



# Flowering of Nicodemus

The official newsletter of Nicodemus National Historic Site

November 2006

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## From the Superintendent

As we leave autumn behind and move into winter, it seems that the shorter days and overcast skies are telling us that this is the season for crawling into a hole to hibernate ... unfortunately, I am afraid that if we slow down, the paperwork will bury us! So, even though we do not have many visitors stopping by during the winter months, we are still open and are still busy. We are thankful to have a new staff person here: Park Guide Michelle Huff will be helping Park Ranger Phyllis Howard at the visitor center. We are busy planning a very exciting archeological project for late May and early June, plus small events for this coming year.

I was fortunate to attend a conference in Lawrence, Kansas on November 9-10, "The First and The Forced." Participants in this conference examined how the lives of African Americans and American Indians have intersected over the years. People from around the United States and from South America attended. Presentations were made on what it is like being a member of two cultures (African American and Indian), how both peoples are represented in film and literature, the development and evolution of racial identity, the impacts of Indian Trust legislation on Afro-Indian people, and many other topics. Haskell Indian Nations University and the University of Kansas hosted the conference and many students from both schools attended. I made a short presentation on Nicodemus to attendees and met several people who knew of Nicodemus and its importance. As a park manager, I am always looking for researchers who can help with projects at Nicodemus (for free, of course!), so this was a good place to make contacts. The conference was funded through a grant from the Ford Foundation.

We are continuing to build partnerships with people here in town, in the region and State, and across the nation. It is very exciting to find individuals or groups that understand that what benefits them may benefit us, and vice versa. Working together is sometimes a slower way to do something (as opposed to the "I'll just do it myself" approach), but the results are so much more rewarding and richer! I hope you feel welcome to visit with us about ideas you have or comments you would like to make on our activities or the way we go about doing things. *Sherda K. Williams*

## Nicodemus National Historic Site Welcomes New Employee, Park Guide Michelle Huff

Michelle has been with the National Park Service since 2001, serving at Zion National Park as a seasonal Visitor Use Assistant and at Pipe Spring National Monument as a volunteer, seasonal Park Guide and seasonal Ranger, and permanent Park Guide.

She was raised in the military and feels fortunate to have lived in a variety of places and to have grown up making new friends and having new experiences every three or four years. She graduated from high school in Flagstaff, Arizona, received her college education from Arizona Universities, and has spent most of her adult life in Arizona. Her family roots, however, are Midwestern and she is very happy to have finally relocated to the rural Midwest where she has always felt at home.

Michelle and her husband Blaine share a variety of interests, some of which are: history, genealogy, anthropology, archaeology, music, travel, antiques, flea markets, gardening, county fairs and animals (especially dogs and horses).

If you would like to meet Michelle or have any questions for her, just stop by the visitor center.



*Michelle working with "Princess" at Pipe Spring National Monument in Northern Arizona.*

Photo provided courtesy of Michelle Huff

## Proclamation By The Governor

NPS Photo

Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius signed the following Proclamation recognizing the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Nicodemus as a National Historic Site. Ms. Danielle Dempsey-Swopes, Executive Director of the African American Affairs Commission, read and presented the Proclamation during the 10th Anniversary program at Homecoming, July 29, 2006.

### TO THE PEOPLE OF KANSAS, GREETINGS:

WHEREAS, When Kansas entered the Union as a “free state” in 1861, many African Americans viewed our State as a place to seek economic gain, and in 1877, a group of five African American men from Kentucky helped form the Nicodemus Town Company, claiming a 160-acre town site along the Solomon River; and

WHEREAS, After the Civil War, “Exodusters” migrated from the South and settled approximately twenty Kansas towns; and they came seeking better economic opportunities, freedom from harassment, and freedom to create their own lives; and these settlers play an important role in settling the State of Kansas, as well as the rest of the United; and

WHEREAS, Of the all-Black town established along the Western frontier at the end of the Reconstruction period, Nicodemus, Kansas, is the only such place that remains, illustrating how African Americans participated in the western expansion of the United States and the settlement of the Great Plains; and

WHEREAS, In 1976, the entire town was designated a National Historic Landmark District by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, and in 1996 President Clinton signed a bill creating the Nicodemus National Historic Site; and

WHEREAS, Nicodemus and its residents own a bright spot in Kansas’ vibrant history and continue to contribute to the rich heritage of our State:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, KATHLEEN SEBELIUS, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF KANSAS, do hereby recognize

Nicodemus, Kansas

on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a National Historic Site, for its vital role in the history of our Great State. Furthermore, I urge all citizens to join in this observance and recognize the dedication of Nicodemus residents in preserving the unique heritage of their town.

DONE: At the Capitol in Topeka under the Great Seal of the State this 11<sup>th</sup> day of July, A.D. 2006



Ms. Danielle Dempsey-Swopes, Executive Director of the African American Affairs Commission, read and presented the Proclamation signed by Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius at the Homecoming Celebration.

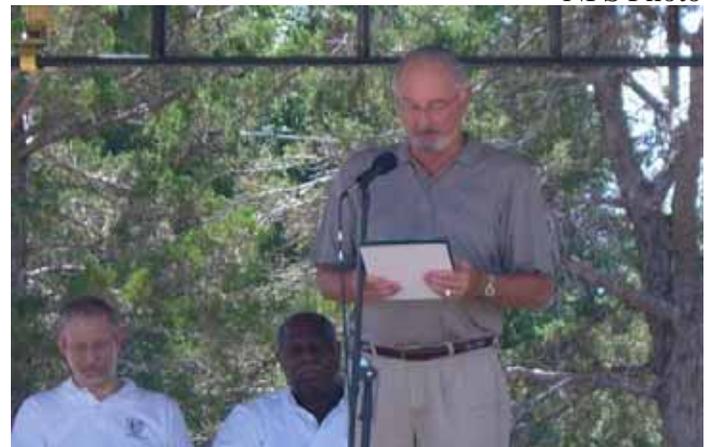
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## Letter from Former President William J. Clinton

Former President Bill Clinton was invited to the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration during this year Homecoming Celebration but was unable to attend. He did send a letter expressing his greeting in recognition of the designation of Nicodemus National Historic Site during his presidency. Former President Clinton saluted those who have worked hard though the decades to establish the town and those who are keeping the legacy of hard work and determination alive not only in Nicodemus but in our nation’s rich history.

The letter, along with the Proclamation signed by Governor Kathleen Sebelius and Representative Jerry Moran’s speech, is on display at the Township Hall from 8:30am to 5:00pm daily.

NPS Photo



Bill Schenk, former Director of the Midwest Region, reading the letter from former President Bill Clinton. Other dignitaries pictured include Associate Regional Director David Given, Midwest Region (far left), and former Director of the National Park Service Robert Stanton (center).



# News From Our Park Partners



## NICODEMUS TOWNSHIP BOARD

Greetings!! The township board members remain the same after the election earlier this month. Thanks to all of you who took the time to vote and write Mrs. Alvena Alexander to continue as our clerk.

We hope all of you had a blessed Thanksgiving and have started making plans for a glorious Christmas season. We are planning to put up at least one decoration somewhere on the town site.

Most activities have gone into hibernation for the winter. But the board will continue to meet each month. We are scheduled to meet with the Nicodemus Housing Authority Board soon to coordinate efforts to keep the Villa up and running.

We are in the process of installing some new playground equipment and safety signs in the Town Park. We have started beautifying the area around the limestone Nicodemus roadside sign. This project is scheduled to be finished by spring. As you drive through town, you will notice that the county has installed street signs around town.

Again, Holiday Greetings to one and all from your friends here in Nicodemus!!!

Sharyn Dowdell-Kountz, Trustee; Esther Clark, Treasurer; Alvena Alexander, Clerk



(Photo: NPS)

Street signs at the corner of 3rd and Washington Avenue in Nicodemus.



(Photo: NPS)

Street signs at the corner of 2nd and Washington Avenue in Nicodemus.

## NICODEMUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Final plans have been made to install the heating system in the Historical Society museum building at the southwestern end of Nicodemus. Soon there will be heat in our building!

Angela Bates, Executive Director; Thomas H. Wellington II, President; Theresa Switzer, Secretary; Gillian Alexander, Treasurer; Twilla Wilson, Spiritual Leader

*“The Master has already written the script”*

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## OTHER LOCAL NEWS

The flowers planted in 2005 for National Public Land Day in front of the Masonic Lodge and maintained by the Nicodemus Pride Committee bloomed beautiful this year.



(Photo: NPS)

Flowers in front of the Masonic Lodge.



(Photo: NPS)

Mums planted in the old well out in the Roadside Park north of the concrete platform.

## Representative Jerry Moran (Kansas) Honors Nicodemus Before the United States House of Representatives

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Representative Jerry Moran of Kansas presented the following speech about the History of Nicodemus, Kansas to the House of Representatives on June 28, 2006 during the second session of the proceedings and debates of the 109<sup>th</sup> congress, honoring Nicodemus contributions to America history.

“Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate from time to time that we reflect upon our country’s past, study events of history, and remember what we have learned from those who came before us.

The western Kansas town of Nicodemus, though small in size, has a rich history that can teach us much about who we are as Kansans, and who we are as Americans.

Discrimination and slavery are an unfortunate part of our country’s history. Black Americans suffered greatly, and many fought and died to obtain their freedom. The struggle between pro-slavery forces and abolitionists was fought across the country. And significant battles took place in my home State of Kansas during the 1850’s.

The outcome of Bleeding Kansas was a free State in the heart of an expanding nation that offered hope and opportunity to former slaves. While the end of the Civil War brought with it expectations that African Americans would finally enjoy the rights described in our founding documents, many rights obtained were largely stripped away by the end of the Reconstruction period.

Many recognized the sacrifice that Kansas had made to become a free State. Ex-slaves left the south and ventured out to the vast prairies of Kansas in search of freedom and opportunity.

The destination for many of these individuals was Nicodemus. Founded in 1877 by six African American men, Nicodemus was formed as a community specifically for African Americans. At a time when prejudice and oppression were still common, Nicodemus offered African Americans a place to own their own land, to make a living farming, and to prosper in jurisdiction allowing self government.

The young community of Nicodemus grew and prospered during the 1880’s as a result of the ingenuity of Black entrepreneurs and the dedication and commitment of Black farmers. Though many African Americans in the south were denied an education, Nicodemus established schools and educated the town’s children. Since the bustling activity and growth of the 1880, Nicodemus has had it ups and downs, yet it today remains a community of African Americans and a testament to the human desire for freedom.

Nicodemus is the only remaining western town established by emancipated slaves during the reconstruction period, and it is critical that its history not be lost.

On November 12, 1996, Congress recognized the historical significance of Nicodemus and established the Nicodemus National Historic Site to preserve, protect and interpret this unique community. Thanks to Congressional action, the National Park Service and especially the residents of Nicodemus, this community and its story are being preserved for future generations.

Each year during the last weekend in July, Nicodemus is transformed again into a busy community, full of activity, for the Emancipation Celebration. At this event, former residents and their families return to Nicodemus to share stories and to enjoy one another’s company.

This year, the community will not only celebrate the first emancipation of slaves in the western hemisphere, but also Nicodemus’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a National Historic Site. Nicodemus is a special community that reminds us both of the struggles and the accomplishments of African Americans.

I am proud of this community. Nicodemus deserves to be honored for its contributions to American history. I commend and encourage the preservation efforts of the National Park Service and the residents of this amazing town.”



Photo: NNDB tracking the entire world

Congressman Jerry Moran Kansas 1st District

## Be a WebRanger!



### What is a WebRanger?

A WebRanger is  
...a Care-taker  
...an Adventurer  
...a Learner  
...a Seeker  
...a Discoverer

A WebRanger could be

...YOU!

Now you can be a Junior Ranger even if you are not able to visit a national park. Become a member of a growing group of young people who are interested in the world around them and involved with their nation's heritage.... The WebRanger!

### How do I become a WebRanger?

Just print your membership card and start your journey. You're ready to explore your National Parks! Along the way, complete activities to earn rewards.

Help a baby sea turtle reach the sea.... Be a spy during the Revolutionary War.... Drive your sled dog team on a wilderness patrol.... Experience the life and death struggle of a puma...and MORE!

Choose your adventure and collect secret words each time you complete a puzzle, finish a game, solve a mystery or take part in a story. [www.nps.gov/webrangers](http://www.nps.gov/webrangers)

#### Parents:

The National Park Service is committed to providing a web-safe environment where your children can explore the parks. No personal information is collected, and none is required for participation in WebRangers.

Have fun and learn along with your children as they explore their National Park Service from the inside.

Each completed activity is rewarded with a secret code word. After completing an adventure (five activities) the secret words can be redeemed for a reward.

#### Kids:

The door is always open to WebRangers of all ages. Watch for new activities and earn more rewards as you get to know more about your parks and the rangers who work there.

#### Teachers:

While not designed as curriculum, many WebRangers activities illustrate principles useful in the classroom. You may find Natural Science and American History addressed in new and exciting ways.

*Explore,*

*Learn,*

*Protect:*

*Be a Junior Ranger!*

Remember, Nicodemus National Historic Site has a Junior Ranger program that you can experience in person at the Visitor Center. And many of our national park units near you have a Junior Ranger Program you can complete at the Park, or on-line. Check with your local national park or visit [www.nps.gov/learn](http://www.nps.gov/learn) for more information.



National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior

Nicodemus National Historic Site  
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## EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

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

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Federal Job Announcements  
(USAJOBS)  
[www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov)

*The **Flowering of Nicodemus** is a quarterly publication of Nicodemus National Historic Site.*

## Learn about Pipe Spring National Monument

Our new Park Guide Michelle Huff worked at Pipe Spring National Monument before coming to Nicodemus National Historic Site. American Indians, Mormon pioneers, plants, animals, and others have depended on the life-giving water found at Pipe Spring. Learn about pioneer and Kaibab Paiute life at the [Visitor Center and Museum](#), on [guided tours of an historic fort](#), during living history demonstrations, and/or on self-guided tours of the grounds (historic buildings, farm animals, an orchard, garden, and ½ mile trail).

To learn more about Pipe Spring National Monument visit their National Park Service website at <http://www.nps.gov/pisp>.



NPS Photo Pipe Spring National Monument

The Fort, called Winsor Castle, and East Cabin at Pipe Springs as shown in a 1925 photo.