

“We Oughta Name Something After the Guy”

By Bob Burtch

Originally published in The Ottawa Herald February 1, 1983

Where is Isaac Smith Kalloch now, when Ottawa needs him again?

Kalloch, for those steeped in local lore, was the man who brought the first sidewalks to downtown Ottawa—though probably not the same ones being replaced this year. He was responsible for many firsts in the community, yet today not so much as a blind alley bears his name.

More than 20 Ottawans were introduced to Kalloch, one of their founding fathers, Monday evening by John Mark Lambertson through the first lecture in the Community Forum series. Lambertson is an Ottawa University graduate working on a master's degree in history at the University of Kansas.

He traced Kalloch from his birth in 1832 to his rise by his early 20s to pastor of Boston's Tremont Temple Baptist Church. Through his fund-raising and oratorical efforts, Kalloch saved the church from bankruptcy and packed the several thousand seats.

Kalloch's fame soon sand to notoriety through a widely publicized adultery trial. Although Kalloch was considered exonerated when the jury reached an impasse, the trial transcript sold more than 300,000 copies and at times surpassed the sales of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," the bestseller of the century.

His reputation as a ladies' man followed him to the end of his days.

Kalloch became involved in the abolitionist movement, including the shipping end of the "Beecher Bibles" gun-running network. This and his other troubles eventually brought him west at age 26. On his third visit to Kansas, he settled here in 1864 with his loyal wife Carolyn.

In a shaded period of state history, Kalloch worked in cahoots with Charles Robinson, Kansas' first governor; Indian agent Clinton C. Hutchinson and "Tauy" Jones, the part Chippewa middleman, to deal the Indians out of 20,000-plus acres. The purpose was to found Roger Williams University, except all but a few hundred acres were sold off at a profit. Ottawa College was founded, with Kalloch as its first president.

In March 1864, Ottawa was surveyed for a town corporation and the settlement began that spring. By 1865, Kalloch had started schools, "The Western Home Journal"—the first newspaper and the Second Baptist Church, so named either because the Indians had the first or to make the town look bigger to Easterners. The paper was a "very efficient" promotional device that lured industrious settlers.

He was responsible for landing the county seat here, starting the first ferry across the Marais des Cygnes River, founding Hope Cemetery and building the first suspension bridge west of Cincinnati across the river in 1866-67.

A jail was built for the suspicious price of \$20,000. Sidewalks were built, then a post office, and a sawmill. There even was a fully-equipped 13-person brass band.

His biggest achievement was talking Anderson, Franklin and Douglas counties out of \$675,000 worth of bonds to build a railroad, to Ottawa—the Leavenworth, Lawrence & Galveston, nicknamed the “Lazy, Lousy & Greasy.”

The first train had to reach Ottawa by Jan. 1, 1868. With the default deadline dangerously near, the last few miles of rail were laid with few amenities—such as roadbed, ballast or ties. The first locomotive rolled and heaved into town very carefully—but on time.

Lambertson emphasized that Kalloch recognized the need to establish predominance for Ottawa at a time when competition was fierce. Kalloch isolated the key elements and succeeded in achieving them—in only five years.

The Ottawa corporate government was voted out, and Kalloch wisely moved on, in 1869, to Lawrence. There he started another paper and a dairy and purchased the Eldridge House hotel and a vineyard—his temperance sermons notwithstanding. By 1873, he had been elected to the Legislature and was president of the Kansas Agriculture Society.

Like many Americans, the Panic of 1873 cost Kalloch much of his fortune, and he again moved on. By 1879, he'd become mayor of San Francisco and editor of another paper. His editorials so infuriated a competitor that the other editor bushwhacked him. The gunshot wasn't serious, but a Kalloch son later fatally shot the assailant four times “in self-defense.”

Kalloch later retired to Washington State, where he lived out his last 10 years in “relative obscurity” before dying in 1890 at age 58. As the minister put it, “He led a full life,” Lambertson said.

“You really have to admire Kalloch’s talents, the historian said, although his methods sometimes were “distasteful.” Although there’s no trace of him in the community, “Perhaps invisibly, the name Kalloch is there.”

Lambertson said in closing, “I think there’s still a great deal here that bears his stamp.” Ottawans needn’t “revere” him necessarily, but “he’s certainly worth remembering.”