



Flowering of Nicodemus

From the Superintendent

Can you imagine that it may have been about this time of the year in 1878 when the families of Nicodemus began planning for an “emancipation celebration”? In those days it was traditional to celebrate the anniversary of the first emancipation of slaves in the Western hemisphere: August 1, 1834. I can imagine that the joy of that first celebration in 1878 may have been “sweetened” by the knowledge that the Nicodemus settlers were surviving in such a difficult environment. And even as they labored to put in crops and build dugouts in the spring of 1878, their decision to make the move to western Kansas was validated as President Hays ordered the withdrawal of the remaining Federal troops from the South. Any protection that those troops had afforded African Americans was lost.

The celebration at Nicodemus continued over the years and evolved. This July, the town is celebrating the 130th Homecoming Celebration! While we at the National Historic Site play only a small role in this celebration, we feel honored to be able to support this historic event. It is obvious that the Homecoming Celebration is important to residents and descendants. We are working with the Homecoming Committee and are again providing an educational speaker for the Saturday afternoon program.

There appears to be good news for this summer – our Fiscal Year 2008 budget includes funding to hire two seasonal (i.e., temporary) employees, a Maintenance Worker and Park Guide. The seasonal Maintenance Worker will work with our permanent Maintenance Worker Robert Brogden to take care of the AME Church and Visitor Center (Township Hall) during the summer. The seasonal Park Guide will assist Park Ranger Phyllis Howard and Park Guide Michelle Huff greeting visitors in the Visitor Center. We will soon be sending out an announcement for these two temporary positions, with information on how to

submit an application. You may remember that Nicodemus descendant Amber James worked as a seasonal employee for us during the summer of 2005.

We were very fortunate that the archeological excavations at the Thomas and Zerena Johnson dugout site north of Nicodemus attracted a lot of attention in 2006 and 2007. The principal investigator this past year, Dr. Florie Bugarin from Howard University, is interested in continuing the excavations if she can find funding. Those of you who were able to either participate in or visit the excavations over the past two years learned how careful archeologists are at excavating. Even with the two seasons of excavations, there are still questions about how the house and cellar sites were constructed. This home site is providing clues about what the Johnson and Henry Williams families ate, their toys and tools used, and their economic status. We will keep you updated and let you know if more work will occur this summer.

Finally, as you will see in a related article, this is the last time I will be “speaking” with you from this column. I have accepted a transfer to James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor, Ohio, effective on March 30th. It is hard to put into words how much Nicodemus has meant to me, both professionally and personally. It has been a true pleasure to get to know the residents here, our visitors, and many of the descendants over the last four years. In so many ways, you have enriched my life – thank you for your friendship and support! I wish the best for you and for this very special place and hope our paths cross again “further on down the road.”

Sherda K. Williams, Superintendent



Superintendent Sherda Williams

*National Park Service
InsideNPS*

EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK First Lady, Director Announce Junior Ranger Contest

*By Larry Perez
February 12, 2008*

First Lady Laura Bush and Director Mary Bomar visited the park on Wednesday, February 7th, to participate in a special event hosted by the National Park Foundation. Joining a group of local fifth-graders from Florida City Elementary, both Bush and Bomar toured a restoration area in the park dubbed the “Hole-in-the-Donut”, an area of roughly 6,600 acres that has been invaded by Brazilian pepper, an exotic invasive species common around south Florida. While there, the students became honorary Junior Rangers and assisted park staff in planting fifteen native trees and shrubs in the area.

Following the event, the First Lady and the Director addressed students, visitors, park staff and invited guests.

“Today we hear that families and children are losing touch with nature and the outdoors,” said Bomar, “but you children are the future stewards of places like the Everglades, Big Cypress Biscayne and all the other special places in America. If you do not care about our parks, who will?”

The event was hosted by the National Park Foundation as a part of their First Bloom project, an initiative that aims to plant the seeds for a stronger

conservation ethic, beginning with kids. Foundation President Vin Cipolla was on hand to announce the launch of the 2008 Junior Ranger Essay Contest, which encourages students to consider what they can do to “turn over a new leaf for the environment and help preserve our national parks.” The grand prize winner will travel with his or her family to Everglades National Park on Earth Day to star in an electronic field trip that examines native and invasive species in our national parks.

“In the Everglades, there are hundreds of invasive plants and animals,” said the First Lady. Acknowledging their hard work earlier in the day, Mrs. Bush praised the students for their help in assisting in the restoration of native plant communities in the park. “You’re very lucky to live so close to the Everglades,” she said, “We want to be sure that all American boys and girls get to get outside and breath the fresh air and explore the beauty of our country.”

Director Bomar encouraged the students to go back home and entice their families to come and enjoy the park.

“And I promise,” she quipped, “they won’t have to work as hard as you did today!”

Submission guidelines for the 2008 Junior Ranger Essay, can be found on the National Park Foundation website at:

<http://www.nationalparks.org/get-involved/essay-contest/>

Contact Information

Name: Larry Perez



Director Bomar speaks at last Wednesday's event. The First Lady sits to her right. Photo by Joy Brunk.

Staff Changes at Nicodemus National Historic Site

Sherda Williams

Our current superintendent, Sherda Williams, has accepted a transfer to James A. Garfield National Historic Site in northeastern Ohio, effective March 30, 2008. Sherda has been at Nicodemus National Historic Site since January 2003. Midwest Regional Director Ernie Quintana appointed Mr. Mark Weaver to serve as “Acting Superintendent” for Nicodemus NHS. This will be a temporary appointment for Mark lasting approximately 3-4 months; he should be arriving the week of March 24th, so he and Sherda have time to discuss on-going projects. Mark will guide the park until the new Superintendent is hired (anticipated by early summer).

Mark currently works as a Community Planner with our Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In that job, he has gained a lot of experience in working with communities. He helps communities develop comprehensive trails plans and green infrastructure plans and assists with non-profit organizational development.

Prior to his Wisconsin assignment, Mark was landscape architect at Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Van Buren, Missouri where he prepared facility improvements plans and provided overall design guidance for the park. Mark also has had some interesting international experience—as a member of a Department of the Interior team, he consulted on eco-tourism and cultural-tourism projects in Central and South America, most recently developing tourist facilities at the Mayan site of El Mirador in northern Guatemala.

Mark brings great experience and a friendly personality to Nicodemus. He has heard great things about the National Historic Site and is looking forward to working with the folks in town and learning more about this interesting part of American history. Please feel free to drop by and visit with Mark at our office (Apt. 4B at the Nicodemus Villa Apartments) or call him with any questions you may have (785-839-4321).

Celebrate “Black History Month” by Preserving Your Family’s History

Sherda Williams

Why not celebrate history by recording your family history? As a Library of Congress website notes, “Often, people think the study of history means studying governments, battles, and national leaders. These are important history topics, but historians learn much about history by studying the lives of everyday people as well.” (Reference 1, below) Every day more memories are lost—memories of what it was like to live in Nicodemus, experiences you or your family had growing up here, and why this town is important.

Do you remember when it was more common for people to sit around talking and telling stories? Before television became our form of entertainment, sharing with each other face-to-face was more common. How often do you share stories of your life with your children or grandchildren? Not only are we losing this shared social experience, but think how little information young children know about growing up in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. And, think how drastically our society has changed from just 50 years ago.

If you would like to make recordings of your family members talking about their childhood and growing up around Nicodemus, we found several references (below) from the Library of Congress and several universities on how to tape oral interviews. Maybe you could get your children interested by asking them to tape their own memories of living in or visiting Nicodemus! Today is tomorrow’s past and everyone’s experiences are valuable and worth remembering.

Some suggested references:

- (1) <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html>;
- (2) http://www.folklife.si.edu/explore/Resources/InterviewGuide/InterviewGuide_home.html;
- (3) <http://www.indiana.edu/~cshmt/techniques.html>;
- (4) http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html;
- (5) <http://alpha.dickinson.edu/oha/>;
- (6) http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/oral_history.html.

The following announcement was sent out by Superintendent McMurry announcing Superintendent Williams's departure.



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Fort Larned National Historic Site

Nicodemus National Historic Site

1767 KS. Highway 156

Larned, Kansas 67550-9321

As you may have heard, Superintendent Sherda Williams will be leaving Nicodemus National Historic Site at the end of March. Sherda has accepted a position in northeastern Ohio at James A. Garfield National Historic Site.

Sherda and I want to thank you for all the support you have provided her and the other staff at Nicodemus National Historic Site! Your help has contributed to our success in serving visitors to this Historic Site.

I want to assure you that the National Park Service will continue our commitment to Nicodemus and to preserving the significant history of the town. With your continued support over the next few years, we are increasing our efforts to help preserve and interpret this important aspect of American history.

Until we have a replacement selected to fill the position of Superintendent, the Regional Director has appointed Mr. Mark Weaver to serve as the temporary "Acting Superintendent" for two to three months while we recruit for a new Superintendent.

We value the unique nature of Nicodemus, where the National Historic Site is so intimately embedded within a living community. There are very few situations where the history we interpret is so directly tied to the heritage of the individual residents and the community as a whole. Visitors to Nicodemus immediately comprehend how special this place is and many are awed by the perseverance and longevity of this community.

Again, thank you for your interest in and support of Nicodemus National Historic Site! If you have questions about the transition to a new Superintendent or about our operations at Nicodemus, please contact Sherda, or after March 31, Mr. Weaver at 785-839-4321.

Sincerely,

Kevin D. McMurry
Superintendent



Nicodemus Historical Society

The Society will be celebrating their 20th Anniversary during this year Emancipation Proclamation/ Homecoming celebration. Currently, work is being done on adding at least two more family trees of the original settlers. They will be presented during Homecoming in July. Continuous work is been done to maintain the exhibits at the Historical Society. If you have any question you, feel free to contact the Historical Society at 611 S. 5th Street, 785-839-4280, or e-mail nichis@ruraltel.net.

Visit African American National Parks

The interpretation of African American history and culture within the National Park Service continues to grow. National Park Service historians, interpreters, volunteers in parks continues to do research to convey the great breadth and depth of African American shared history, as well as its relationship to the overall fabric of American history. Archeologists, museum curators, and preservation specialists are finding new clues of past African American lifeways. All are working together to help the national park service tell real-life stories through exhibits and public programs.

The National Park Service continues to work with academic, preservation, and other partners to ensure that all sites associated with African American heritage in the national park system are preserved and interpreted for the education and enjoyment of all Americans and many others around the world.

There are over forty-five (45) parks, memorials, preserve, and trails telling their parts of the story of African American part in American history from the Underground Railroad to the Civil Rights Movement and more. For a list of sites to discover the strength of our Nation's diversity, you may visit http://www.nps.gov/untold/banners_and_backgrounds/parksbanner/parks.htm or <http://www.nps.gov/history/aahistory/parks/parks.htm>. To find a national park near you, you may visit <http://www.nps.gov/>.

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site, Kentucky

The commemoration of the 200th birthday of the 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, will be celebrated at several National Park Service sites. The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial opening ceremony will be held at Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in Hodgenville, Kentucky on February 12, 2008. First Lady Laura Bush will deliver remarks at the inaugural ceremony.

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace focuses on Lincoln's life in Kentucky. The Birthplace Unit demonstrates his humble beginnings with a symbolic birth cabin enshrined within a neo-classic Memorial Building. The Boyhood Home Unit at Knob Creek Farm was home to Lincoln during his formative years. Events in Kentucky helped mold a young boy into the man who became the nation's sixteenth President. For more information about this site visit their website at <http://www.nps.gov/abli>.

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Washington, D.C

Frederick Douglass' 190th Birthday Celebration will be held on Thursday February 14, 2008. This is an annual event during Black History Month.

The Frederick Douglass National Historic Site is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the most famous 19th century African American. His life was a testament to the courage and persistence that serves as an inspiration to those who struggle in the cause of liberty and justice. Visitors to the site learn about his efforts to abolish slavery and his struggle for rights for all oppressed people. For more information about this site visit their website at <http://www.nps.gov/frdo>.

Did You Know?

The Brown v. Board of Education U.S. Supreme Court decision involved more than 150 plaintiffs from five states.—Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. For more information visit <http://www.nps.gov/brvb/historyculture/plaintiffs.htm>



National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior

Nicodemus National Historic Site
304 Washington Avenue
Nicodemus, KS 67625

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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Comments? Write or Call:

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785-839-4321

General Information:

www.nps.gov/nico
785-839-4233 Visitor Center

Federal Job Announcements (USAJOBS)

www.usajobs.opm.gov

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

Captain Trego's Frock Coat

Fort Larned now has on display for the first time in the Visitor Center, Captain Trego's frock coat. Captain Edgar Poe Trego of Company H of the Eighth Kansas Volunteer Infantry was killed at Chickamauga and later Trego County, Kansas was named in his honor.



Captain Trego's Frock Coat