

Joab Bernard – Santa Fe Trader, Town Founder and Franklin County Pioneer

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Although Franklin County was at the heart of “bleeding Kansas,” and people of both Free-State and Proslavery persuasions settled there in territorial times, we know less about the latter settlers who departed when the Free-State forces prevailed.

One of these was Joab Mitchell Bernard, postmaster, trader, and founder of St. Bernard near Centropolis. Bernard was a Virginian by birth whose family moved to Calloway County, Missouri in 1839. Much of our information about Joab comes from a memoir of his daughter, Mamie Bernard Aguirre, and articles by and about his prominent nephew William Rodney Bernard, who served as mayor of Westport and judge of the Jackson county court. (1)

Mamie Bernard was born in St. Louis in 1844, the year of the great flood. Her mother, Arabella, told her the Mississippi River was five miles across at one time during the deluge (2) that also swelled the Kansas and Marais des Cygnes rivers in the Indian Territory. There, Ottawa Indians and their missionary Jotham Meeker saw farm buildings from their first mission near Fort Scott Crossing on the Marais des Cygnes swept down the river. (3)

W.R. Bernard settled in Westport in 1847 to participate in the lucrative trade with Santa Fe and the Indian Territory—now eastern Kansas and Oklahoma. The area was a gathering place for hunters, trappers, Indians and soldiers. In 1848, Bernard began business in partnership with Albert Gallatin Boone, a grandson of Daniel. Their store was on Westport Avenue with a warehouse on the Missouri River at what was then called Westport Landing, but is now Kansas City, near the City Market.(4) The records of the Osage River Indian Agency in what would become Franklin County, KS show William Bernard living there as a 33-year-old clerk for Boon & Hamilton of Westport, receiving \$600 per year in 1849.(5)

After the discovery of gold in California in 1848, the already booming trade with Santa Fe—established in 1821 by William Becknell—was enriched by the addition of wagon train outfitting for the swarms of immigrants heading for California. Steamboats full of travelers disembarked at Westport Landing and proceeded to Westport to purchase wagons, stock and supplies. Unlike overland freighting, the outfitting business was conducted in cash, and business prospered. W.R. Bernard formed a new partnership in 1853 with former Texas Ranger Charles Kearney. Bernard later asserted that, during these years, he was a partner in several firms doing an aggregate business of half a million dollars, yet their losses didn't exceed \$5,000--\$3,500 of that loss being caused by a trader being killed by Indians, his stock being carried away and his wagons destroyed. (6)

In 1846, Francis Parkman traveled through Westport on his way to the Oregon Country and described the area thus.

“Westport was full of Indians whose shaggy little ponies were tied by the dozen along the houses and fences. Sacs and Foxes with shaved heads and painted faces, Shawanoes and Delawares, fluttering in calico frocks and turbans, Wyandottes dressed like white men, and a few wretched Kansas in old blankets were strolling about the streets and lounging in and about the shops and stores. Whiskey...circulates more freely in Westport than is altogether safe where every man carries a pistol in his pocket.” (7)

Bernard encountered Frances X. Aubrey, Kit Carson and John C. Fremont and his wife Jessie, daughter of Senator Thomas Hart Benton. (8)

At some point in this busy pre-Civil War era, W.R. Bernard entered into partnership with his uncle, Joab Mitchell Barnard. Although Joab and his wife Arabella and their growing family were then living near Baltimore, he spent much time in Westport. When, in May of 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed and made into law, Joab made plans to establish a beachhead in Kansas Territory for his trading business. On surviving census and voting records of Franklin County K.T., Bernard states that he had lived in the county since June of 1854, being among the very first settlers.(9) D.M. Valentine in his history of Franklin County, says the same. (10) A.T. Andreas' *History of Kansas* has him arriving on Eight Mile Creek on June 27, with fourteen other men. “The group

voted on whether the settlement would be Proslave or Free-State. Two of the group, Joab Bernard and Timothy Keizer, voted Proslave but the rest voted Free-State. This didn't stop any of them from selecting claims in near proximity. Bernard and Keizer chose a site on the east bank of the creek, and Perry Fuller and others settled on the west side—which would eventually become Centropolis.” Andreas continues, “J.M. Bernard opened a store on his quarter section and on the 3rd of March (1855) was appointed Postmaster, the post office being appropriately named after him, St. Bernard. The people thenceforth obtained their mail at St. Bernard instead of Kansas City...”(11)

This site was not selected randomly. Although the Federal Government was proceeding with efforts to extinguish Indian rights to Kansas lands, only a few areas of Franklin County were available for legal white settlement in 1854. One was the northernmost strip of land that had been a part of the Shawnee lands, another was the area south of the Ottawa reserve that had been, until 1848, home to a band of Pottawatomies. Some areas along the eastern border of the county would soon be vacated by the Kaskaskias and Peorias. Along Eight Mile Creek in the previously Shawnee area was a branch of the Fort Scott-California Trail which came up from Dutch Henry's Crossing of Pottawatomie Creek in southeast Franklin County, crossed Mosquito Creek, Middle Creek at Mount Vernon, the Marais des Cygnes River at what is still known as “Fort Scott Crossing,” and then forked. One branch headed northeast passing the home and inn of John Tecumseh “Tauy” or “Ottawa” Jones, and then continued on to Palmyra and the main Santa Fe Road that ran east-west across southern Douglas County. The branch heading northwest passed a spring still called “California Springs” and then crossed Eight Mile Creek above the Ottawa Reserve and that is where Bernard opened his store.

Besides the Fort Scott-California Road, another feeder trail for the Oregon-California came from West Point, Missouri west toward Council Grove, meeting the Fort Scott-California Road north of the Marais des Cygnes River. Jothan Meeker's journal records immense traffic along this now-unknown road with upwards of 30,000 cattle being driven along it towards the west in one season. (12)

Bernard's daughter Mamie, in her memoirs, recounts living in Baltimore until April, 1856, when her mother and siblings joined Joab in Westport. She remembered people marching in the street with drums and fifes and being told that they were going to fight in Kansas. The family moved back to Baltimore a year later, perhaps out of concern for the upheaval going on just west of

Westport, only to return again in 1858, at which time she was sent to boarding school in Independence. (13)

Her father had not only been conducting a profitable business in Westport during this time, he had also maintained a residence in Kansas Territory. William R. Bernard; James G. Hamilton, his brother-in-law; David Lykin and Joab Bernard were partners in the company. (14) Bernard voted the Proslavery ticket in an August 4, 1856 election. (15) Acknowledging his “soundness on the goose,” the Kansas Territorial legislature, called “bogus” by its free-state critics, located the county seat at St. Bernard in 1855.(16) The town, however, never grew nor prospered, and was dealt a serious blow by a raid on Bernard’s store by Free-State men in June of 1856.

The richest evidence of Joab’s life in Franklin County during the time of the troubles in 1856 are the records of his claims against the government for property lost during the period, later called “bleeding Kansas.” There is no doubt that a guerrilla war was going on in Kansas during this period, with bloodshed and loss of property, if not too much loss of life. Raiding took place in eastern Kansas back and forth between small groups of forces organized to force the issue of Kansas’ stand on slavery. Claims against the government to collect for lost property totaled over \$15,000 in Franklin County alone. The person with the largest loss claim was Joab Bernard.

The raids on the Bernard store were the subject of testimony given to two different special committees created by congress to study “Bleeding Kansas:” the Howard Committee in 1856 -- testimony given just days after the events— and the Hoogland Committee whose report was issued in 1859.

George T. Kezer and Daniel Kezer, Bernard’s business partners, testified before the Howard Committee, and from them we learn that Bernard

has engaged in merchandizing, raising cattle, beef, trading, &c.;
it was on the creek midway between Centropolis and Minneola;
it was a large frame store building, about 18 x 30 feet, maybe larger;
1½ stories high, situated on a public road known as the West Point,
Council Grove and California road... Bernard had at his store a good
assortment of Indian goods, trinkets, dry goods, groceries, hardware
boots and shoes, such articles as were used in a country store...
his store was half a mile or a little more from the Ottawa Reservation;
he had Indian trade, Sac and Fox trade... (17)

Daniel and Joab also had a branch store on Appanoose Creek, five miles west of St. Bernard—probably on the same Santa Fe detour route described below. George Kezer states in 1856

I was, until a few days prior to the 1st of June, 1856 associated with him in the mercantile business. I conducted a separate establishment at a place about five miles distant from St. Bernard, in Franklin County; at this store there were Indian cloths, blankets, scarfs, handkerchiefs, prints, wood goods, beads, wampum, hair pipe, ear bobs, drilling and domestic satinets, and a general assortment of dry goods, clothing, hardware, queensware, groceries and provisions...all of which were removed from my separate storehouse to the main establishment of J.M. Bernard at St. Bernard, and received by him only a few days before the robbery of his store; before the robbery, I sold my entire interest in the establishment to said Bernard, and believe that there were six thousand dollars worth of goods in his said store when it was pillaged, and there may have been more. (18)

Jose Remadoes, another Bernard employee, identifies John Brown's men as the perpetrators of the robbery, though not the old man himself.(19) Brown was certainly in the area for two days after the Battle of Black Jack. [Remadoes' Hispanic heritage is interesting in light of Bernard's deep involvement in the Santa Fe and Mexican trade and the subsequent marriage of his daughter Mamie to Don Epifanio Aguirre, a Mexican nobleman.] The claims reports describe for us the store and its contents plus Bernard's stock and the extent of his farming.

It is interesting that Free-Stater Perry Fuller, who states in his supportive testimony that he also had a store of roughly the same size and stock as Bernard's across the creek from it, was untouched by this Free State raid. Fuller only lost a few head of horses and cattle that were roaming unbranded on the prairie.

“I knew petitioner when he was keeping store in the spring and summer of 1856, at his location, midway between where Centropolis and Minneola are now located, in Franklin county. I was in his store frequently. I was a merchant nearby, about a quarter of a mile from him, he had a small assortment of goods for the whites and Indians; a general country, furnishing

store; do not know the particulars of his stock. I went to St. Louis about the 12th May, 1856, on my return learned that the goods that he had on the Appanoose had been returned to his main store. From my general knowledge of the stock and store, it would be impossible for me to give any reliable estimate of the amount of goods he had on hand the last of May. His stock and mine generally averaged about \$6,000 before payment [of Indian allotments]; payment took place last of April or 1st of May. Do not know how many goods he sold at payment, nor the amount of stock brought from the Appanoose. I had a pretty good trade that season, so I was crediting Indians, and Mr. Bernard was not...I have looked over the bill of goods alleged to have been taken away at the time of the robbery of the store of Mr. Bernard, and find it contains about such a list and such an assortment of articles as I know Bernard as well as I myself usually kept on hand. (20)

Jose Remadoes swore that he

has resided with Joab M. Bernard for a period of one year in the capacity of herder or keeper of stock; and that he was present on the 3rd and 4th of June, A.D. 1856 and saw the body of armed men, numbering about twenty, armed with guns, pistols, and bowie knives, and with loud threats and violence, forcibly rush into the store of said Joab M. Bernard and while himself and three others were kept under guard with guns and pistols presented at them, the said marauders plundered, robbed and stole goods, wares, and merchandise from said store. Jose Remadoes further says that the armed men aforesaid were detachments from an encampment of about 200 men, under the command of one Captain John Brown. And the said Jose Remadoes further says, that on about the 10th day of September A.D. 1856, the said Bernard was in the possession of about 35 head of cattle, 10 yoke of work cattle, 9 head of beef cattle, and the balance cows and calves, and that the same were on or about the 10th day of September aforesaid, driven off by some marauding party and lost to the

said Joab M. Bernard. And the said Jose Remadoes further says that the cattle afore-said were driven off by men unknown, and towards Lawrence where James H. Lane was then encamped with a large body of outlaws. (21)

[In the topsy-turvy world of these claims, James Lane elsewhere offered evidence of depredation against *his* Douglas County home.] Though Remadoes placed Bernard at the store at the time of the robbery, Bernard testified that some of his free-state friends had overheard other members of that party indicate their intention to rob and kill him, and urged him to return to Westport. (22) The store clerk John Miller, told a story of those days.

“Mr. Bernard had gone to Westport, Missouri, or had started for Westport and was not there at that time [27 May 1856]. I was at the store with Mr. Davis. Whilst there, a party of thirteen men came to the store on horseback, armed with Sharpe’s rifles, revolvers, and bowie-knives. They inquired for Mr. Bernard. I told them he had gone to Westport. One of them said to me, “you are telling a God damn lie,” and drew up his gun at me. Some of them came into the store, and the rest remained outside, they called for sack goods as they wanted, and made Mr. Davis and myself hand them out, and if we ‘didn’t hurry’ they would shoot us—they had their guns ready. After they had got the goods they wanted—principally blankets and clothing—they packed them upon their horses and went away. On the evening of the 28th a party of fourteen men came to the store on horseback, with Sharpe’s rifles, revolvers and bowie-knives; thirteen of the party I recognized as the same that came to the store the day before; and the other man I knew—William S. Ewitt is his name—and who I know is a free-state man and a prominent man in the free-state party. The thieves took almost all the goods left in the store, two fine horses, three saddles, two bridles, and nearly all the provisions left, including flour and bacon. (23)

Bernard himself described his losses thusly:

I believe said deposition and the schedule thereto annexed contains a fair, just, and honest account of the property taken away and destroyed by the sacking of my store. The destruction continued from 4th June till 15th September, 1856.

Nine yoke of oxen, \$100 per yoke	\$900.00
Five cows and calves and four beef cattle	400.00
Add corn, as above	630.00
And horses	450.00
The cows were worth with their calves. \$40 each, \$200. The four beef cattle were worth \$50 or \$60 each. I could have got that for them.	\$200.00
Three saddles, blankets, and bridles, worth	50.00
Money taken from store drawer	15.25
Dry goods	2,502.43
Hardware, &c.	507.50
Clothing	473.00
Groceries, &c	1,050.00
Boots and Shoes	182.00
Indian trinkets, &c	975.50
Drugs, medicine, &c	34.00
Books and stationery	42.50
Stoneware and tinware	105.00
Hats and caps	130.25
Contents of store	\$6002.18

I had taken an inventory of my goods a few days before, when I ordered the goods mentioned from the Appanoose. I added to my stock the bill of goods brought from the Appanoose store, and deducted from the whole, as near as I could get at it, the value of the few goods that were left, and also the small amount of sales made within that time. The above bill of \$6002.18 includes and means the amount of

goods taken after making all proper deductions as aforesaid.

Deduct one yoke and a half of cattle recovered,	\$150.00
One heifer worth \$15	165.00
After making all deductions, as set forth in testimony	\$8,282.43

Joab M. Bernard (24)

After fleeing the territory in May of 1856, Bernard reappeared soon, though his daughter's memoirs stated that he never returned to Kansas Territory after the Brown raid.(25) Joab ran for representative to the Kansas Territorial legislature and was elected on October 5 as the representative for Franklin and Anderson Counties. Valentine maintains that none of these officials ever served their terms. (26)

By 1858, the territory was firmly in the hands of the Free-staters, and yet Bernard, the old settler remained. A flier for a "Grand Ball" to be given at the Capital House at Minneola on April 23, 1858, includes his name as a sponsor. Minneola was a "paper" town with the grandiose goal of becoming the state capital, which was achieved for one 24-hour period. Minneola, now long gone, was located along with St. Bernard on the east side of Eight Mile Creek. Among the "committee of arrangements" for the ball are early Franklin Countians such as P.P. Elder of Ohio City, Dr. J.G. Blunt of Lane City, J.W. Funk of Middletown, J.M. Bernard of Minneola and Gen. J.H. Lane of Lawrence. (27)

One possible reason for Bernard maintaining a presence in the St. Bernard/Minneola/Centropolis area was the creation in 1858 of a detour of the Santa Fe Road passing by his store. In 1858 the territorial government platted and improved a road to serve as a detour for the Santa Fe Road in times when water was low in southern Douglas County. That road would dip southwest from Palmyra towards Eight Mile Creek and St. Bernard *et al.*, angle northwest and then travel straight west to pick up the main Santa Fe road in Osage County. (28) Copies of the plats of this road were distributed to the counties through which the road passed, and a copy of all the maps remained in the files of the

territorial government, and eventually ended up at the Kansas Historical Society. (29) The Franklin County survey map of 1857 shows two fields or parcels of broken prairie along the northern border of the county which, when the “Santa Fe Road” detour map is overlayed upon the earlier map, lie directly along the path of the “Santa Fe Road detour,” one of which is identified as belonging to Daniel Kezer, Bernard’s town company partner. Franklin County pioneer Joshua Marsden Luce wrote in 1913 that when water in Douglas County—on the main route-- the Santa Fe trains detoured south into Franklin County for access to the more abundant water of Eight Mile Creek. (30) Bernard’s branch store on Appanoose Creek described in the affidavits would most likely have sat upon the later route of the detour.

Bernard appears to have considered himself a part of the Franklin County, Kansas Territory community as well as that of Westport. There was still a significant trade in the area, both Indian and Santa Fe. Although Bernard descendants report the existence of another Joab M. Bernard, a nephew of the town founder, the census records and personal reminiscences used for this study call Joab “Old” Joe Bernard – a more likely nickname for someone in his 50s than a youth.

Centropolis pioneer J.M. Luce’s memoirs, appearing in the Ottawa Herald in 1913, describe him walking down to Centropolis from the main Santa Fe Road on March 20, 1857. He subsequently settled there, and mentions “Joe Bernard” on a claim east of town as having had a few articles of merchandise and also keeping the post office. (31) The territorial detour road would be blazed the next year. A voter list from July 25, 1859, list Bernard, living alone in Centropolis Township. (32)

Though he eventually sold his claims and left Kansas, Joab Bernard was a pioneer who endured the hardest years of territorial life in Kansas while maintaining an extensive trading business in Westport. He was willing to live among free-staters even after the hope of making Kansas a slave state was dead. Indeed, he only seems to have fled the area under threat of bodily harm – news of which he maintained had come from free-state friends – and returned quickly when the troubles ceased. He died in 1879 at the age of 79, and is buried in Union Cemetery in Kansas City with the other Westport pioneers.

Endnotes

1. Undated clippings in Bernard family file, Westport Historical Society (WHS), Kansas City, MO.
2. Journal of Mamie Bernard Aguirre, published in WHS Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 3 (Dec. 1968) p. 5.
3. Journal of Jotham Meeker, ms. At Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS), 1844, *passim*.
4. Undated clipping in Bernard family file, WHS, *op. cit.*
5. 1849 document listing employees at the Sac and Fox agency, found in Letterfiles of the St. Louis Superintendency, KSHS.
6. Undated clipping in Bernard family file, WHS, *op. cit.*
7. Parkman, Francis. *The Oregon Trail* (1849) in William R. Bernard, "Westport and the Santa Fe Trade" *KSHS Collections*, Volume 9, p. 552.
8. Undated clipping from the Bernard file, WHS, *op.cit.*
9. Territorial census records, Franklin County, Kansas Territory, KSHS.
10. Valentine, Daniel M. "History of Franklin County, Kansas Territory" in *Franklin County History*, Vol. 1, 1993, Curtis Media, Chicago, p. 5.
11. Andreas, A.T., *History of the State of Kansas*, 1883, Lakeside Press, Chicago, p. 603.
12. Meeker Journals, *op. cit.* 1849 *passim*.
13. Journal of Mamie Bernard Aguirre, p. 7, *op.cit.*
14. File on Franklin County ghost towns, Franklin County Historical Society (FCHS) archives.
15. 34th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, Report No. 200, Report of the Special (Howard) Committee appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas; with the Views of the Minority of Said Committee. Information on election fraud, p. 492.
16. Ibid. "Sound on the goose" was a coeed phrase indicating one's support of Kansas becoming a slave state.
17. 34th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, Report no> 200, Report of the Special (Howard) Committee appointed to Investigate the Troubles in Kansas; with the Views of the Minority of Said Committee. 29 December, 1959.
18. Report of the (Hoogland) Special Committee, Tertimony of Daniel Kezer, p. 858.
19. Report of the (Hoogland) Special Committee, Testimony of Jose Remadoes, 25 December, 1859, p. 856.
20. Report of the (Hoogland) Special Committee, Testimony of Perry fuller, p. √
21. Report of the (Hoogland) Special Committee, Testimony of Jose Remadoes, pp. 856/857.
22. Report of the (Hoogland) Special Committee, Testimony of James G. Hamilton. p. √
23. Report of the (Hoogland) Special Committee, Testimony of Joab Bernard, p. √
24. Journal of Mamie Bernard Aguirre, p. ?, *op .cit.* √
25. Journal of Mamie Bernard Aguirre, p. ?, *op .cit.*√
26. Flier for a "Grand Ball" to be held at the Capitol House at Minneola on April 23, 1858, in FCHS Archives.
27. Franklin County K.T. portion of "*Wyandotte to Council Grove, 1859, Southwest Toward Santa Fe*" road map in KSHS, Manuscript Road Maps, Map Collection
28. Ibid.
29. Luce, Joshua Marsden. "*Memoirs of Centropolis Township*" article dated January 1, 1913, Ottawa Herald in FCHS.
30. Ibid.
31. A List of Voters and the Whole Population of Centropolis Township, Franklin County, K.T., July 25, 1859. KSHS, archives division, p. 1.