

Preface

At the end of January 1864, M. Marshall Murdock, editor and proprietor of the *Osage Chronicle*, wrote that “Kansas politicians may well be likened to a lot of curs, consisting of mongrel whelps, bench-legged fices, and cunning foxhounds.” Unfortunately, he continued, “it is a notorious fact that about every other man in Kansas is a politician.”¹ Coming on the third anniversary of Kansas’s admission to the Union, Murdock’s observation was apt. Indeed, although the state had suffered many shortages since its inception—from rain and money to men and munitions—politicians were plentiful. Moreover, their struggle for influence shaped the new state and its response to the American Civil War. As a seminal event in this country’s history, the war itself is of such importance that nearly 150 years after the firing on Fort Sumter, we continue to debate its meaning, origins, and legacy.

Kansas’s War is dedicated to understanding how Kansans experienced this fundamentally American war. Wartime Kansas was remarkably political, in large part because of its own origins. The struggle over whether Kansas Territory would become a free or a slave state notoriously transformed it into Bleeding Kansas, and its settlement is one of the defining events of the era known as the Coming of the War. Unlike the other states in this series on the “great interior,” which enjoyed longer tenures in the country before the war commenced—Ohio having joined the Union in 1803, Indiana in 1816, Illinois in 1818, Missouri in 1821, Michigan in 1837, and Wisconsin in 1848—Kansas was admitted in the midst of the secession crisis. As such, the state did not have an opportunity to recover from its internal strife before being called to contribute to the preservation of the Union. Indeed, the shift from a time of peace to a time of war was not as stark for Kansans as it was for other Americans.

This confluence informs the documents collected. Readers will note the recurrence of names and themes as Kansas’s contested settlement shapes the state’s war and postwar experiences. Kansas’s very organization has dictated those areas represented by this documents collection. Most of the counties organized during the territorial period were in the eastern half of the territory, the most populous being those adjacent to Missouri. During the first decade of statehood, another eighteen counties were organized, largely surrounding those organized previously, moving south and west.² As a result, many of the Kansans whose voices are captured in these documents necessarily lived in the eastern and southeastern portions of the state.

The documents themselves have been allowed to stand as they were written midcentury, with scant editing and the retention of the author’s original spelling and punctuation. However, I have made three changes for ease of comprehension.

First, I have silently corrected typesetting errors in publications such as newspapers or circulars. Second, repetitive phrases or words which an author used to help a correspondent follow his or her thought as a page was turned or a new leaf was started have been eliminated. Finally, where an author has used an extra long space to denote a change in subject, I have opted to begin a new paragraph. In all the documents, ellipses indicate where material has been omitted for length, while headnotes provide a context for readers to better understand each document.

Although a young state when the war began, Kansas has a rich and varied history, and a selected bibliography is included for those desiring a greater immersion than this volume allows.