

# Salina has colorful 149-year history

By the Salina Journal

Measured against the ages, 149 years is no great length of time. But as Kansas cities and towns go, 149 years brings roots, history and respectable maturity.

Before there was a town named Salina, of course, there were the Plains. And the original inhabitants thereof — the American Indians. The area was a hunting ground for the nomadic tribes — the Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Pawnee, Kansa and Osage. In the mid-19th century, members of the more peaceful tribes, the Pottawatomie, Kaw and Delaware ventured west. Inevitably, there was conflict.

What became known as the Battle of Indian Rock occurred in the fall of 1857 when a war party of Cheyenne and Arapahoe attacked a hunting party of Pottawatomie and Delaware along Spring Creek. The hunting party retreated, joined with a group of better-armed Kaw, established good defensive positions near what is now Indian Rock Park in east-central

Salina and eventually won the battle.

The battle marked the end of the dominance of the nomadic tribes in this area and signaled that it was safe for settlers and others moving west.

## Salina is founded

In 1858, three years before Kansas was admitted to the union, Salina was founded by William Addison Phillips and two companions — Alexander M. Campbell and James Muir — who had walked west from Lawrence to the banks of the Smoky Hill River just above its confluence with the Saline River. There, they stopped, drove stakes and proclaimed this to be their town.

Originally, it was named “Saliens” and pronounced “Saleena,” but later the name was shortened to “Salina” and pronounced “Sa-lie-na.”

The Andreas History of Kansas says the city’s name was derived from the federal government’s name for the Saline River.

The original 320-acre townsite was bordered by what are now North and South streets, Front on the east and

Ninth on the west. The first building in Salina was a log cabin on what is now the southwest corner of Fifth and Iron streets. It was the town’s first hotel and first store.

Phillips, 34, Campbell, 23, and Muir, 24, soon were joined by Phillips’ brother David and Alexander C. Spilman, both 21. The five are considered Salina’s founders.

In 1859, gold was discovered in Colorado, and many stopped in Salina on their way west, making the town a trading center.

The Phillips brothers and Campbell also were founding members of Salina’s first church, First Presbyterian, that was established May 12, 1860.

By 1861, William Phillips had carted in a steam-powered grist mill and established the early character of Salina’s industry. Luke Parsons helped erect the mill and pulled the whistle cord announcing its completion.

Other mills followed, and by 1930, Salina was ranked fifth in the world in flour production. Milling contin-

ued as the principal industry until the 1960s, when the Interstate Commerce Commission changed the rules on freight rates for flour as compared with rough grains. Most of the mills departed from Kansas — the source of wheat — and moved to population centers where the bread is consumed.

One of the stones from Phillips’ original mill is in Founders Park on East Iron Avenue, near Salina Community Theatre.

The Kansas Pacific Railroad pushed through Salina in 1867, changing forever the frontier settlement. The railroad brought settlers, materials and ideas.

## Education established

Education long was a staple of life in Salina. The first school building was a simple structure, where the Pioneer President’s Place apartments stand off Seventh Street. It was replaced in 1874 by the three-story Central School, which was torn down in 1922. St. John’s Military School was established in 1888 by the Episcopal

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