

MIDCONTINENT PERSPECTIVES

[Midwest Research Institute](#)

Kansas City, Missouri

January 23, 1992

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Harvard University

Boston Investors and the Early Development of Kansas City, Missouri

Good afternoon. It is a sincere pleasure to speak to you today. Before beginning, I would like to recognize the support given to this project by Dr. Kimball. Frankly, Dr. Kimball's interest in this subject, having originated in the mid-1960s, is older than I am. Born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, Dr. Kimball wasn't much older than I am when he left Bunker Hill for Kansas City. In recognition of Kansas City's historic and continuing ties to New England, Dr. Kimball in 1975 urged that Kansas City and Boston become sister cities. Dr. Kimball has provided encouragement as my project progressed, and I am grateful for his support.

During this address, I hope to convey a sense of the importance of Bostonian investment to the Kansas City region. Boston's role in the development of the regional economy was unique. While New York, British, and even Dutch bankers provided the capital that fueled many of Kansas City's early industries and railroads, none had the influence of Boston on either specific industries or on the business climate of Kansas City. Charles Dudley Warner, an Eastern writer who ventured West in 1889, was quite impressed with the hustle and bustle of this young river town. Later that year, Warner wrote, "of all the wonderful towns in the West, none has attracted more attention in the East than Kansas City. I think I am not wrong in saying," he concluded, "that it is largely the product of Eastern energy and capital, and that its closest relations have been with Boston."¹

While Warner may have overstated his point, the influence of Eastern investment on the development of Kansas City has unfortunately been obscured by local dogma. The written history of the urban West in the late nineteenth century, typically the product of promotional schemes, has seldom been guided by fact or academic conventions. Kansas City's written history is no exception, as it tends to credit longtime local heroes, like Kersey Coates, Robert Van Horn, Isaac McCoy, and William McGee, with much of the city's early business success. While no one can deny the influence of local businessmen on the city's growth, their role has often been wildly exaggerated. The influence of local figures in Kansas City's economic growth is indeed only part of the story. It is the other part that I wish to tell, that of the Eastern capitalists who financed Kansas City's railroads and several key industries, and who, by their presence here, influenced the development of social and business institutions.

Kansas City's remarkable growth from a small river hamlet to a bustling industrial center did not occur, as local tales purport, because destiny dictated that a city should form at the apex of the two great rivers, nor was it due simply to the foresight of local political leaders or the

¹ Charles Dudley Warner, Studies in the South and West (New York: Harper & Bros., 1889), p. 349.

business cunning of local merchants. Kansas City was but one of many Western towns projected to flourish because of its geographical advantages and business climate. Boosterism alone did not guarantee commercial success. As Jeffrey Adler writes in his recent book, various rivals of St. Louis lost that regional contest despite their geographical advantages.² In St. Louis and Chicago, like Kansas City, the decisive factor was neither location nor local spirit, but the ability of land speculators and local politicians in these cities to attract and maintain outside investment, and thereby develop their ties to national markets.

The New England Emigrant Aid Company

Before turning to Kansas City directly, I'd like to touch on the connections between New England and this region before the Civil War. In the mid-1850s, as the Kansas-Nebraska Act polarized national politics, Eastern emigrant aid companies dispatched settlers to the new territories to establish squatter sovereignty and influence the outcome of local debates over slavery. The most active of these, the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Company (later renamed the New England Emigrant Aid Company), was backed to the tune of \$5 million by Horace Greeley, the publisher of the *New York Tribune* and the *New Yorker*; Amos Lawrence, a Boston industrialist whose family established the mill towns of Lawrence and Lowell, Massachusetts; and Boston writer William Cullen Bryant. Led by Eli Thayer, a Worcester, Massachusetts, legislator and the company's agent, the New England Emigrant Aid Company began its Kansas Crusades in 1856. The Company's efforts were publicized by the Reverend Edward Everett Hale and John Greenleaf Whittier.

The Emigrant Aid Company established several towns in this region, including Atchison, Lawrence, Topeka, and Osawatimie. The town of Lawrence bears the name of Amos Lawrence, one of the early subscribers to the college that became the University of Kansas. In addition, Mount Oread at the University of Kansas is named for Eli Thayer's Oread Collegiate Institute in Worcester.

The Company's presence in the region fueled tensions that arose as Missouri border ruffians infiltrated Kansas territory. In 1854, the Company bought the Gillis House Hotel in Kansas City, which was renamed the American Hotel. The hotel became an abolitionist headquarters, and faced numerous bomb threats from pro-Southern forces in the city, but was protected by pro-Union forces organized by Colonel Kersey Coates.

After the Civil War, the Company's commercial contacts provided opportunity for speculative investments by Easterners as the transcontinental railroad system resumed construction. And it was the 1860 Kansas election campaign tour by Republican leader William H. Seward, who later became Lincoln's secretary of state, that first brought Charles Francis Adams, Jr., to the Kansas City area. These links became important a few years later as the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston Railroad, which began as a local paper road, was bought out by an important railroad syndicate known as the Forbes Group.

The Railroad Network

The eventual preeminence of Kansas City among the cities of the Missouri Valley was unthinkable in 1850, the year of its establishment. Leavenworth and Atchison, and even St. Joseph and Independence, all had larger populations, and were far more important centers of

²Jeffrey Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.8.

commerce. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., the central figure in my research, was fairly blunt in his assessment of prewar Kansas City. Adams called the river town “a forbidding spot on the southern bank of the Missouri. A mere steamboat stopping place, it was no more important than a dozen others up and down the stream and immeasurably less important than several.”³ The arrival of the Missouri Pacific, which connected Kansas City to St. Louis in 1865, was followed a few years later by the extension of the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad, marking a significant watershed in Kansas City’s history. The construction of the Hannibal Bridge over the Missouri River from 1867 to 1869 is recognized as the event which most sealed the city’s economic fortunes.

Unfortunately; this event and its implications have been erroneously portrayed as the masterwork of local boosters. A more accurate account of the bridge tale recognizes that while local officials did influence the railroads, factors beyond their control played a decisive role in the bridge’s eventual location. The 1866 decision by the directors of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to extend the Hannibal & St. Joseph over the Missouri River at Kansas City rather than at Leavenworth was but the first of several events that contributed to the city’s eventual growth. The opening of the bridge alone lacked sufficient momentum to fuel Kansas City’s economic growth. The ongoing investment decisions made by Easterners greatly influenced the gradual development of Kansas City and its Midwestern hinterland.

The Forbes Group was named for Boston railroad magnate John Murray Forbes, who earned considerable wealth in the China trade. Forbes held interests in a network of railroads centering in Chicago, primarily the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy. Despite Forbes’ ambition to connect the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad in Iowa to the Union Pacific at Omaha, and from there to the northwest, the president of the Hannibal & St. Joseph, James F. Joy, decided instead to develop the Hannibal and pursue a course to the southwest. Joy’s decision ran contrary to Forbes’ interests, as the Hannibal route to Kansas City intersected with several competing roads. Despite these concerns, Joy was backed by Nathaniel Thayer, another important Boston investor, whose support Forbes thought crucial to the expansion of his system.

Joy’s decision to pursue the latter course and concentrate on Kansas City was made primarily because he owned a sizable interest in the West Kansas City Land Company, which platted the land now known as the West Bottoms, and because a congressional land grant in Kansas promised a handsome profit. While Joy’s decision caused some consternation within the Forbes Group, the Kansas City Bridge was an important first event which led Thayer and Joy to invest heavily in Kansas City industrial land. Joy’s maneuvering undermined his relationship with Forbes, however, and, combined with a later dispute, it contributed to his dismissal from the company’s directorate.

The Burlington railroads, with Thayer’s backing, soon purchased controlling interests in other regional railroads along a route to the southwest. Among these were the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston, which became the Kansas City, Lawrence and Southern; the Kansas City, St. Joseph and Council Bluffs; and the Kansas City, Topeka and Western, which became a part of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. Control of these roads lay not in Kansas City, but in Boston, and the managers of important sections of the lines were usually dispatched from New England or Chicago.

³ Charles Francis Adams, Jr., *Diary*, 31 December 1888, *Charles Francis Adams II Papers*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (hereafter MHS).

The Kansas City Stock Yards Company

The concentration of these railroads in Kansas City led to the establishment of several subsidiary enterprises, many of which were associated with the livestock trade. In 1871, Burlington president James M. Walker and railroad agent L.V. Morse established the Kansas Stock Yards. The yards consisted of little more than a few holding pens for Texas cattle on their way to Eastern markets. The Kansas Stock Yards remained a minor operation until 1874, when Charles Francis Adams, Jr., backed by Thayer and others, successfully purchased a controlling interest in the company's stock, and reorganized the operation as the Kansas City Stock Yards Company of Kansas.

Adams, a member of the fourth generation of America's most prominent political family, was drawn to the West, like others of his generation, by the promise of great wealth attached to the development of Western railroads. From early in adulthood, Charles Francis strove to become the new pillar of his family. To back his excessive borrowing, Adams successfully manipulated the family dower entrusted to him and his older brother John. Although Adams never fulfilled his ambition of achieving a status equivalent to that enjoyed by the Vanderbilts and the Astors, he was at a young age one of the most respected members of Boston patrician society.

Adams began investing in Kansas City in 1869, as he successfully maneuvered himself into positions with the Leavenworth, Lawrence and Galveston and other Burlington-controlled roads. As a director of these roads, Adams developed associations with Nathaniel Thayer, James F. Joy, and Charles Merriam, treasurer of the Kansas City, Fort Scott & Gulf. To varying degrees, these men backed Adams' personal investments as well.

After 1879, Adams' Kansas City investments were managed by Charles Fessenden Morse, a Boston-born railroad agent. The younger son of a Boston merchant, Morse was trained as a civil engineer at Harvard University's Lawrence Scientific School. He apprenticed with a prominent Boston architect until the start of the Civil War, when he volunteered with the Second Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. Morse's war experience was exemplary, and his service in the Second earned the admiration of prominent members of Boston society. The leadership of the Second was composed of volunteers, including Boston notables Robert Gould Shaw, who went on to lead the 54th Colored Regiment, and Henry Lee Higginson, who later joined the First Massachusetts Cavalry.

Morse distinguished himself within the ranks of the Second, first as captain, and later as major. He commanded his regiment at Gettysburg and earned great respect as a military leader. Lieutenant Colonel Morse led the Second into Richmond upon its fall in May 1865. He was mustered out of the service as a brevet-colonel, and retained his military title in business and social circles.

Morse arrived in Kansas City in February 1879, after several years with Forbes-controlled railroads and after five years as general superintendent of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe at Topeka. Morse's primary assignment was as general manager of the Kansas City Stock Yards. His aims were bold: "The object of my life now," he boasted to Henry Lee Higginson, "is to help make Kansas City the Chicago of the Missouri Valley."⁴ Leaving his wife and two daughters in

⁴ Charles F. Morse to Henry Lee Higginson, 31 December 1878, *Henry Lee Higginson Collection*, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, Boston, Massachusetts.

Topeka, Morse boarded at the Coates House until he built a home that summer on Quality Hill. “I like the bustle and stir of Kansas City,” he later reported to Higginson. “I think we shall like the place very well after getting used to the hills and the holes.”⁵

New England Investment in Land

Morse’s first task in Kansas City was to locate prime tracts of land for investment purposes. Being familiar with Kansas City, Morse recommended that Adams purchase land on the west side of the Kaw River, on which several small farms were situated. This land, an isolated flood plain separated from Kansas City by the Kaw and from the town of Wyandotte by a precipitous bluff, lacked any real improvements and seemed uninspiring. With the construction of a bridge from Kansas City, however, Morse thought the tract would be a tremendous investment opportunity. On a cold and rainy day early that spring, Morse and Adams tramped about the west side of the Kaw, their view of Kansas City obscured by a belt of cottonwood trees. “From appearances about us,” Morse later recounted, “we might have been miles away from any centre of population.” But the fact that land in Kansas City, just opposite this site, sold for nearly a thousand dollars an acre made the proposition seem tremendous. Adams agreed, and authorized the purchase of the farms.⁶

Adams met with Philip 17. Armour in Kansas City during this visit, ostensibly to discuss the impact of the land purchase on the Armour Company’s holdings in Kansas. In 1871, at Adams’ suggestion, the Armours relocated their operations from Missouri to Kansas (a move of only a few hundred yards). To encourage expansion, Adams offered to name the new town Armourdale. As a result, Simeon Brooks Armour, the youngest member of the packing family and manager of the Kansas City plant, directed an expansion of the firm’s holdings over the next ten years. Eventually, numerous four- and five-story buildings sat upon the ten acres of ground.

With these prospects in hand, Adams returned to Boston and discussed the proposal with the directors of the Stock Yards Company. In late July 1879, the Kaw Valley Town Site and Bridge Company was chartered as a Kansas corporation. In this affair, as in others to follow, Adams relied on financing from Boston associates and partnerships with local investors. Listed in the directorate of the company were notable Boston railroad financiers, among them Charles Merriam; Horatio Hopis Hunnewell, a principal backer of the Hannibal & St. Joseph; and longtime railroad investors John Appleton Burnham and Nathaniel Thayer. Adams and his older brother John provided the remaining capital for the land syndicate, which totaled \$300,000, divided into 300 shares.

Adams intended that Armourdale, unlike typical railroad towns, should grow on the order of a New England industrial city. The town covered six hundred acres, platted into 25-foot lots of 125-foot depth to serve residential and business purposes. In the center of Armourdale, the Town Site Company left an open expanse of nearly seven acres for a public park, much like the central commons of New England villages. The placement of a public park in an industrial town spoke to the influence of Frederick Law Olmsted, the patriarch of American landscape architecture and Adams’ longtime intellectual companion. Shawnee Park, as this tract was called, predated public parks in Kansas City, Missouri, by more than ten years.

⁵ C.F. Morse to H.L. Higginson, 1 May 1879, *Henry Lee Higginson Collection*, Baker Library.

⁶ Charles Fessenden Morse, *A Sketch of My Life* (Cambridge: privately printed, 1927), pp. 50-53.

Armourdale soon attracted major packing concerns, among them Swift and Cudahy. Armourdale was also home to the Kansas Dessicating and Refining Company, an enterprise financed by the Town Site Company which converted packing offal into fertilizer.

Armourdale was the largest tract in the Kansas City area controlled by Adams and his backers, but the Town Site Company developed few physical assets there. Adams' approach in Kansas City, Missouri, differed. Just months before Morse's arrival in Kansas City, Adams, backed by Thayer, purchased a tract south of the city limits from David O. Smart, a Kansas City real estate speculator. Upon the Smart Tract, Adams asked Frank J. Baird to plat Adams' First and Second Additions to Kansas City. Comprising the land from 19th to 23rd streets between Baltimore and McGee, the Smart Tract became the site of the syndicate's first real development. The Grand Avenue Building Company was organized to construct commercial properties along this strip. Adams' ambition was to develop a rail line through the property, connecting with the Kansas City, Fort Scott and Gulf to the west, and a new line to Chicago on the east. Rental income assured that the venture was profitable irrespective of whether Chicago railroads were attracted to the site.

Morse managed the tract carefully and with an eye to the future. A few years later, he organized and chartered the Kansas City Belt Railway Company, which in 1883 obtained a city ordinance authorizing the construction and operation of a railroad over Adams' Additions and eastward on 22nd Street. The Kansas City Belt Line, as the road was called, connected to the Fort Scott, but Morse was unable to convince any Chicago railroads to finance the venture, and the prospects for an eastern link to Chicago seemed dim. Later that year, however, A.E. Touzalin, the Atchison's chief engineer, contacted Morse, and advised him to await further instructions. Shortly thereafter, William B. Strong, Morse's successor in Topeka and vice-president of the Atchison, asked Morse to come to Chicago. Strong hired Morse to perform, with Touzalin's assistance, a survey of a direct line from Chicago to Kansas City terminating on the Belt Line tracks. The entire operation was conducted secretly to avoid arousing local political attention.

Later the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe took a financial interest in the Belt Line Company, and the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul and the Burlington railroads followed suit by building tracks over the route. Business picked up quickly thereafter, and in 1889 the company constructed a three-story freight and passenger depot at 23rd and Grand. While Morse sometimes thought the venture dubious, the waiting would pay off as Union Station was eventually located on this site.

Other Investments

In addition to the Hannibal & St. Joseph, Boston investors financed the Kansas City, Fort Scott and Gulf, which in turn influenced the development of Rosedale, Kansas, and the various towns along the line in Johnson County. In the spring of 1880, the railroad constricted an amusement park at Merriam, a town named for company treasurer Charles Merriam. The 40-acre park was landscaped by George Kessler, the railroad's superintendent of parks. Kessler's assignment at Merriam Park led to his position with the Kansas City parks board several years later.

Other commercial developments in Kansas City were financed by Boston money as well. After his father passed away in 1883, Nathaniel Thayer, Jr., speculated in Kansas City real estate, and assumed the management of several of his father's railroads. Thayer's Addition was a tract

of exclusive homes near 17th and Jefferson streets. Thayer owned the building at Ninth and Broadway bearing his name, and Vaughn's Diamond at the junction of Main, Delaware, and Ninth Streets. The Thayer banking house, with Lee Higginson & Co., financed the Kansas City Railway and Light Company, the Central Electric Railway, and the Grand Avenue Railway, three important streetcar systems. Adams and others developed horse-drawn street railways in Armourdale, Rosedale, and the West Bottoms. Later, Thayer & Brother became Kidder Peabody & Co., an important backer of Kansas City's municipal bond issues.

The Boston-owned street railways were eventually consolidated into a metropolitan system. In 1886, Henry Lee Higginson purchased the Thomas Corrigan Street Railways, a poorly maintained horse-drawn system extending from Independence to downtown Kansas City and Westport. Higginson asked Colonel Morse to assume management and consolidate the system with other Boston-owned streetcar lines in Kansas City, under the moniker of the Metropolitan Street Railway. With the assistance of his brother-in-law Daniel Bontecou, an electrical engineer, Morse converted the system to an electric and cable-driven railway extending to nearly every corner of the metropolitan area.

While Morse remained with the company only 12 years, Higginson was influential in the development of the West End Street Railway system in Boston and Lee Higginson & Co. financed street railways in Kansas City until almost 1920. The Metropolitan eventually passed into bankruptcy, but emerged as a public utility. Its routes are covered today by Area Transportation Authority buses. Interestingly, Boston again provides a model for Kansas City, as the ATA is modeling south Kansas City's light-rail system on Boston's Southwest Corridor railway.

Thayer also backed speculative promotions in the business district. In 1889, he subscribed to second mortgage bonds for the MidContinent Hotel, which was to be built at Tenth and Wyandotte. Yes, even 100 years ago Kansas Citians were debating the feasibility of an additional convention hotel. The project fell through a few months later; the reasons cited should sound familiar to Kansas Citians today. The distance of the tract from the convention hall, and inadequate financing, proved fatal.

Kansas City's Brahmin Enclave

As the extent of Eastern investment in Kansas City widened, so did the local involvement of New Englanders. When looking for bright-eyed faces eager to journey west, Adams turned to his alma mater. In 1886, he asked Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot to recommend recent Harvard graduates for positions on the Union Pacific. Among those Eliot recommended, and Adams hired, was thirty-year-old Charles J. Hubbard, a native of Barre, Vermont, and a recent graduate of Harvard College and Law School. .

In early July 1886, Adams dispatched Hubbard to Kansas City, where he was responsible for the day-to-day management of land investments for Adams and other Bostonians. Shortly thereafter, Hubbard established a self-styled land speculation firm, which developed holdings throughout the West. Hubbard also served as vice-president of two New England banks in Kansas City.

Adams' presence in Kansas City prompted the relocation of other Boston professionals. Henry Van Brunt, a prominent Boston architect, moved to Kansas City around 1887. As president of the Union Pacific, Adams awarded numerous design commissions for Western rail

depots to Van Brunt's firm. When Boston business slowed in 1885, Van Brunt sent his partner Frank Howe to Kansas City. Van Brunt seemed sufficiently convinced of Western business opportunities to move his family to Quality Hill. Kansas City's landscape thus gained the second Coates House Hotel, the Bullene, Moore and Emery Dry Goods Company store, the first Board of Trade building, and the original Kansas City Club. Van Brunt also designed an office building for Nathaniel Thayer, Jr., and homes for the Armour family and August R. Meyer in Hyde Park.

But true to his Yankee roots, Van Brunt felt alienated by his bucolic surroundings. Kansas City lacked the social and intellectual energy of Cambridge, a fault Van Brunt remedied by organizing regular meetings of a social club at which participants discussed intellectual subjects.

Like Morse and his associates, Hubbard was active in civic affairs. Morse was among the founding members of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Bureau, a forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce. Wallace Pratt was a prime mover in the development of the Jackson County Law Library, and Hubbard led the movement to establish a municipal waterworks. Both Pratt and Hubbard were members of the city's leading social clubs.

Together with other railroad and business leaders, Morse was an early member and vice president of the Kansas City Club. Morse also had a hand in the creation of the Kansas City Country Club on an isolated hill some three miles outside the city limits, the present site of Loose Park. His growing children made the establishment of private schooling a priority for Morse, as it was for other members of Kansas City society. In 1884, he joined August Meyer, A.W. Armour, and others in financing the city's first private school, named for Wellesley graduate Mary Louise Barstow. Morse, Meyer, and Hubbard served among the school's trustees.

Colonel Morse was among the first to leave Quality Hill for the newly developed residential subdivisions near Westport, some four miles to the south. Dissatisfaction with the growing congestion and squalor of the West Bottoms and the infiltration of the west bluff by squatters led many to abandon their homes for new developments south of the city limits. In 1886, Morse joined Frank J. Baird and other investors in a syndicate that developed the Hyde Park district, a wealthy addition to the city. Hyde Park would become home to other officials of the Stock Yards Company, members of the Armour family, Hubbard, and Van Brunt, among others. The district was landscaped by George Kessler, who embellished the ravine to the east to prevent the development of squatter housing like that which had threatened the bluff. Morse purchased a lot of slightly more than two acres, upon which he constructed a three-story eclectic mansion, embellished by turrets and multiple gables.

Brahmin influence in Kansas City ran deeper as the children of New Englanders grew older. Colonel Morse's three sons were educated in Kansas City and at Groton, and all three later graduated from Harvard. When his twin sons, John and Henry, graduated from Harvard in 1898, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., dispatched them to Lewiston, Idaho, to manage a townsite development scheme. Lewiston was but one of many sites at which Adams hoped to duplicate his Kansas City success; it was also one of the few which actually boomed. But John Adams tired of Idaho, and went on to Washington and Oregon before finally informing his father in 1902 that he had settled in Kansas City.

The presence of the Morse family, and others, provided a solid footing for the young Adams, who was employed by August R. Meyer as an agent of the latter's United Zinc and Chemical Company in nearby Argentine, Kansas. John Adams later fell in love with the Morses'

second-oldest daughter, Marian. In 1905, the couple married in Boston and settled into a Hyde Park home before buying a house in Kansas City's newly developed Country Club district. John Adams soon became secretary and then treasurer of United Zinc. When Meyer passed away in 1905, Adams was made president of the company. With his brother-in-law Arthur Holdrege Morse and several others, John Adams reorganized the Harvard Club of Kansas City, and served as a club official.

The End of the Era

The Stock Yards Company's relationship with the cattlemen from whom it purchased livestock soured in the 1890s. In 1895, the Kansas Legislature began inquiries into yardage fees, the amount charged by the company to care for livestock until they were sold. Two years later, these investigations resulted in legislative price controls which undercut company profits by nearly half. For several years, the pressure brought by Western farmers for free silver had raised the threat of severe inflation. The free silver issue especially imperiled the Metropolitan Street Railway, which was highly leveraged and whose fares were controlled by city ordinance. Inflation would damage the company's ability to repay its debt obligations.

The repeated inquiries and attempts at regulation by not only the Kansas and Missouri but also the Nebraska legislatures angered Morse, and threatened the Stock Yards Company's standing in Eastern bond and stock markets. He later complained bitterly to Higginson in Boston. "For more than thirty years," Morse wrote, "I have had to attend committee meetings in some one of these states, attempting to defend property of which I have had charge from partial confiscation." These inquiries seemed to Morse no more than heavy-handed attempts by "impetuous gentlemen high in office acting from political motives."⁷ Among those Morse faulted for supporting these investigations was William Rockhill Nelson, editor of the *Kansas City Star*, who had been critical of the Stock Yards Company. In private, Morse derisively referred to Nelson as a socialist.

For Adams, passage of the yardage bill by the Kansas Legislature worsened an already threatening financial situation. Kansas City was home to Adams' only profitable Western investments. Besides the ongoing threat posed to the Metropolitan Street Railway Company, the Stock Yards now faced a severe curb in profits. "What has been my main support in carrying my rather heavy load for a number of years past," Adams complained to Morse, "is knocked away from under my feet."⁸

The Stock Yards Company circumvented the new laws while launching a legal challenge. In 1898, the company was reincorporated in Missouri, and the yards themselves were expanded on the east side of the state line. Although the company lost its case in the district and appellate courts, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the law in 1901. In 1909, a new livestock exchange building was constructed on the Missouri side of the state line.

While the ongoing battles with the Kansas Legislature were a worry for Adams, nature's perils proved equally troublesome. In 1903, the Kaw River overflowed its banks at the Missouri, drowning Armourdale and most of the stock yards. Flooding had been a recurrent problem in the bottoms, but the 1903 flood was devastating, and it came at a time when Adams' precarious financial position made him especially vulnerable. Adams later displayed some optimism, at

⁷ C.F. Morse to H.L. Higginson, 13 January 1908, *Henry Lee Higginson Collection*, Baker Library.

⁸ C.F. Adams to C.F. Morse, 29 July 1897, Box 4, Folder 21, *Charles Francis Adams II Papers*, MHS.

least in part when he spoke to a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. The flood made it clear that Kansas City's growth would not proceed if repair of the bottoms alone was considered a solution. Adams urged the city to pursue a broader course of action, and not to think simply in terms of established development patterns. His tone was prophetic. "Kansas City has already spread across the Kaw," he said. "It will next cross the Missouri."⁹

In time, however, these pressures undermined Adams' commitment to the Stock Yards Company. Armour and Swift had held company stock since at least the early 1890s, a fact regarded with some uneasiness by Eastern bankers, who feared the influence of the packers. Gradually, the Morns and Cudahy packing companies gained increasing stakes in the yards. In 1913, Adams finally relented. At a meeting of the company's directorship in Kansas City, he and Morse submitted their resignations. The time to retire had arrived, Adams reasoned. "After a man passes seventy years," he told Morse, "he ought to be retired, if he does not know enough to retire himself."¹⁰ The control of the company thus passed to the packers, and the company was reorganized in Maine.

Conclusion

Morse's influence on the success of Adams' Kansas City investments was tremendous. So too, as Henry Van Brunt, Jr., related, was the impact of the Morse family on Kansas City society. In the *Kansas City Star*, 40 years after the Morses left, Van Brunt declared that "they brought New England to Kansas City, and, in a sense, lived the life of New England here."¹¹

Certainly one of the most significant Bostonian contributions to Kansas City's physical development was the Belt Line venture. Morse canvassed the directors of Chicago railroads operating in Kansas City to support the location of the Union Station at its present site. His eventual success was testament to the importance of his connections to railroad officials in Chicago.

The details of Morse's involvement in the station affair have never been thoroughly investigated. During my own research, I was unable to document the specific course of events because most of this correspondence is likely in the Burlington archives in Chicago. What is clear is that Morse feared political fallout if his role were disclosed publicly. And remain secret it has, as most local observers simply attributed the fortunes of the Belt Line to being in a good location at the right time. But Adams knew better. "That is a matter," he later confided to Morse, "almost exclusively confined to your and my personal knowledge."¹²

Despite his failure elsewhere as a land baron, Adams' greatest contribution to Kansas City's development was the expansion of the stock yards. Prior to Adams' personal investments in the company, the railroads had shown little inclination to expand the operations. Had Adams failed to take a personal interest in the yards, St. Joseph or Omaha would surely have surpassed Kansas City as the nation's second largest meat-packing center.

As Henry Lee Higginson would say in tribute to Adams and Morse, the stockyards were "an excellent scheme, well carried out by these men."¹³ Boston capital proved essential to the

⁹ Quoted in "Kansas City Prophecies Fulfilled," *Kansas City Star*, 20 April 1919.

¹⁰ C.F. Adams to C.F. Morse, 15 February 1913, *Charles Fessenden Morse Papers*, Volume II, MI-IS.

¹¹ Henry Van Brunt, Jr., "Elegance of Quality Hill Lives in Shadows of Progress," *Kansas City Star*, 15 March 1953, 4E, 9E.

¹² C.F. Adam, Jr., to C.F. Morse, 15 February 1913, *Charles F. Morse Papers*, Volume II, MHS.

¹³ "Tribute of Major Higginson," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 48 (April 1915): 397.

industrial development of Kansas City, but the network of Boston-born businessmen who managed the daily affairs of various concerns proved as much an influence on the city's social and business climate. For more than thirty years, New England business and social manners influenced Kansas City on both sides of the state line. Their tasks completed, these men and women returned to Boston, their roles in the city's growth later forgotten as the city became a metropolis. For Colonel Morse, these achievements were a life's work. "Whether the fact is or is not generally appreciated," Adams told him upon his retirement, "you leave a mark writ deep in the history of Kansas City."¹⁴

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

QUESTION: What is the next step in your research – where do you go from here?

ANSWER: I should probably begin by describing how this research originated. Lisa Schwarzenholz, an archivist at the Wyandotte County Historical Society, actually sparked my interest in this topic last March. I was on a semester-long sabbatical last spring, and talked to Lisa about several projects I was interested in researching. We discussed the establishment of Armourdale, which the historical society had been considering for a display at the county museum. Little material was available locally, however, and I was discouraged along the way. Being familiar with Boston's library resources, and particularly those at Harvard, I expected that I would be able to turn up some primary material.

I made inquiries at Harvard and the Massachusetts Historical Society, where the Adams' family papers are housed. I got some very solid results. This paper was still a hobby when I met Dr. Kimball. As the project progressed, I began to seek a faculty advisor to supervise my research upon my return to Cambridge, and eventually secured the mentorship of Professor Stephan Thernstrom. Once I complete my degree this spring, I hope to expand this study. Similar works on St. Louis and Chicago were published in the past year, but I discovered them rather late in my research. I would like to integrate some of that material and expand this study, perhaps as a history of Eastern finance in the region.

QUESTION: When did the Missouri Pacific enter Kansas City?

ANSWER: The Missouri Pacific was the first railroad to reach Kansas City, arriving in 1865. The presence of that railroad connection made possible the trip by Kersey Coates and Robert Van Horn to Boston to sway Joy and others to direct other roads toward Kansas City.

QUESTION: Would you expand on the interviews that you have had recently with persons such as Thomas Boylston Adams, Henry's father. I believe you had a long conversation with him.

ANSWER: One of the two important sources of information for this study is Henry's father, Thomas Boylston Adams (the son of the younger John Adams), who was actually born in Kansas City. He lived here only a few years, and returned with his family to Boston. He doesn't recall much about Kansas City, but offered stories told to him by his older brother and his uncle, and my second source, Thomas Robeson Morse, Colonel Morse's youngest son.

Mr. Morse, who is 97 years old, graciously allowed me to come to his home a month ago, where I spent nearly two hours discussing his family's life in Kansas City. He was nearly twenty

¹⁴ C.F. Adams, Jr., to C.F. Morse, 15 February 1913, *Charles F. Morse Papers*, Volume II, MHS.

years old when his family returned to Boston, and has very vivid memories of life here at the turn of the century. Mr. Morse told fascinating tales of life in Hyde Park, and described family picnics at Brush Creek and riding horseback alongside his father to the Country Club. The Morses left Kansas City several years before the development of the Country Club Plaza, and Mr. Morse himself has not set foot here since the mid-1930s.

QUESTION: What was the relative importance of Kansas City to Boston investment as compared to other cities?

ANSWER: I haven't been able to fully quantify Bostonian investment, but I think it is important to recognize that nowhere else did Boston investors have such influence on a city's social and business climate as they did in Kansas City. This was true primarily because of the city's size; they didn't get lost in the thicket of a city like Chicago, where investors from New York and London were commonplace. Yet the degree of business was significant enough to warrant some migration of personnel from the East Coast.

QUESTION: Besides Boston, what other cities invested in Kansas City?

ANSWER: The next best documented source of outside financing of Kansas City industry is the Dutch financing of the Kansas City Southern Railway, the product of Arthur Stilwell's ambitions in the 1890s. Stilwell's promotions were certainly on a par with those of the New Englanders, but at a slightly later time. There have been a number of substantive studies on that railroad. There also were, of course, investments from New York and New England, even from Bostonians unaware of Adams. And Kansas City had important financial connections to Chicago.

QUESTION: You made reference to a thirty-year battle over a new Union Station. Would you elaborate on that?

ANSWER: The debate over a new Union Station began in the early 1880s because the Union Depot, which was located near the stockyards in the West Bottoms, was intensely overcrowded. The approach to the depot from the city's north side was very narrow, and only a few railroad lines actually entered the depot. This resulted in delays for passengers and freight, which aggravated crowding in the station's waiting room. Architecturally, the station also left much to be desired. Despite these problems, the railroads were reluctant to replace the station, and at one point even hired Van Brunt's architectural firm to remodel the interior. The Kansas City Star was very critical of the railroads for this reason, as were a number of local politicians. Land was difficult to come by in either the North or West Bottoms, however, and moving the station would have involved tremendous cost to the railroads.

The debate was settled by the 1903 flood, which made it clear that the station would have to be moved and the railroad lines reoriented to a different part of the city. From that point, the question became where to locate the new station, a question that remained open to debate. Tracts at the north end of downtown and in the West Bottoms were promoted, but these too had been inundated during the flood.

The establishment of the Belt Line on the southern end of the city and Morse's solicitation of the railroads proved decisive in placing Union Station at its present location. One should recognize the enormity of the transformation on the city's development. Today, 23rd and Grand is at the southern end of downtown. In 1890, 23rd and Grand was on the city's southern frontier. Beyond that was the countryside, so the area could be considered the pre-metropolitan

equivalent of southern Johnson County, I suppose. Given that fact, removing the city's railroads to that area was hardly a self-evident proposition.

QUESTION: How old is Kansas City, Kansas, and how old is Kansas City, Missouri?

ANSWER: Kansas City, Missouri, was platted in 1850 as the Town of Kansas, and was formally incorporated as the City of Kansas in 1853. The city of Kansas City, Kansas, grew out of the consolidation of Wyandotte, Armstrong, and Armourdale in 1886. Later Argentine and then Rosedale were annexed to Kansas City, Kansas, as well.

QUESTION: Given your thesis that there was a need to both attract and maintain capital investment, how conscious were locals of that fact? Were they aware that they not only needed to attract outside investment, but also to maintain it?

ANSWER: Attracting Eastern capital was a matter of necessity. Western towns simply lacked the resources needed to finance development. Competition for Eastern investment became a staple of local politics. Towns throughout the West printed promotional brochures, pamphlets, and even newspaper stories for distribution back East. In fact, the 1886 decision to name Kansas City, Kansas, was influenced by the fact that Easterners were more familiar with that name than with Wyandotte, and could be confused into believing they were investing in Kansas City, Missouri. Speculative investment drove the economy of nearly every western town.

Today, the pursuit of outside investment is typical of developmentally oriented city governments seeking to expand their tax bases. In the late nineteenth century, however, real estate provided a tremendous opportunity for speculators to make a fortune. This was particularly true in Kansas City, which explains the drive by locals to attract the railroads. Kersey Coates is a good example. Sent here by Philadelphia capitalists, he owned most of the prime real estate in and along the west bluff by the end of the Civil War. He and other boosters stood to earn a considerable profit by attracting investment. The scramble for the railroads and outside capital was the basis of local politics and the local economy in many cities.

QUESTION: Would you comment on the antagonism between William Rockhill Nelson and the Stock Yards Company?

ANSWER: I first learned of Morse's dislike for Nelson in a conversation with Henry Adams in Boston, who first heard the comment from Tom Morse. I asked Mr. Morse about this, and he was quick to mention that his father disliked Nelson's personal demeanor as much as his political stance. Nelson placed himself on a collision course with Morse by supporting political elements in Kansas when the state legislature began considering the 1897 bill to regulate yardage fees. As I mentioned, Morse saw this law as the product of agrarian politics, rather than as an equitable remedy for cattle traders. It is not surprising that he would describe Nelson in such terms.

A Note on Sources

This lecture is based on research performed by the author for a course of supervised reading and research supervised by Professor Stephan Thernstrom at Harvard College during the fall of 1991. Permission to reproduce quotations from manuscripts in the following collections has been granted by the respective institutions.

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Charles Fessenden Morse Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

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Recommended Reading

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Pictures included in the lecture publication.

[page 1](#) | [page 2](#) | [page 3](#) | [page 4](#) | [page 5](#) | [page 6](#)

Daniel Serda. A lifelong resident of the Armourdale district of Kansas City, Kansas, Daniel Serda attended the public schools of that city and is a 1987 graduate of J.C. Harmon High School. He is an undergraduate at Harvard College, where he will complete his bachelor's degree in government this spring.



Beginning this June, Mr. Serda will serve for one year as a research associate to the William T. Kemper Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri. In this capacity, he will perform research in local history and coordinate history-related projects for the Foundation.

Mr. Serda then plans to pursue a graduate degree in urban studies. His primary academic interests lie in the fields of urban history and land-use planning, and he is especially intrigued by the influence of municipal development policy on private enterprise.

[Top](#)

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