

2/10/2020

Attachment 12

Application for Network to Freedom, Table Rock Cemetery

For Block S12 – Discussion of John Brown at Table Rock, with separate bibliography

Local lore has it that John Brown stopped at Table Rock, or more usually at the rock for which the town is named. He is said to have stopped for a drink of water by the natural caves near the unusual rock formations east of town. He is said to have carved his name on one of the rocks. An 1855 government survey noted as covered by undecipherable “hiroglyphics.” Whether the carvings were sacred Indian symbols or merely graffiti has never been established, and the rocks in question, of sandstone, have long been gone, although others remain.

John Brown’s presence is not impossible given Table Rock’s location. The Bodwell account tells of being forced as far west as Table Rock by widespread flooding, and Brown may have had such experiences as well. However, with the present lack of any solid information, it is perhaps just as likely that George Washington, Jessie James, or Kilroy were here. Nevertheless, the following sources have been found that refer to John Brown and Table Rock.

1. *Nebraska State Journal*, April 29, 1896, page 4.

An untitled article touting Table Rock’s beauty begins, “The newspaper boys who visited Table Rock last Monday were well repaid for their trouble.” They were shown around and found the countryside pretty, said the new Chataqua grounds were being readied for a two-week event, a banquet was prepared for them, and a good time had by all. The article closed with a poem by an unidentified author, the second stanza of which is,

“I hope one day again to walk, the paths trod by old John Brown, who carved his name on [the] Table Rock, and left his footprints in the town.”

2. "The Founding of Table Rock. Placed on the Map by a Colony from New York and Pennsylvania," *Nebraska State Journal*, June 10, 1917, Sunday edition, page 49.

This article provides an account of the early days, citing (inaccurately) 1858 as the date that the Nebraska Settlement Company purchased the site from the Table Rock Town Company. It names many of the pioneers and references the Underground Railroad, starting with a mention of John Brown:

John Brown, the great emancipator, stayed all night in Table Rock in the early part of 1850 and carved his name on the famous Table Rock.

For many years this was a station on the underground railroad, the next station being Brownville, where the slaves who were hurried on to freedom, first crossed and stepped on free soil. If A. E. Heywood and J. C. Wood were still living, they could recount several trips they made to deliver the poor colored persons to "Massa Bob Muir" at Brownville."¹

3. *Pawnee Republican*, "Stories of Old Nebraska" by Frank Harrison, July 1, 1920, Page 4.

In telling the history of Table Rock, the author describes the Table Rock Town Company and events relating to the sale to the Table Rock Settlement Company, it appends this statement: "...[O]nce, at least, old Osawatomie John Brown came up for a visit with the Table Rockers. While there, he carved his name high in one of the stones and it remained there until a few years ago, when some yokel cut it out to make room for his own initials."

4. "Forty Acre Tract at Table Rock Donated to State by Rev. Peter Van Fleet, Is One of Nebraska's Most Scenic Parks. Surrounded by Indian Legendry," *Lincoln State Journal*, January 4, 1931.

¹ John Brown's stay is oft repeated but undocumented. If it was in 1850, there were no settlers here in 1850 to remember it, because the area was not opened for legal settlement until 1854.

This extensive article about the donation of land which is now part of the Table Rock Wildlife Management Area has a passing reference,

“In the sandstone cliffs are caves, some of comparatively recent origin. Some of the caves, according to Table Rock people, were used to hide negro slaves during operation of the underground railway.”

5. “Fifty Years Ago,” *Pawnee Republican*, January 1, 1981, page 8.

This column references a 1931 article and also has a reference to the caves at the site of the Table Rock having a connection to the Underground Railroad:

“Rev. Thomas Russel, C. H. Norris, and F. H. Taylor, constituted a committee from Table Rock, who met with the state park commission and with Senator Wherry in the governor’s office and decided in favor of making the plot of the historic “table rock” and 40 acres, transferring it to the state and transforming it in to the Van Fleet Recreation Park. Rev. Russell and the 4-H boys are doing a good job of clearing rubbish and making a driveway to the historic table rock. Dr. Van Fleet has offered to help. Beautiful trees line the hills and valley. The natural caves in the hillside were used to hide slaves who were escaping through ‘John Brown’s road.’ The beautiful Nemaha River adds to the beauty of the scene.” (Emphasis added).

4. “Scenarist Plots First Business Session of One House Legislature,” *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, November 22, 1936, page 10.²

This lively article imagines a contentious first session of the Nebraska unicameral, which was to take place in January 1937. The “scenarist” describes in vivid detail what would be said, by whom, and how. Included in this is an imagined exchange between Lieutenant Governor Jorgensen acting as president of the session, banging his gavel as he refused to entertain a motion, upon which Warhayton, elected as Speaker responds:

² Newspapers.com cites the paper as the Nebraska State Journal, but the actual image states it is the Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star, and the banner on page 1 says, “Sunday Journal and Star.”

“Stand by ‘er boys,” yells Speaker Warhayton, arising and waving encouragement with his own silver bound gavel, presented to him by the university engineering department, made from a tree that grew from the mouth of the cave near Table Rock where John Brown drank out of a gourd before he began to march on.”

5. “History of Table Rock Precinct,” *Pawnee Republican*, October 6, 1949, page 10:

“Table Rock was one of the stations on the underground railroad for helping slaves to escape from Missouri. John Brown is known to have traveled it. Gabe Morton told of having seen him one time. Mr. Morton, Sr., ran a hotel in Pawnee City and one night a middle-sized man stayed all night. Gabe, a small boy, was not impressed by the men, but he was by the horse. He thought it one of the finest horses he had ever seen. The next day Brown went on through Table Rock, and soon other men came searching for Brown. Then they learned their visitor’s name.”