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the reader can imagine tall prairie grass washing over the hills to the west, south and east of Uniontown. In the spring tall, golden grass tickles the belly of horses except in those stretches where fire has scalped the land left emerald with new growth in its wake. The hills are gentle with good, deep soil. Between the hills are wooded valleys with hardwood trees woven through with intermittent streams and spring-fed pools. The streams have steep mud banks with big trees, where prairie fires have spared them. Trees grow only in the fire-sheltered parts of the stream bed. Those streams are short—only two or three miles in length before they empty into the Kansas River to the north. On the south side of the Kansas River the banks are steep and rocky except where the streams enter and access to the river is easiest. Those high banks and prominent hills are covered with thick

6. In 2010 a field survey by Washburn University archeologist Margaret Wood and her students found scant evidence on the parcels of private land to which they had access. Margaret C. Wood, “In Search of Uniontown: Pedestrian and Metal Detector Survey of Fields that May be the Location of the Early Settlement of Uniontown, Kansas,” (unpublished paper, Washburn University, Topeka, Kans. August 2010).

7. The 1846 Latter Day Saints party that crossed Kansas was “known as the ‘Mississippi Saints’ under the leadership of William Crosby. This group consisted of 19 wagons and 43 persons, mostly from Southern states. They followed the original Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri, and at first traveled in company with non-Mormons.” Morris W. Werner, “Highway to Zion: The Kansas Connection,” Kansas Heritage Group, [www.kansasheritage.org/werner/highzion.html](http://www.kansasheritage.org/werner/highzion.html).

8. Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West: Annals of the Kansas Gateway to the American West 1540–1854* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1972), 795, 796.

9. Cutler and Andreas, *History of the State of Kansas*, 531, available online at <http://www.kancoll.org/books/cutler/shawnee/shawnee-co-p1.html>.



*Wagons on the Oregon–California Trail crossed the Kansas River at a point that closely resembled the view in this ca. 1960s photograph, which shows a site on the river near the location of Uniontown. This area was reputed at one time to be the last civilian location west of the Mississippi where travelers could purchase supplies on their way to Oregon.*

stands of hardwood timber protected from grass fire by the streams coursing around them. From the high bank, the Kansas River is a shining ribbon up to one hundred yards wide along the south side of a broad, flat valley of rich ground for farming.

Uniontown sat on a hill near Post Creek. The creek here is in a steep valley a few hundred yards wide, and water during dry periods is intermittent. The Oregon–California Trail dove steeply into the ravine at Uniontown. Nearby, Plowboy occupied Vassar Creek over the next hill to the east. It is a gentle valley with rich bottom land suitable for farming nearly a mile wide with wooded banks and generous water even during periods of drought. Vassar Creek empties into the Kansas River immediately downriver of the Point of Trees prominent on the early maps of the 1800s. The Oregon–California Trail traverses the creek where the mud bank gently descends to a rocky crossing. Geography made transportation routes along the trail possible, turning them into profitable locations for trade and giving rise to both Uniontown and Plowboy.<sup>10</sup>

Uniontown and its straggling suburb, Plowboy, are remembered primarily as ghost towns of the Oregon–California Trail. The description as ghost towns misses their importance in Kansas history. While they were prominent on the trail as trading centers, they are really

histories of the Indian, particularly Potawatomi, experience in Kansas. Thinking of Uniontown and Plowboy as simply ghost towns or trail waypoints ignores what these places represented. The details of Uniontown—which hilltop it might have been on and what years it might have thrived—draw us away from the larger picture of an active community that existed before and after Uniontown in the area. Like many towns, transportation supporting commerce is the reason for settlement.

Kansas was not the vast empty land often described by famous explorers. Buffalo, Plains Indians, and later fur traders used pathways through Kansas decades before explorer John C. Fremont made his trip of discovery along the Kansas River in 1842. Frederick Chouteau, brother of Pierre Chouteau, who ran and later owned the Western Department of John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company, controlled trade west of the Mississippi River. Fur trappers and traders had coursed the greater region around Uniontown and Plowboy for more than 150 years and specifically traded in the area of Uniontown for almost thirty years before it was established. Before the Oregon–California Trail and before the Potawatomi relocation along the Kansas River, Plowboy was a trading site for the Kansa Indians.

10. The author surveyed both Post and Vassar Creeks in March 2014 during a period of drought to confirm water flow. Public access to these sites is welcomed. The State of Kansas owns land at both the Uniontown and Plowboy sites. The Green Wildlife Refuge adjacent to

the Uniontown Cemetery National Historic Site has walking trails and Oregon–California Trail ruts. The Fitzgerald Wildlife Area is located at Plowboy—wagon ruts are prominent where the trail splits to the northwest toward Uniontown and the Darling Ferry.

In 1829 the Kansa Indians, who had villages near present-day Manhattan, Kansas, relocated eastward from the Kansas River and Big Blue junction. In September 1829, Reverend Isaac McCoy, Indian agent and Baptist missionary, along with Kansa principal chief White Plume led a group on a “tour of exploration” of the Kansas region. Where they went and what they discovered was never reported. White Plume’s son-in-law, Louis Gonville, a Frenchman, served as the interpreter and spoke little English. McCoy kept secret the geographical clues of their tour. Nevertheless, Kansa villages and a Baptist mission were soon located near a Chouteau trading post not far from where Plowboy would develop and where Uniontown would sprout in 1848.<sup>11</sup> This moved them forty miles closer to Missouri, downstream from three villages west and north of present-day Topeka along the Kansas River. It is likely McCoy was attempting to influence the location of a trading center because in December 1829, Kansa sub-agent M. G. Clark, who controlled his license to trade, advised Frederick Chouteau to abandon his trading post at Horseshoe Lake (near present-day Lawrence) because it was unprofitable.

Around 1830, Frederick Chouteau established a trading post on a tributary of the Kansas River upriver from current-day Topeka. The Kansa Indians had villages a couple of miles either side of their trading post on American Chief Creek (later renamed Mission Creek). Hard Chief located his village of five hundred to six hundred people at the place we later identify as Plowboy. For blankets, guns, tobacco, and whiskey, Chouteau traded pelts and cash the Kansa Indians received from annuity payments from the government.<sup>12</sup> In April 1838, the American Fur Company launched a caravan headed west from Westport, Missouri, that traveled the Santa Fe Trail until it split away to follow the Kansas River to “a point of timber” (west of Topeka) where they awaited a pirogue supply boat before crossing the river. Chouteau’s company transferred goods from the pirogue and the overland caravan to the company’s flat bottom

boat (presumably in place when they arrived) across the river. This site became a stronger crossroads location as Frederick Chouteau claimed to own the only keelboats on the Kansas River, which were used to haul pelts to St. Louis. Chouteau’s operation was on the south side of the Kansas River near the mouth of Mission Creek, where timber would have been more plentiful. Timber, scarce on the wildfire-scorched plains, would have been as important to missionaries and Chouteau as it was to the Kansa Indians and Uniontown’s founder, Indian sub-agent Richard W. Cummins, two decades later. Chouteau and his company operated along and upon the Kansas River likely no more than five miles from the site where, decades later, Cummins and A. J. Vaughan planted their flag for Uniontown.<sup>13</sup>

**E**arly trappers and fur traders in the region were French and had a long association with the American Fur Company and its rivals. The French connection is part of the Uniontown and Plowboy story. The only constant in the area is commercial activity, which Chouteau controlled. Chouteau’s operations were intertwined with the activities of Indian agents representing the government. Increasingly, the road crossing the Kansas River became more important than the river itself, and business with emigrants overshadowed business with Kansa Indians. Through the 1830s and early 1840s the Kansa Indians had a reputation for being a terror with respect to their neighboring tribes, which may have hastened their declining value as business partners.<sup>14</sup> They earned that reputation by both violence and alcohol—no doubt interrelated. At Plowboy, the Indian trade was the reason for Chouteau’s trading center. Eventually, however, the Kansa Indians were pushed out, as government policy moved the Potawatomi in, and they became the successor to the Kansa Indians as a trading partner at Uniontown and Plowboy.

*Laissez-faire* economic beliefs and commercial exploitation of the rich resources of the central plains combined with a country hungry for land, and the riches of opportunity, placed both Uniontown and Plowboy at the

11. Isaac McCoy, “History of Baptist Indian Missions,” in Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 164.

12. Louise Barry, compiler, “Kansas Before 1854: A Revised Annals, Part Nine, 1836–1837,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 29 (Spring 1963): 43, available online at <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-historical-quarterly-kansas-before-1854-a-revised-annals-part-nine/17907>; “Senate Document 110,” 21st Cong., 1st Sess., in Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 167; “Cool Things—Keelboat Steering Oar,” *Kansapedia*, Kansas Historical Society, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/cool-things-keelboat-steering-oar/10384>.

13. Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 345; 21st Cong., 1st Sess., in Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 167; the map provided by Barry clearly shows the Point of Trees on the first survey map at the location where the roads split. “Shawnee County map of 1874,” in Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 167.

14. William E. Unrau, *Indians, Alcohol, and the Roads to Taos and Santa Fe* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 33.

crossroads of history. Indians were moved from place to place as others coveted their lands. The Potawatomi were pressured into agreements with the government as they were being forcibly relocated. As the Kansa Indians were moving their villages in the 1830s, the Potawatomi were being forced to move from the upper Midwest and Great Lakes.

Several small bands of Indiana Potawatomi, hereinafter called Citizen Band, signed a treaty on February 11, 1837, in Washington for land along the Marais de Cygnes, a tributary of the Osage River near Osawatomie, Kansas.<sup>15</sup> They left the upper Midwest on an arduous relocation known now as the Trail of Death. While a few of the Prairie Band relocated to the Marais de Cygnes, the majority stopped at Council Bluffs, remaining recalcitrant about moving.<sup>16</sup> The Potawatomi were accustomed to dealing with white settlers and the government. John and Abram Burnett were among the interpreters. Abram Burnett later became a chief of the Potawatomi in the Topeka area. By the time of the tragic Trail of Death in 1838, the Potawatomi had lived with the French for more than two hundred years. There developed a subculture of French and Potawatomi of mixed ancestry known as Métis, but often negatively thought of as “half-breed” by both Indians and whites in the 1800s.<sup>17</sup> They traded and

worshiped with each other, intermarried and worked for the American Fur Trading Company, which had already set up business in the western region before the Potawatomi relocation to Kansas. Both Catholic clergy and American Fur Trading agents followed or led the Citizen Potawatomi to the Marais des Cygnes area. Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Company established a new post in 1839 for the newly arrived Potawatomi trade at a place to this day called Trading Post about three miles west of the Missouri line in Linn County. The establishment of the Marais de Cygnes Potawatomi and the Kansa trading post mentioned earlier had important parallels. Most certainly, Pierre Chouteau’s trading company was a connecting influence upon the Potawatomi, as was the employment by the Indian department of Métis leader Joseph N. Bourassa, a lawyer, as interpreter, and Jude W. Bourassa, as miller, both of whom would eventually settle at Uniontown.<sup>18</sup>

Baptist, Methodist, and Jesuit Catholic religious denominations had influence among the Potawatomi. The Jesuits seemed to have the most influence with the Citizen Band, although the Methodists opened a new station on what became known as Potawatomi Creek. Father Christian Hoecken, a Jesuit priest, joined the Potawatomi in October 1838 and reported a few months later that his mission was thriving and that six hundred Catholics could be counted among the Potawatomi in Kansas. Nevertheless, he urged them to move fifteen miles to Sugar Creek to give separation from the Protestants.<sup>19</sup> Religiosity was not the only function of missionaries. Both groups operated schools before the forced relocation to Kansas and after it. In 1845 Indian sub-agent Alfred Vaughan reported that the Citizen Band “are communicants, to the number of about eleven hundred, of the Roman Catholic Church — and too much praise cannot be awarded to the zealous fathers of the persuasion for the good they have wrought among the people. Two schools are in operation. The female one, under direction

15. There are two bands of Potawatomi, and in the historical record each was given multiple names according to the preference of the correspondent. The Citizen Band were called Indiana, and Dayton, Osage Potawatomi and Mission, because they had become Christianized by missionaries. The Prairie Band were called Chicago, Des Moines, and Council Bluffs. These names reflect relocations over time and other names can be found to refer to each band beyond those referenced here. The names “Prairie” and “Citizen” were not formalized until 1861 but are used here for the sake of continuity. “Timeline History of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation,” pamphlet (Shawnee, Okla.: Citizen Band Potawatomi Nation), 2012.

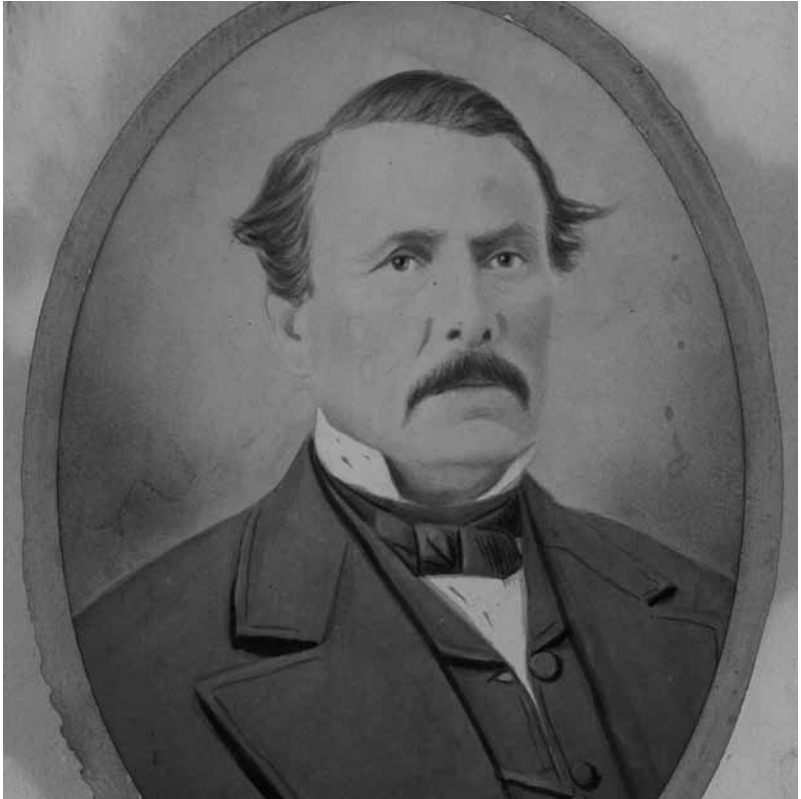
16. The Potawatomi had their first contact with Europeans in 1615 with French explorer Samuel de Champlain. By 1670, the Potawatomi had contact with Christianity when they met with Father Claude Allouez, a Jesuit priest. From 1742–1748 during King George’s War, the Potawatomi fought with the French against the British in New England and a few years later in 1754 with the French again in the French and Indian War. The Trail of Death cost the lives of 40 of the 875 who started the trip. This was one of a pattern of tribal relocations for the Potawatomi from their original lands in New Brunswick west through the Great Lakes. It was not to be their last relocation. “Timeline History of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation,” and Joseph Murphy, *Potawatomi of the West: Origins of the Citizen Band* (Shawnee, Okla.: Citizen Band Potawatomi Tribe, 1988), 131.

17. Commissioner C. A. Harris, letter, July 21, 1837, in Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 319; James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture 1665–1965* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 134.

18. Joseph N. Bourassa became a full instructor at the Jesuit School in 1840 and taught English. He was noted to be active and influential in the affairs of the tribe. Hoecken, “Narrative and Diary, 1837–1848: Annual Report of Sugar Creek Schools 1842,” trans. James O’Meara (St. Mary’s, Kans.: St. Mary’s College Archives), 14, in Murphy, *Potawatomi of the West*, 110; Joshua Pilcher, superintendent of Indian Affairs, “Abstract of Licenses Granted, St. Louis, for the Year 1839,” in Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 376; Report by Agent Richard W. Cummins, recorded by 29th Cong., 1st Sess., in Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 569.

19. Barry, *The Beginning of the West* 315; Hoecken, “Diary,” in Barry, *Beginning of the West*, 356.

of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, deserving particular commendations.”<sup>20</sup> Competition between the religious orders to receive funding for education from the government became a source of tension among the Potawatomi. There were socio-economic divisions among the Potawatomi as well. The Citizen Band was generally more successful at trading and agriculture, and included among their numbers multiple generations of educated members. It was American Fur Company agent Alexis Coquillard who in 1840 first secured acceptance of the idea to unite the bands of Potawatomi. He proposed that they could be brought together at Sugar Creek with those under the religious stewardship of Father Hoecken. Métis leaders Luther Rice and Joseph Napoleon Bourassa were sent to Council Bluffs to meet with the Prairie Band but were rebuffed. Coquillard was wrong about how many of the Potawatomi were Catholic and their willingness to be together as a Christian community.<sup>21</sup> Educated members of the Potawatomi including Rice and Bourassa are important to the story of why the Potawatomi were relocated to the Kansas River basin around Uniontown and Plowboy. While the Potawatomi Métis leaders had less sway with government officials in Washington than did the Prairie Band leaders, their cooperation with agents and traders was influential through the 1830s and 1840s with respect to the commercial ramifications of their relationship with the government. Trade with Indians was important economic activity.



*This ca. 1860 portrait shows Joseph Napoleon Bourassa (1810–1877), a leader within the Métis (mixed French and Potawatomi) subculture. The Métis were negatively seen as “half-breeds” by both whites and Indians but served as important liaisons with traders and Indian agents.*

Meanwhile, the certainty of Iowa statehood (December 28, 1846) became the driving force to once again relocate and unify the Potawatomi Nation. The press of white settlement pushed the Prairie Band out of Iowa, but they objected to relocation with the Citizen Band along the Missouri border at Marais de Cygnes. The Prairie Band argued the land was unhealthy and unproductive, and they were not interested in being unified with the Citizen Band.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. government subjected each tribe to a “carrot-and-stick” administrative philosophy.

The government wanted Indian land, and it offered cash for land and annuity payments or the threat of forced removal.<sup>23</sup> The Kansa Indians were restricted to a new reservation around Council Grove on the Santa Fe Trail at the headwaters of the Neosho River. It was an area of small rivers and streams that were not navigable or part of the transportation system of the time like the Kansas River was, and, like all Indians relocated to reservations, the Kansa Indians retained only a small part of their original range.

of Mormons who stopped along the Missouri River on their migration to Salt Lake, many of whom abandoned polygamy, dropped out of the emigration to Salt Lake, and settled in western Iowa. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 315–46.

23. On December 2, 1845, the Potawatomi reached a deal to pay \$850,000 and receive a new reservation on the Kansas River in exchange for vacating their lands in Iowa and around Marais de Cygnes. Elliott was to receive \$3,000 in silver from the Potawatomi for his services as middleman in the deal. The deal later fell apart. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 339–42.

20. Murphy, *Potawatomi of the West*, 96.  
 21. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 330.  
 22. By this time, the Prairie Band were being invaded by thousands



In June 1846, a treaty was held with the two divisions of the tribe. It was concluded on June 5 at the Potawatomi Agency, near Council Bluffs, with the Iowa or Prairie Band; and on June 17 with the Kansas [Citizen] Band on Potawatomi Creek. "In this treaty," wrote Kansas historian William E. Connelley, "there was an attempt to bring together the tribes formed by the ancient division of the Potawatomes. It provided that the various bands of the Potawatomi Indians, known as the Chippewas, Ottawas and Potawatomes, the Potawatomes of the Prairie, the Potawatomes of the Wabash, and the Pottawatomes of Indiana, being the same people by kindred, by feeling, and by language, should unite and be consolidated into one people to be known as the Potawatomi Nation." While the Prairie Band did not want to go south to Marais de Cygnes, many among the Citizen Band did not want to go north and west to the Kansas River valley.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Potawatomi leaders, led by Chief Wabansi, the principal chief of the Potawatomi Nation and most closely associated with the Prairie Band, negotiated vigorously with Washington to make the best financial deal for the inevitable relocation.<sup>25</sup> Those chiefs of the Prairie Band who preferred to deal directly with Washington led the negotiation. Citizen Band leaders were largely left out of these talks and tended to work through missionary and business leaders who carried influence. Chief Wabansi died from injuries sustained in a stagecoach accident returning from Washington, and in the wake of corrupt behavior of Indian sub-agent Richard Smith Elliott, new sub-agents were assigned to the task of moving the Potawatomi to the Kansas River reservation. Deals agreed to in Washington unraveled. Some among the Citizen Band complained that the Kansas River area contained too little timber for houses and fences, but considerable influence by Father Felix Verreydt convinced them the move was advantageous. Agent Cummins, out of frustration at the slowness of progress toward the relocation, made his own tour of the Kansas River area and declared that the Potawatomi were very much mistaken about the lack of timber. He likely had commercial development of the Kansas River area of the Oregon–California Trail very much in mind, and locating the trading post that would become Uniontown on the south side of the river was certainly an appeasement of the Citizen Potawatomi.<sup>26</sup>

24. William E. Connelley, *A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1918), 1:260.

25. Wabansi has various spellings including Wa-Ban-Si. The town and county in Kansas that carry his name are Wabaunsee.

26. Murphy, *Potawatomi of the West*, 136, 142–43, 149.

Development meant money, and financial success was, understandably, a consideration. Missionaries to the Indians needed financing as well. The Methodists, Baptists, Catholics, and others all competed for influence (and government payments) among the Potawatomi and had their own evangelical and financial interests at heart. Reverend Isaac McCoy, by this time a well-known Baptist leader, argued that relocating the Indians would allow the territory to become first a colony of the United States for Indians and eventually a state for Indians. It was a concept abandoned by others who wanted the land for white settlement.<sup>27</sup> Cummins issued the trading licenses and thus had abundant contact with the American Fur Company and with Methodist missionary Reverend William Johnson and those who would conduct trade with the Kansa Indians at their new Council Grove area reservation. Perhaps the Methodists had their greatest influence with the tribes on the Santa Fe Trail—the Shawnee at Shawnee Mission and the Kansa Indians at Council Grove. While the Kansa Indians were being pushed out of the Kansas River valley, Methodist missionaries were trying to make Kansa Indian life at their new reservation better. But why replace one tribe of Indians with another?

It is likely that the Potawatomi, with considerable influence of the Métis subculture, were a better business partner. They were better educated and their commercial experience with the American Fur Company was valuable. The Oregon–California Trail was a road of growing commercial importance, and the Potawatomi were the best partner for the task. Also, some Indians among virtually every tribe in what would become Kansas had members who embraced white culture. They prospered from it using their leadership positions within the tribe to influence decisions that would benefit them personally and financially, even at the expense of the other tribal members. Many were of mixed European and American Indian ancestry with French surnames. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau in *The End of Indian Kansas* (1978) suggested that such Indians might be derogatively labeled "Uncle Tomahawks."<sup>28</sup> Government policy, transportation, commercial activity, and unenlightened self-interest created Uniontown from an area previously known as Plowboy.

27. H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854–1871* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 5.

28. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

The movement of first the Kansa Indians and later the Potawatomi Indians to and from the Plowboy commercial area is as much a part of Uniontown's history as the Oregon-California Trail. The existence of the Chouteau trading post that had serviced the Kansa Indians on the Kansas River fostered the settlement of traders, trappers, and others in an area where trails diverged and water was sufficient. That place would eventually be called Plowboy. When Plowboy received that designation is unrecorded in the historical record—the name first appears on local maps in 1861, but subsequent accounts imply that the Plowboy settlement emerged in the early 1840s. The origin of the name, like the date of its beginnings, appears to be a mystery. However, the distinct French influence among the traders of the region suggests that Plowboy was the anglicizing of the French words *plus bois*, meaning literally "more wood," but no doubt here translated as "many trees."

The portion of the Oregon-California Trail near Plowboy that diverts to the northwest is identified on local maps in 1861 as the "road to the Darling Ferry." The Darling Ferry operated on the Oregon-California Trail crossing the Kansas River on a deep hole just downstream a few yards from where Cross Creek enters from the north. The ferry, which commenced operation in 1840 under proprietor Lucius Darling, was funded by the federal government from treaty funds and officially called the Pottawatomi National Ferry. It was operated by Lewis Ogee, a Potawatomi. Plowboy was the junction of those two roads and straddled the Oregon-California Trail about a mile southeast of the Uniontown cemetery on Vassar Creek.<sup>29</sup>

It was not until 1848, when agents R. W. Cummins and A. J. Vaughan declared it so, that Uniontown became an officially designated location. On March 7, 1845, Vaughan reported in a letter, "I have accordingly stuck my stake and christened it union town," and five days later Cummins wrote: "The point selected by us is on the south side of the Kansas ["on high ground, near the river"] ... & very nearly in the center of their [the Potawatomes'] country, east & west & as nearly so north and south as good timber...

29. In 1867 Frank Darling, son of Lucius, was given patent to land adjacent to the location of the family owned trading post at Plowboy. Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas*, 2:3; George A. Root, "Ferries in Kansas: Part II, Kansas River, Concluded," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 3 (February 1934): 15-42, available online at <http://www.kshs.org/p/jabsas-historical-quarterly-ferries-in-kansas-part-ii-kansas-river-concluded/17899>.

KANSAS STATE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE  
**G O S P E L**  
ACCORDING TO MATTHEW,  
AND THE  
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES;  
TRANSLATED INTO THE  
PUTAWATOMIE LANGUAGE.  
BY JOHNSTON LYKINS.

Carefully compared with the Greek text.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE AMERICAN  
AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY, BY THE BOARD OF  
MANAGERS OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN MISSION ASSO-  
CIATION.

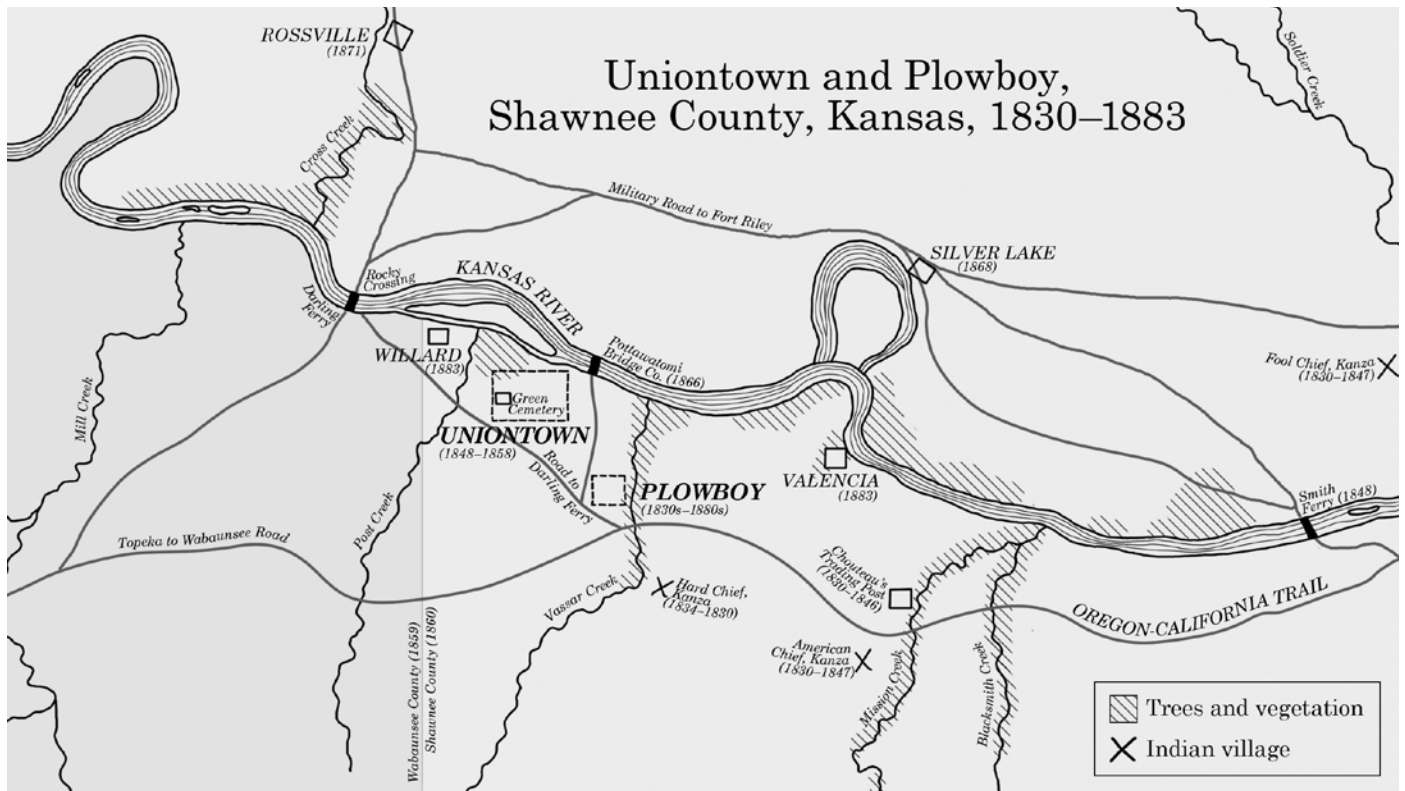
LOUISVILLE, Ky.  
William C. Buck, Printer.  
1844.

*Missionaries like Reverend Isaac McCoy, who explored the area near the future site of Uniontown in 1829 and established a Baptist mission soon after, and Father Christian Hoecken, a Jesuit who claimed to have converted six hundred Potawatomi to Catholicism in 1838, used religious literature like this to communicate with and "civilize" American Indians, whose religious and spiritual beliefs they thought barbaric.*

could be had. . . ." Their purpose was to locate "the [black] smith & traders for the Potawatomes."<sup>30</sup> Good timber was as essential to Uniontown's location as it had been to Plowboy's. Perhaps there is another hint to the mystery of Uniontown in Cummins's words "for the Potawatomes." In one sense it can have a paternalistic meaning that the Potawatomi needed to be cared and provided for by whites. Another, perhaps more illuminating reading of his words, would have Cummins's acting on behalf of or

30. A. J. Vaughan, letter, March 7, 1848, and R. W. Cummins, letter, March 12, 1848, in Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 737-38.

## Uniontown and Plowboy, Shawnee County, Kansas, 1830–1883



The above map shows the approximate locations of Uniontown and Plowboy, short-lived communities established near the Oregon–California Trail. In 1838 the federal government forced many Potawatomi from Indiana to relocate to the area, which had once been settled by Kansa Indians. The Potawatomi joined local communities in commerce, agriculture, and religion, forming an integral part of the trade that flourished along the Oregon–California Trail. Created by Katherine Goerl based on the research and drawing of Tom Ellis.

even at the insistence of Potawatomi leaders to mollify factions within the Potawatomi and stabilize the trading relationships already in existence. Certainly the choice of the town’s name by Indian agents was symbolic of the government’s desire that the Potawatomi unify.

Although the Citizen Band was reluctant to move to the Kansas River, they did so cooperatively and settled in villages south of the river. While cholera was devastating and many left, others did not. The Pappan brothers—Joseph, Louis, Achan, and Pelegie—were operating a ferry before 1846 across the Kansas River at what would become Topeka.<sup>31</sup> Joseph and Lewis Ogee operated a ferry close to that location as well. Near Uniontown was Lucius Darling’s Ferry. Jude Bourassa, brother of Joseph

Bourassa, was the government authorized miller and operated a mill a few miles west on Mill Creek. All were Potawatomi. Crossing the Kansas River on the north, a wagon first came to the sawmill and toll bridge operated by Frank Bourbonnaise, also a Potawatomi. Ten miles farther west another sawmill and toll bridge were operated by Louis Vieux, a Potawatomi who by all accounts and photographs appeared to be quite prosperous, dressed in the finest suit and top hat of the time. During the height of the season, those ferries could handle sixty wagons a day at two to five dollars each in 1850. These men were serious entrepreneurs and among the merchant class of the Kansas River valley.<sup>32</sup> Several lived in Plowboy and the

31. The Pappan (or Papin) brothers are generally identified as Frenchmen (see, for example, Barry, *The Beginning of the West*, 480, 584). There are clear family relationships with the Kansa Tribe, but Pappan descendants are also founding members of the Citizen Band, indicating close ties with both Indian nations. R. Blake Norton, Curator / Archivist of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Shawnee, Oklahoma, interview by author, September 30, 2014.

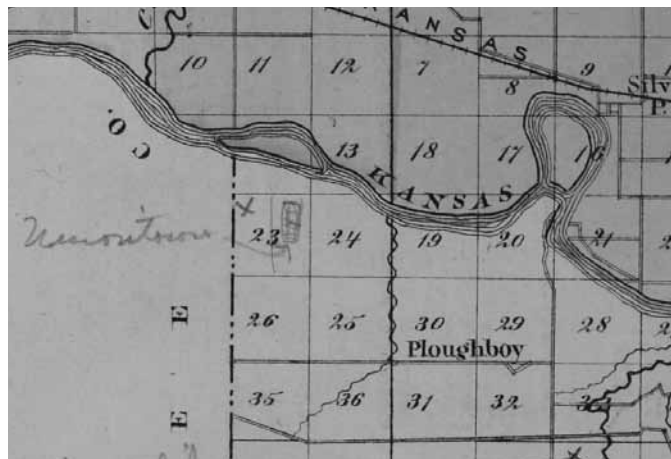
32. Some of their graves are at Uniontown, but other graves with primitive stones are found at Plowboy, including the grave of Dotti Darling who died at age sixteen in 1870. At Plowboy there are still “many trees,” some of considerable age, which James Fitzgerald, whose family has owned the Plowboy site since the 1870s, has dated to the time of the Oregon–California Trail. Near those trees, Fitzgerald has found evidence of the old dwellings, including artifacts that pre-date 1850. The Oregon–California Trail went through Fitzgerald’s property, and he has

vicinity, and there is considerable evidence of permanent settlement as structures remain of what is thought to be Darling's trading house.

Following the demise of Uniontown, Plowboy continued to be a center of community activity through the 1860s. On March 12, 1866, the Pottawatomie Bridge and Ferry Company was organized in Topeka by many of Topeka's founding fathers, including Dr. D. W. Stormont: "but a few rods from the mouth of what is now known as Vesper [Vassar] creek, was the location of the Pottawatomie Bridge and Ferry Company. A stone approach led up from the river at this point. . . . This was just one and one-half miles below the site of old Uniontown."<sup>33</sup> That bridge road intersected from Plowboy. This location is directly north of Plowboy one mile on the river, and the current land owner in January 2014, confirmed the existence of the rock road just under the surface. The road is discernible from aerial photos taken in 2012 and visible on the Shawnee County website. While commercial activity thrived in the Uniontown area, it was government payments to the Potawatomi which kept them tied to the town.

Uniontown was intended to unify the Potawatomi. In theory they would all come together in one place several times a year for allotment payments and by doing so become united. According to historian Daniel Fitzgerald, "Annuity gatherings usually lasted 10 to 15 days, during which time gambling, horse racing, and drinking were present for the Indians to enjoy along with their tribal dancing and funerals that enlivened the ceremonies. The Indians were paid separately their sums of money with \$6.00 to \$10.00 the largest share received by any of the Indians. Most of this money was spent on liquor before they left town."<sup>34</sup> Not unlike shopping centers today, certainly the traders wanted the Potawatomi people to be in one place with money in their hands. As the local newspaper recorded twenty-five years after Uniontown's demise:

There were quite a large number of houses and a brisk trade was carried on with the Indians; the principal commodities of course being calico and whisky. Union Town had its share of excitement in the shape of railroad and political mass-meetings and



Although Uniontown had faded away as an official settlement by the late 1850s, it is identified on this 1873 Shawnee County Atlas map in pencil, northwest of "Plowboy."

speculation in town lots ran as wild and reckless as in the average of early Kansas towns. But every other interest subsided at once on the event of the regular visit of the Indian agent with 'payment.' Everybody then claimed a perfect right to all the money he could trade, cheat or steal from the Indian. They all went in for 'a long pull, a strong pull and a pull altogether,' as long as the money lasted, and the poor deluded wretches [Potawatomi] couldn't hold on to it long under such a strain.<sup>35</sup>

It was up to the army, which was the only civil authority, to keep the swindlers, whiskey sellers, and blacklegs away.<sup>36</sup> General John C. Fremont visited on October 25, 1853, and reported in his diary, "Went to Uniontown and nooned. This is a street of log cabins. Nothing to be had here . . . lots of John Barleycorn [whiskey] which the men about were consuming."<sup>37</sup> At the time there was a government regulation against providing alcohol to Indians to which the army turned a blind eye. Also, land speculation on town lots was over ground that belonged to the Potawatomi in trust as part of their reservation. Speculators could not rightfully trade land that was legally owned by the Potawatomi. Prior to Kansas

done extensive research at the site and in the vicinity since the 1950s. James Fitzgerald, interview by author, February 2, 2014.

33. Root, "Ferries in Kansas: Part II," 18.  
34. Fitzgerald, *Ghost Towns of Kansas*, 2:2.

35. *St. Marys (Kans.) Times*, May 11, 1877.

36. Blackleg is a name given to a general category of cheating gamblers and swindlers.

37. John Charles Fremont, *Memoirs of My Life* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke and Company, 1886), 27.

becoming a territory in 1854, permanent settlement by non-Indians west of the Missouri border was, ostensibly, illegal according to the U.S. government, but ignored with government complicity. Even opening of Kansas Territory was not done because of the need for white settlers to escape overcrowding in the east. Iowa, for example, had only averaged three persons per square mile. Miner and Unrau noted, "Virgin soil, railroad rights of way, and lucrative town sites were more important than stuffy statistics and a permanent Indian policy conceived by a previous generation."<sup>38</sup> Uniontown and Plowboy were in decline after only a few short years.

As noted previously, the Citizen Band Potawatomi had a relationship with the American Fur Company and Chouteau for decades, and that business center had been near Plowboy. The decline of the fur trade caused Chouteau to scale down his operations in the West. Even in the decline of Chouteau's enterprise we do know the Citizen Band appealed to Chouteau a decade later to intervene on their behalf in conflicts with the government.<sup>39</sup> They thought of Chouteau as a partner. Chouteau's successor trading company, Boon and Hamilton, was complicit in the illegal trade of alcohol as most traders before them had been. The destructive powers of alcohol were as devastating as cholera, smallpox, and typhoid on Indian populations. While the decline of the Chouteau trading enterprise had a withering effect, so did the growth of Topeka and other towns east along the Kansas River. Uniontown was founded by government agents; Topeka was founded by visionary business leaders bolstered by the righteousness of their fervor that Kansas would join the United States slave free. The energy and fervor that founded Topeka was missing upriver at Uniontown.

Uniontown was founded on a logic that was destined to fail. The deal that Chief Wabansi had negotiated for payments before his death was diminished by later actions of the government to subtract large amounts from the payments. The government simply heaped expenses from years earlier into the settlement, subtracting them from the agreed upon \$850,000 cash settlement. And although the treaty was signed, it was done so by leaders of factions within both the Prairie and Citizen Bands and lacked universal support within the tribe.<sup>40</sup>

Even though Uniontown boomed to fifty buildings and three hundred residents, its time was short. At the

spring annuity payment in 1849, there were recorded 3,235 Potawatomi on the Kansas River.<sup>41</sup> While the Potawatomi were scattered near Uniontown and their farms and homes included the Plowboy vicinity, among other communities, there seems never to have been a unified appreciation for Uniontown to be the center of Potawatomi life.

It was not only stress from relocation, social upheaval, and cultural pressure that made life hard for the Potawatomi at Uniontown and Plowboy. Through the late 1840s and early 1850s, cholera came in waves along the Oregon-California Trail.<sup>42</sup> The Potawatomi were hit hard by cholera as they gathered to receive annuity payments. Twenty-two or more (accounts vary) Potawatomi are buried in a mass grave. The government appointed physician was stricken and died, and the residents fled. The town was abandoned out of the fear of the cholera scourge and was burned. Plowboy and Uniontown were adjoining areas, and Plowboy was where many of the Potawatomi homes were located. Those folks from Plowboy suffered as well, and their tales of woe are interwoven and inseparable with Uniontown.

Yet disease was not the only problem. The experiment with unified services for the Prairie Band and Citizen Band was never fully accepted, largely because the Potawatomi were never unified. It was a time of stress for the Potawatomi. Not only had they been moved—a stressful exercise in and of itself—but there were new stressors at their Kansas River reservation. In the summer of 1848, the Potawatomi, allied with the Sac and Fox, Kansa, and Kickapoo Indians, participated in a battle against the Pawnees over hunting grounds. Skirmishes with the Pawnee Indians continued until 1852, and fear of reprisal weighed on the Potawatomi. Tensions with other tribes over hunting grounds caused a major disruption for those Indians who relied on hunting more than commercial trade.<sup>43</sup>

The Kansas River created its own stresses. The Potawatomi north of the river, including the Prairie Band, complained about crossing the river to receive their annuity payments and petitioned for their own pay station, blacksmiths, and traders. Conflict also developed

38. Miner and Unrau, *End of Indian Kansas*, 5.

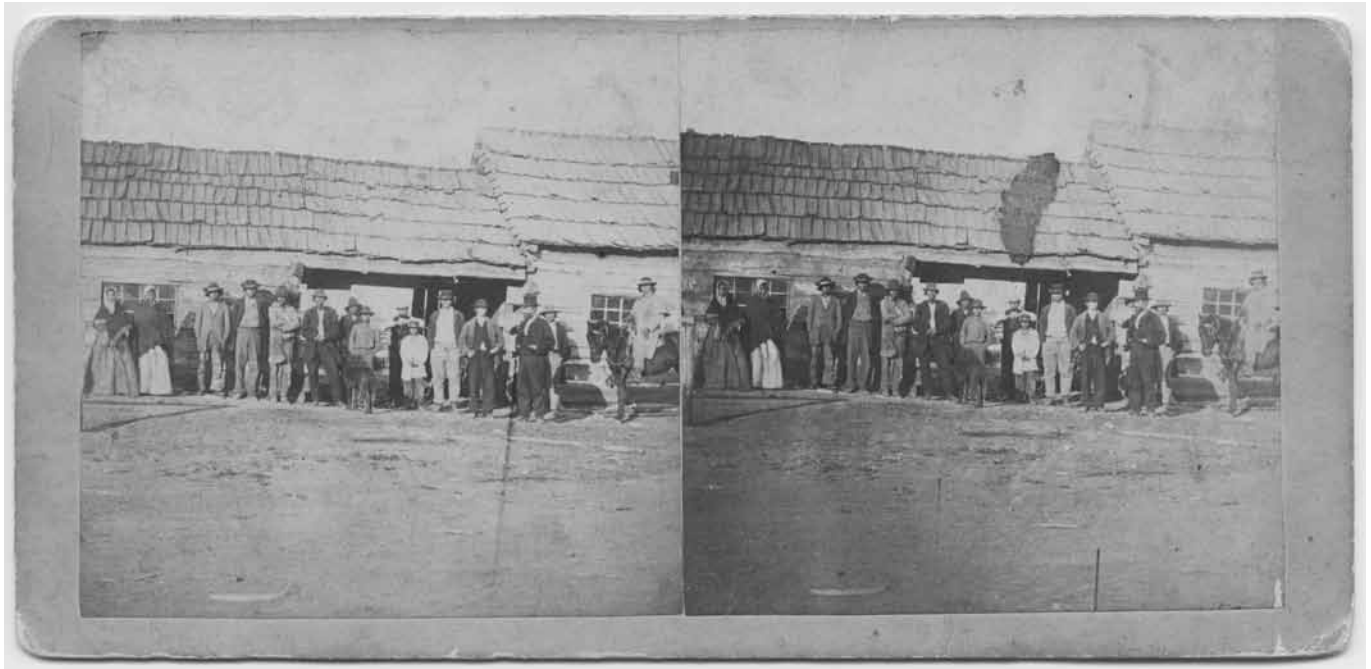
39. Murphy, *Potawatomi of the West*, 234.

40. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 341.

41. United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1848, Ex. Doc. No. 1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1849), 447, available online at <http://images.library.wisc.edu/History/EFacs/CommRep/AnnRep4650/reference/history.annrep4650.i0003.pdf>.

42. Powers and Younger, "Cholera on the Overland Trails," 32–39.

43. Murphy, *Potawatomi of the West*, 157–59.



*Alexander Gardner created this stereograph showing a group of Potawatomi at St. Mary's Mission in Potawattomie County, Kansas, in 1867 on his journey to the West along the Union Pacific Railway. The Catholic mission included a school and, following nineteenth-century philosophy, encouraged members of the Potawatomi to give up traditional Indian culture and assimilate to western ways of life. Accordingly, the Potawatomi pictured here all wore conventional western styles of clothing.*

over the concept of “national debts,” a decades-old practice of allowing traders to incur debt on behalf of the tribe and be directly reimbursed by the Indian agent. This put considerable power in the hands of traders and the chiefs the traders favored. The government began giving annuities directly to individual Indians, thus diluting their impact on any one trader and further dividing the centralized power within the tribe both by chiefs and the traders they favored. Citizen and Prairie Bands favored different traders, so the concept of concentrating them at Uniontown fell apart.<sup>44</sup>

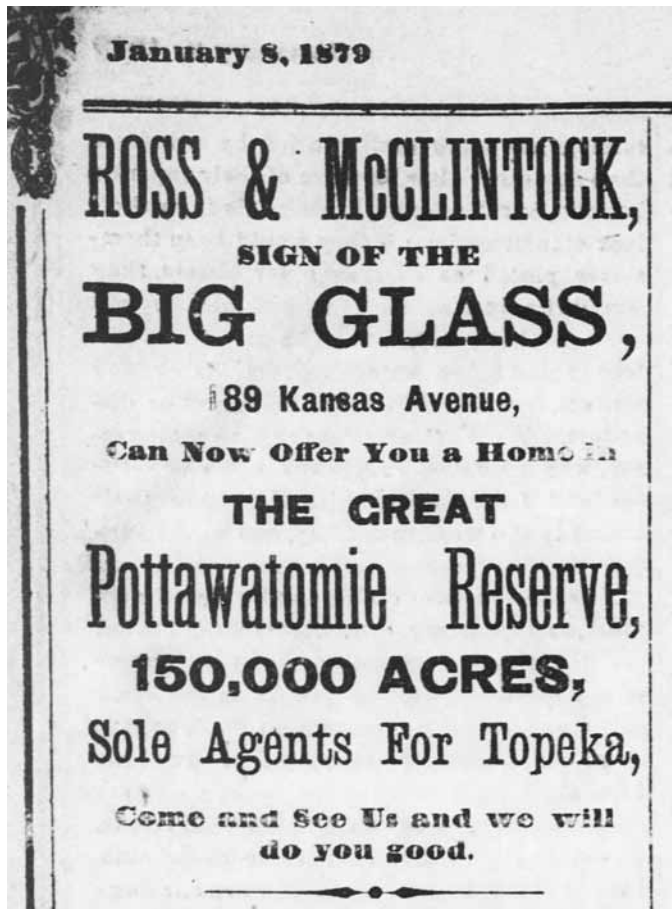
**F**rom the beginning there were complaints about being forced together. The Prairie Potawatomi sought more isolation and autonomy and rejected the influence of Christian missionaries. The Prairie Band may have disagreed with the Citizen Potawatomi who carried the favor of missionaries for the resources and influence that different denominations afforded. There was an effort to keep Uniontown and its philosophy of unification together. Uniontown was

reestablished in 1851 but had faded by late 1852. By then the Jesuits had firmly established their mission on the north side of the river at St. Marys, which became the center of religious life for the Catholic Potawatomi, who were largely Citizen Band. The Prairie Band did not embrace Christian religion and there developed an anti-Prairie Band sentiment among the Jesuits.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, an additional payment center eventually was established at St. Marys. Commerce was spread up and down the Kansas River on both sides.

Perhaps Uniontown was never rebuilt because it was a failed experiment in social engineering to push the Potawatomi bands together in a place festering with corruption and predatory actions toward the Indians. Ownership of land eventually trumped both commerce on the Oregon–California Trail and Potawatomi unification as the overarching influence on Uniontown and Plowboy. From the time Kansas became a territory in May 1854, there was a concerted effort to pry away the land entrusted to the Potawatomi along the Kansas River in

44. Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 377–78.

45. *Ibid.*, 344–45, 365, 380; “Uniontown Cemetery,” Registration Form, National Register of Historic Places, available online at [http://www.kshs.org/resource/national\\_register/nominationsNRDB/Shawnee\\_UniontownCemeteryNR.pdf](http://www.kshs.org/resource/national_register/nominationsNRDB/Shawnee_UniontownCemeteryNR.pdf).



From a January 8, 1879, issue of *Kansas Farmer*, this advertisement announces the sale of 150,000 acres of the "Great Pottawatomie Reserve." An 1861 treaty with the Kansas River Agency had divided Potawatomi land between the Prairie Band and individual members of the Citizen Band, making it easier for outsiders to acquire their land holdings.

1848. Even before 1854, while the land officially belonged to the Indians, competition by squatters, town developers, speculators, and railroads for control of acreage was fierce and government enforcement against white settlement was generally ignored. Most of the land in eastern and southern Kansas never became part of the public domain, so government policies allowing for preemption and homestead were not followed. The Potawatomi lands were allotted directly to individual Indians to break up the trust lands on the reservation. Those lands owned by individual Indians then became available to be ceded by their owners directly to individuals or companies. Alternatively, if they were ceded to the United States, it was done under trust for the benefit of the Indians and the government was then free to sell the land or allot those lands to individual Indians. After Kansas became

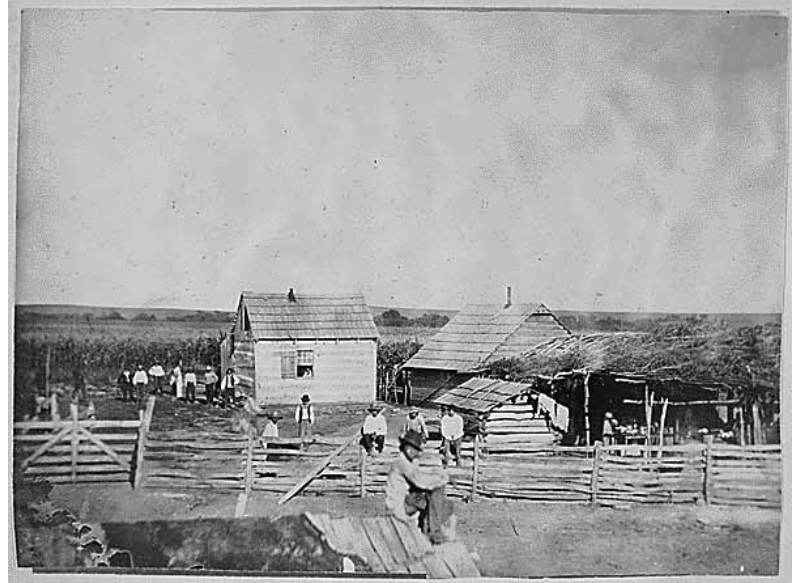
a territory, other burgeoning towns in the Kansas River valley emerged as real or potential commercial centers.<sup>46</sup> Many of those towns had political leanings for or against slavery and were active in attempts to tilt the balance one way or the other, supplying commercial energy and settlers for growth.

The Civil War caused more upheaval. The Citizen Band Nation records indicate that at least ten Citizen Band men volunteered for military service with Kansas volunteer units on the Union side. Perhaps tension caused by the notion that those soldiers favored the duty of citizenship was the final straw that shattered the unification of the Potawatomi on the Kansas River. In 1861 the Treaty of the Kansas River Agency caused the Mission (Citizen) Potawatomi to sell portions of their land and have it allotted to individual members. The treaty required that they distinguish themselves from the Prairie Potawatomi who decided to stay on their reservation and hold their land in common. The treaty also formally made the Mission Potawatomi citizens of the United States, and that was when they officially became known as Citizen Band Potawatomi. The government's orchestrated attempt at unification had transformed into an official effort to separate and divide the Potawatomi, making their land holdings easier to acquire. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad became the beneficiary of several hundred thousand acres of "Potawatomi Reserve" and marketed the sale of the land to settlers with a vigorous advertising campaign. The sale of Potawatomi land became the way to make money by companies and speculators. Uniontown and Plowboy, once important to the Oregon-California Trail, were left in the shadows as the railroad became the new transportation link to commerce and western expansion.

Plowboy continued as a "straggling suburb" under siege by land ownership policies of the day. Homes and businesses continued. Many of the same Métis Potawatomi leaders who influenced the move to the Kansas River stayed or returned when the Citizen Band relocated to Oklahoma. Those same Potawatomi men created a Business Committee for all Potawatomi, and in 1867 it evolved to be the first Citizen Potawatomi Business Committee. Those businessmen remained and

46. Paul Wallace Gates, "A Fragment of Kansas Land History: The Disposal of the Christian Indian Tract," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 6 (August 1937): 227-40, available online at <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-historical-quarterly-a-fragment-of-kansas-land-history/12721>; Cutler and Andreas, *History of Kansas*, 533.

thrived in Shawnee County. By the early 1870s, most of the Citizen Potawatomi had resettled to Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma), leaving behind a prosperous cadre of merchants. Even though Plowboy had been a geographic locale, it became an official location when a post office was established in 1871. It continued until 1882 when the post office name was changed to Redpath. It is not clear why the name changed, but in Potawatomi ceremonies today, members are encouraged to follow the “red road,” meaning to follow the Potawatomi way. It is not hard to imagine that the residents of Plowboy, in defiance of land grabs to take their property, would fight back with a symbolic name change. The Plowboy post office served the crews working to build the railroad along the south side of the river and survived until the railroad towns of Valencia and Williard became established. The Redpath post office continued operation until 1886 before closing. By the 1880s most of the land around Uniontown and Plowboy had already transferred from Indian ownership.



*A Potawatomi farmer named Pishedwin poses here in 1877 in front of his home in Kansas, which was likely within a few miles of Uniontown. Many Potawatomi settled near communities along the Kansas River in what is now eastern Pottawatomie and western Shawnee Counties. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.*

This closer look at Uniontown and Plowboy only shines a penlight on the panoramic mural that is the history of the Oregon–California Trail in Kansas and its development in relationship to western expansion and the predatory treatment, relocation, and removal of Indians. The villages are gone. A prescient view of the Potawatomi future can be found in the work of Rudolph Friederich Kurz, a noted Swiss artist and traveler. His drawings illustrate the dignity of the Potawatomi from when he interacted with them in 1848. He questioned “how long they would have the benefit of that retreat [on the Kansas River].”<sup>47</sup>

Plowboy was important to the fur trade, the Oregon–California Trail, and the Potawatomi. Even after statehood, settlers counted on services at Plowboy while the Kansas River was an important transportation link—either to use or cross—on the Oregon, California, and Military Trails. When the railroad was built, the river’s importance declined, and Plowboy ceased to be a place except in Kansas history. The prominent names among the Potawatomi who served the commercial needs of Oregon–California Trail travelers for flour, ferries,

bridges, lumber, and trade goods continued to live and prosper in the area. Assimilation, as a government policy, was adopted by many Potawatomi families who found life along the Kansas River valley suitable. Many of those families remain today. Other Potawatomi saw their land holdings disaggregated and snatched from them. The remaining homesteads became scattered from the center of tribal life. The Dawes Act of 1887 finalized the allotment process, and the Citizen Band officially moved to Shawnee, Oklahoma. The Prairie Band refused to have their communal lands divided, even though they had been allotted, and retreated to an eleven mile square of original reservation, isolating themselves from the others.

The ghosts of Uniontown and Plowboy remain. In many ways, Uniontown was like initials carved in the tree trunk of Plowboy, a place of many trees scarred and faded by time. Arguments are made that Uniontown never had big aspirants to propel the town to a stable future. But unlike most frontier towns that thrived, it was not built on a dream. Rather it was cobbled together on an artificially constructed notion that the Potawatomi, pushed from place to place by the government, could unify conflicted tribal bands in a commercial enterprise plagued by corrupt officials in a town focused on taking the Indians’ land and treaty payments. [KH]

47. Randolph Friedrich Kurz, “Sketch of Prairie Potawatomi Family on the Trail, 1848,” in Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 345.