



# Flowering of Nicodemus

## From the Superintendent

Welcome to this spring 2012 installment of The Flowering of Nicodemus. We have a lot to fill you in on.

**Site Selection Study.** The process to determine the location for a new Visitor Center includes developing criteria to guide the selection and the architectural programming for the facility. As you are aware, we have just completed the month-long public review of the Site Selection Study and Environmental Assessment document. We held two public meetings—one on Feb 11 attended by about a dozen people, and the second on Feb 14 attended by one person. We did not receive any comments via the government website and only one via the comments box at the Township Hall during the review period. Thanks to those of you that took the time to learn more about this process and offer suggestions or comments.

**Designing the Parks / Parks for the People.** This project partners the park and the community with two universities: Kansas State and City College of New York. These multidisciplinary studios will explore design and development options for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Undoubtedly these two incredibly creative groups of students, faculty and consultants will offer many unconventional ideas that will spark our imaginations and inspire the park and community in a unified direction for the future. Their work will be complete in late spring. Tom Wellington is the community contact person.

**Park Projects.** This summer the Historic Preservation Training Center crew will be here to stabilize the Schoolhouse, replacing the failed foundation and siding, among other tasks. The final result will be a cleaned-up exterior, freshly painted, ready

for picture-taking. The crew will also repair the plaster and paint the foyer of the AME Church. We hope to provide temporary universal access (government-speak for a handicap ramp) to allow visitors to enter the foyer, view a panel on the history of the church and peer into the main body of the church—which is in serious disrepair right now. More on that later.

Next summer, we have scheduled the crew to stabilize the Township Hall. There are significant drainage problems around the building that are causing the stone to deteriorate. The north wall will be treated with a biocide to take care of the sooty growth over most of it. The crew will tackle a number of other issues with the building as well.

The following summer (2014) the crew will return to rehabilitate the AME Church. Plans right now will call for the reconstruction of the north wall and its additions. And the summer after that (if we are lucky with our funding request) we will install replica historic furnishings and open it up for descendant, resident and visitor access.

The Park and the Nicodemus Historical Society have partnered on the incredibly successful Oral History Project, and the Site Bulletin Project. There is more information about these projects later in this newsletter.

We are in the first year of a three year project to develop wayside exhibits. You may be familiar with the angled information panels that are pretty common in other national parks. We are hoping to be a little different, incorporating linking

the information to your cell phone, etc. Post Modern Co of Colorado is researching the alternative media options, the Historical Society is researching the potential locations for the Waysides, and a crew of National Park Service specialists will be developing sketches for the interpretive panels. In year two, the panels will be designed and in year three, they will be built and installed. Stay tuned!

This May we are excited to host Diversity month. We are working with the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance on a set of exhibits highlighting the diversity of settlers in the Solomon Valley—African-American, French-Acadian, Czech and Bohemian, to name a few. Check our website for the Event day, or just pop in during the month of May to view the posters that will be on exhibit.

And finally please welcome two new staff to the park: Joe Randall is our new Administrative Assistant. He is a veteran with an extensive business and administrative background. Bill Doerrer, also a veteran, will serve as the park Facility Operations Specialist. He comes from Great Smoky Mountain in Tennessee. He served as acting Facility Manager in his previous assignment at Dinosaur National Monument. So when you see someone in town that you don't recognize, it's probably Joe or Bill! Take a moment and say hi.

MARK

**Did you know** ...that Reverend Roundtree, one of the founders of Nicodemus, was the first African American settler in Nicodemus Township and his homestead bordered the northwest corner of the town of Nicodemus?

# Around Town

## Nicodemus Historical Society News

**Nicodemus Politicians** – The Historical Society worked with Park Ranger Phyllis Howard to develop a program for January entitled “The Politicians of Nicodemus”. The program included a historical photo exhibit of the Nicodemus politicians and leaders, and a political platform portrayed by descendants. The platform included Kansas State Auditor and Nicodemus Town Company Secretary, Edward P. McCabe (Tom Wellington), Town Company President and Solicitor, John Niles (Val Williams), Minister and County Commissioner, Daniel Hickman (Victor Williams), and the first and second Graham County attorneys, George. W. Jones (Steve Jones) and William L. Sayers (Gil Alexander). The portrayal of these early Nicodemus politicians and leaders was phenomenal with Victor Williams setting the tone. His “academy award winning” performance was described by those in attendance as “mesmerizing”. In addition, Ms. Gretchen Cassel Eick of the Speaker's Bureau, Kansas Humanities Council, spoke on Kansas Civil Rights, highlighting the many “firsts” Kansans can be proud of.



**Wayside Exhibits** – The Historical Society is assisting the National Park Service in identifying and researching the history of sites within the historic landmark district (town) and the Nicodemus and Wild Horse Townships where interpretive signs might be placed. This project will culminate with nearly twenty proposed signs and locations for these signs. Anyone interested in assisting with the project, please contact us.

**Oral Histories** – An additional ten oral histories are being completed this year. Most are of the generation of descendants that are between the ages of 50-70. Descendent children and adults that were trained in the first set of interviews are being engaged to conduct these.

**March “Women’s History Month”** – We will be presenting “The Women of Nicodemus” for the March program at the Visitor Center on Saturday, March 31, at noon. (The photographic exhibit “Women of Nicodemus” will be on display all month.) The March 31 program will feature a musical reenactment of the famous “Williams Sisters” singing group as performed by daughters and nieces of the musical talents, with a special selection by the only remaining sister, Pearlena Moore. There will be a dramatic presentation about the legendary women of Nicodemus and a host of other women descendants will provide histories and various talents during this event. Sample tastings from these women will be featured as part of the refreshments, including Bertha Carter’s famous lemon meringue pie, Ernestine’s peach cobbler and Pearlena’s cookies.



**Site Bulletin Development** - This four month research and writing project ends in April. Four descendants are working with the Nicodemus Historical Society and the National Park Service to produce eight site bulletins for Nicodemus National Historic Site. Steve Jones is doing research and writing about Nicodemus politicians and leaders, professional sports greats of Nicodemus and the history of Nicodemus baseball. Twilla Berry is covering the history of the A.M.E. Church and gospel music. Sharyn Dowdell is researching and writing about the Homecoming celebrations and 4-H. Esther Clark is researching and writing about quilting and education at Nicodemus. The researchers are collecting information from the Nicodemus Historical Society's archives, National Park Service files, genealogy files, county records, and the Graham County Historical Society. The project is being assisted by retired English teacher and Ellis County Historical Society volunteer, Karen Madorin. She will assist

the writers with the development of the site bulletins. As project director, Angela Bates is excited about the descendants researching their history and says, “They are realizing the breadth, depth and richness of the history at Nicodemus”. Steve Jones, states “I wish I had known this history while I was going to school. What a difference it would have made in my life.” This is a great opportunity for a few descendants to be directly involved with creating brochures that reflect their history. Any descendant wanting to be involved in these types of projects or who wants to volunteer on various projects for the Nicodemus Historical Society are encouraged to contact us.

Angela Bates

## Township Board News

The Township Board has selected the mowing contractor for this season. We are getting a remarkable price for the mowing of both cemeteries and the town site locations. Thanks to those of you who took the time to prepare and present your bids.

There are several projects which may or may not get funded this year. The water tower needs to be painted. More streets are needing repair. The playground needs to be addressed again- the sand we installed has not stayed within the boundaries. We've had to replace both water pumps.

Sharyn Dowdell

## Kansas Black Farmers Association

We are getting very close to purchasing enough lots to house our production facility. The next step is securing funding for construction. There are still the faithful few of us who have faith that we will have a facility in the not too distant future.

Sharyn Dowdell

## 2011 Nicodemus Homecoming

The committee is starting to meet more often in preparation of this year's event. We are looking at the surveys we solicited last year in hopes of finding out more about what the descendants want from this event. We are open to suggestions about a theme and any new activities.

Sharyn Dowdell

# From the Park

## NICODEMUS NHS QUILT PROJECT

We hope to start the Nicodemus Quilt Project soon. The goal is to have an ongoing quilt-making project in the Nicodemus Township Hall (Visitor Center) that park visitors as well as residents and descendants can help complete by adding a few stitches to the quilts while visiting the Township Hall.

We want the quilts to reflect the culture and history of Nicodemus. To accomplish this, we would like to make them as historically correct as possible, using patterns, materials and methods used by the Nicodemus community in the late 1800s through the 1950s.

This ongoing quilting project will present an amazing interpretive opportunity for the park to unfold yet another important part of the “Nicodemus story” to our park visitors. We invite anyone interested in helping us plan and get started on this important project or anyone who has an unfinished quilt that we could start with, please contact Michelle Huff at 785-839-4321 TU thru TH or 785-839-4233 SU or MO.

## 2012 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

An exciting year of monthly events is planned for 2012. The list below shows the themes for each month. Would you like to help us further develop events for any particular month? Contact Park Ranger Phyllis Howard at: 785-839-4233, TU-SA from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm.

March: Women's History Month

April: Youth

May: Diversity

June: Music

July: Emancipation/Homecoming Celebration

August: Men of Nicodemus

September: Founders Day – The Boom Years

October: Pioneer Days

November: Patriotism

December: Holiday Celebration Open House

**Did you know** ...that there are 17 Civil War Veteran burials in two of the three Nicodemus area cemeteries?



## SPOTLIGHT ON “AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE FUND” PARKS:

### GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER NATIONAL MONUMENT

George Washington Carver was born near Diamond, Missouri at the close of the Civil War. His mother was enslaved on the farm of Moses Carver. Soon after his birth, George and his mother were captured by outlaws. George was found in Arkansas and returned to the Carvers but his mother was lost. The Carvers raised George on their farm where he explored nature and developed a love for plants and animals. The local school did not accept African-American students and Carver’s search for education led him throughout Kansas and Iowa, facing a multitude of racial roadblocks and violence. He pressed on and graduated from Iowa State College in 1896 with a Master of Agriculture degree.

Booker T. Washington offered Carver a position at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Carver accepted and became Director of Agriculture, spending the next 47 years at Tuskegee. Much of his career focused on educating impoverished, southern farmers about scientific agriculture, improving crop yields and raising their standard of living. He is remembered for making over 300 products from the peanut plant and over 100 products from the sweet potato plant. Outfitting a moveable school for farm families, working with polio patients, and becoming a spokesman for the YMCA Commission on Interracial Cooperation are lesser known aspects of his work and contributed to his legacy. Carver died on January 5, 1943 and is buried on the campus of Tuskegee University.

For more information on George Washington Carver, visit [www.nps.gov/gwca](http://www.nps.gov/gwca).  
And to learn more about the African American Experience Fund, visit [www.aaexperience.org](http://www.aaexperience.org).



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

**Nicodemus National Historic Site**

510 Washington Avenue, #1  
Nicodemus, Kansas 67625

Former enslaved African Americans left Kentucky in organized colonies at the end of the post-Civil War Reconstruction period to experience freedom on the free soils of Kansas.

Nicodemus represents the involvement of African Americans in the westward expansion and settlement of the Great Plains. It is the oldest and only remaining reconstruction era African American town west of the Mississippi River.

NICO\_Ranger\_Activities@nps.gov

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American People so that all may experience our heritage.

**EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™**

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**Comments? Write to:**

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Nicodemus, Kansas 67625

**Federal Job Announcements:**  
**(USAJOBS)**

[www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov)

The Flowering of Nicodemus is a publication of Nicodemus National Historic Site and is published three times per year.

**Hope to see you at the  
134th Annual  
Homecoming / Emancipation  
Celebration  
July 26 through 29, 2012.**

For more information, visit:

**[www.nicodemuskansas.org](http://www.nicodemuskansas.org)**