

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

**Nicodemus Historic District and Dugout House, two miles east**

AND/OR COMMON

**Nicodemus**

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

**Nicodemus**

STATE

**Kansas**

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CODE

**20**

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT **First**

**Graham**

COUNTY

**065**

CODE

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

**Multiple Ownership / Contact - Mr. H. Bates**

STREET & NUMBER

**Church Baptist Congress**

CITY, TOWN

**Nicodemus**

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

**Kansas**

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

**Graham County Courthouse**

STREET & NUMBER

**Pomeroy Street**

CITY, TOWN

**Hill City**

STATE

**Kansas**

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The historic buildings and sites of the Nicodemus Historic District are as follows:

Sayer's General Store and Post Office - Built in 1880 Sayer's General Store and Post Office is presently an unoccupied two story building of native limestone with a wood frame roof and brick masonry chimney. The doors, windows and frame of the rest of the structure are also wood. The one story structure at the rear of the main building is wood framed with stucco walls and a brick chimney. The roof of this structure also has a wood frame and wood shingles as does the frame of the interior. Although it is not now in active use there are a few articles stored on the inside of the building.

First Baptist Church - Replacing an earlier structure of the initial church structure that was a dugout, the present First Baptist Church was built in 1908 and is presently in active use by a religious group. A one story structure of native limestone that is covered with stucco, the church has a wood frame roof with wood shingles. On the interior there are partitions of wood lath with plaster over the wood frame and buttresses on the east side of the building to brace the wall. There have been additions to the original building over the years.

Township (T. W. P.) Hall - A one story assembly hall with stage, proscenium arch, high ceiling, and a half basement, this structure was built in 1939 with exterior walls of native limestone. The roof is structural steel with composition shingles and the floor is concrete slab. The walls are plaster, and the ceiling is acoustical tile. It is presently used for all community meetings.

Site of the Masonic Hall - A marker placed in 1972 by the Masons designates the site of the old masonic hall. Resting on a concrete slab, the brick masonry marker has three stones with carved exposed surfaces incorporated into the masonry work. The South one is dated "1880" with the north one bearing the letter "G". The central stone is semi-circular with the lower portion showing "A.F. & A.M. 1893" and the upper portion having a half moon with a face in profile.

A.M.E. Church - Built in 1885 of native limestone covered with stucco this one story structure has a wood frame roof with wood shingles that are partially covered with composition shingles. The north wing is in ruins.

Fletcher Residence - Built in 1878 this building is one of the original structures of the town. One and one-half stories high it was originally native limestone walls that are now covered with stucco. The frame walls and roof structure of wood frame with wood shingles are additions to the original structure that also housed the town's first Post Office before it was moved to Sayer's General Store.

An Original Town Residence - Although the exact date of the construction of this original building is not known it was one of the original residences of the town. Although in a state of ruins what remains are sod walls veneered with native limestone, a wood frame door, and partially standing walls.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
__1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
__1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
__1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
	<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION, DISCOVERY, RESEARCH			

**Afro-American History**

**SPECIFIC DATES** Nicodemus established in 1877 **BUILDER/ARCHITECT**

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

During the 1870s the great human phenomena of a mass migration of blacks from the South to the Midwest took place. Greatly dissatisfied with the conditions in the South, blacks, in numbers sizeable enough to initiate an investigation and report by the United State Congress, swarmed from the South to the Midwest. Black spokesmen such as Frederick Douglass and Richard T. Greener offered their people conflicting advice on how to deal with the oppression and poverty of the South. Douglass advocated that they remain in the region in order to change and ameliorate the conditions. Greener, on the other hand, urged migration from an area that he felt was beyond change as far as blacks were concerned. In line with Greener's advice, blacks from Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky surged westward.

One of the principle leaders of this mass migration movement was Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, who glowingly told stories of the "Promised Land" in Kansas. He was responsible for the founding of eleven colonies in Kansas alone between 1873 and 1880. Singleton, born a slave in Nashville, Tennessee about 1809, learned the trades of carpentry and cabinet making. He hated his enslavement and so fled to Canada settling later in Detroit, Michigan, where he pursued a variety of occupations. After the general emancipation of slaves, he returned to his native Tennessee and began attempts to colonize blacks there. He soon realized that such an effort in the South was not conducive to the welfare and future progress of black people. Finally, he visited Kansas in 1873, bringing with him 300 blacks from Tennessee, most of whom settled in "Singleton's Colony" in Cherokee County. Returning to the South in the latter part of 1873, he traveled throughout Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi, organizing groups to migrate to Kansas.

The impact of black migration on the population of Kansas is evident from census reports. In 1860 there were 625 free blacks and two slaves in the entire state. In 1870 the colored population had jumped to 17,108 and a number of all-black communities had sprung up in the eastern part of the state. By 1880 the black population had doubled to 43,107. Singleton's efforts were primarily responsible for this increase in the colored population of the state of Kansas during his last great colonizing effort, 1878-1879.

Nicodemus, under Singleton's influence, was one of the towns that resulted from this black migration movement. Established on homestead land in Graham County, Kansas with assistance from a white Tennessee minister, W. T. Hill, and named after a legendary slave, the town of Nicodemus was officially founded on September 17, 1877. However, prior to that date, during the previous summer, there had been some earlier arrivals to the townsite, the first being Reverend Simon P. Roundtree who

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Gavin, Roy. "Benjamin, or 'Pap' Singleton, and His Followers." Journal of Negro History, XXXII (January, 1948), 7-23.
- Kansas, A Guide to the Sunflower State. Work Projects Administration (New York: 1939).
- Schwendemann, Glen. "Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon." Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXXIV (Spring, 1968), 10-31.

## PARTIAL LISTING

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 161.15

Sod House:  
14/449500/4360500

UTM REFERENCES

NE	A	14	447017	436040	NW	B	14	446315	435940
	ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING
SE	C	14	447017	435917	SW	D	14	446315	435916
	ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE		EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Historic District of Nicodemus, Kansas is square shaped. In the North it follows North Street eastward to East Bend Road, and then traveling South to South Street. Here it continues West on South Street to Seventh Street going North until it joins North Street.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Marcia M. Greenlee, Historical Projects Director

December 1974

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, Northwest

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D. C.

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET DESCRIPTION

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE Two

Historical Marker - Constructed in 1970 this roadside marker briefly states the early history of the town of Nicodemus. It was erected by the Kansas Historical Society and the State Highway Commission.

Dr. D. L. Stewart Residence- Built in 1906 with native limestone exterior walls, this one story structure has interior walls that are wood frame with lath and plaster and a roof that is wood frame with wood shingles. The porch on the north end of the house is in ruins.

The proposed boundaries for the Nicodemus Historic District are as follows:

- Northern Boundary - Washington Street to Fourth Street to North Street
- Eastern Boundary - East Bend Road
- Southern Boundary - South Street
- Western Boundary - Seventh Street

The sod house though not within the boundaries of the proposed district, because of their distance from it, should nonetheless be designated a landmark because of its significance and relationship to the history of Nicodemus. The property is less than one acre.

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE TWO

was there on June 18, 1877. The next arrivals came on July 30th. In this group were Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher. Mrs. Fletcher was the only woman in the colony until others of her sex arrived with a group of "Exodusters" came from Kentucky in the spring of 1878. Finally in 1879 the last sizeable group, 50 blacks from Mississippi, settled in Nicodemus. According to the 1880 census there were 260 blacks living in Nicodemus township.

The Nicodemus colonists had to cope with many hardships on the Kansas frontier. The initial form of shelter was a "burrow" constructed out of the side of a bank or small hill. Sod dugouts and then wooden structures eventually replaced the "burrows". The problem of finding food was a far more difficult obstacle for the colonists to overcome. Few of the settlers had any money, (most of them having spent their funds in order to get to Kansas) and thus, to aid in the alleviation of this problem, the Nicodemus Town Company was established to appropriate food and supplies from across the state and to distribute them to the settlers.

By 1881 however, there were 35 residential and commercial structures in the town. Although most of these structures were scattered haphazardly throughout the district, there was a defined business district. The general store of Z. T. Fletcher founded in the fall of 1877 was the oldest business in the county. In 1878 a Post Office was established in a section of the store. One of the highlights of Nicodemus' history is connected with this Post Office. It has been reported throughout the town's history that Mrs. Fletcher, who was the official post mistress, and her husband went forty miles a month to the neighboring town of Ellis to carry outgoing and incoming mail. In 1879 a livery stable and lumber yard were started. The establishment of the latter is an excellent indication of the progress the Nicodemites were making as their sod structures were being replaced by wood. The first church edifice, a sod structure, was constructed in 1879 under the auspices of the Baptist minister Daniel Hickman. In June 1879 School District No. 1 was established in Nicodemus with most of the classes being taught in peoples' homes. In 1887 a formal four room structure was erected. By the 1880s Nicodemus was showing all the signs of a thriving social center -- a baseball team, a literary and benefit society, lodges, and an ice cream parlor. Nicodemus had two newspapers, the Western Cyclone established May 13, 1886 by A. G. Tallman and the Enterprise established August 17, 1887 by H. K. Lightfoot. By 1887 when the town's first bank was established by a white man, A. L. McPherson, Nicodemus was a recognized social and business center of Graham County.

The esteem in which the town was held is further evidenced by the prominence of its members in county affairs. Selected as the temporary site of the township's first election, an honor that acknowledged its potential voting strength in that region, the election was held in December 1879.

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CONTINUATION SHEET SIGNIFICANCE ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE Three

The Nicodemus "Equal Rights Ticket," composed of five white men and three blacks - Granville Lewis, H. Winn, and Lewis Welton - all won their respective seats: Lewis as one of the town justices of the peace; Winn as township clerk; and Welton as road overseer. The Nicodemites continued their promising beginnings in the field of politics when the county elections were held in June 1880. John DePrad was elected county clerk, an office that was to be held by a number of blacks in future elections. Other Nicodemites who were to achieve county elected offices were: J. R. Hawkins who served in the office of the clerk of the court; W. L. Sayers (a relative of the football player Gale Sayers) who served as county attorney; and Lewis Welton and Daniel Hickman who served as county commissioners. In the field of politics for the county and state, it has been said that it was a rare election that did not have a black Nicodemite on its ballot.

An outstanding member of the Nicodemus community, and of the entire state, was Edward P. McCabe whose rise to prominence in that frontier community was evidence of the opportunities available to any person who wanted to excel in the fluidity of a frontier society. McCabe came from New York and Chicago in 1878. He served as the county's first county clerk, being appointed to that temporary position by Governor St. John until the county elections of June, 1880. He and A. T. Hall operated a land agency in the town and in 1882 and 1884 he was elected to the position of state auditor. He held the same position in the territory of Oklahoma from 1897 to 1907 by appointment from Governor G. S. Steel.

Nicodemus probably reached its peak by 1910 when the federal census of that year reported 595 colored inhabitants in the county. Although there are no reliable figures for the town of Nicodemus, it is presumed that the decline in the population paralleled that of the rest of the county. By 1950 only sixteen people were counted there and by 1953 the Post Office station was closed, symbolizing the end of a cycle of seventy-six years of existence.

Nicodemus, Kansas, is of national historical significance because it is the only remaining town established by blacks of the "Exoduster" movement which was organized mainly through the efforts of Benjamin "Pap" Singleton. It is the site of the oldest reported Post Office supervised by blacks in the United States. Nicodemus is also symbolic of the pioneer spirit of blacks who dared to leave the only region they had been familiar with, in a search for personal freedom and the opportunity to develop their talents and capabilities.