

*Frontier Manhattan: Yankee Settlement to Kansas Town, 1854–1894*, by Kevin G. W. Olson. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012. x, 273 pp. Illustrations, tables, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hard-cover.

Reviewer Kay J. Carr is associate professor of history at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. She is the author of *Belleville, Ottawa, and Galesburg: Community and Democracy on the Illinois Frontier* (1996).

In the spring of 1855, New Englander Isaac Goodnow and five other men stood at the junction of the Kansas and Big Blue Rivers in the northeastern sector of Kansas Territory; committed abolitionists, they were to become the founding fathers of Manhattan, Kansas (affectionately to be known by locals as “the Little Apple”). In *Frontier Manhattan* author Kevin G. W. Olson traces the motivations of those founders and examines the history of his native town during its first four decades. He employs a variety of primary sources from early Manhattan and eastern Kansas, ranging from manuscript letters and diaries to local and regional government records and newspapers. The work is a detailed account of one town’s growth and ultimate transition from an experiment in progressive radicalism to the home of comfortable and modern conservatism.

Olson divides the first 40 years of Manhattan’s development into five eras: the territorial (1854–1861), the Civil War (1861–1865), the postwar (1866–1869), the transitional (the 1870s), and the modern (1880–1894). He is clearly the most interested in the earliest period, devoting 11 of 15 chapters to it. Leader Goodnow and his founding compatriots were sent to Kansas, with the help of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, after the passage of the infamous Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The law allowed the people of the two territories to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery within their borders. The Aid Company (and others like it) bankrolled the abolitionist settlers’ transportation and startup costs. Along with Lawrence, Manhattan was to become the home of one of the largest groups of “Free-Staters” who flocked to Kansas in the late 1850s.

The radical New England founders (along with another large group of settlers from Cincinnati, Ohio) were proud of their new town and immediately set up progressive institutions that reflected their social idealism. The founders were Methodists and Congregationalists, and their embrace of Protestant moralism was reflected in the close relationship between the town’s churches and its government institutions. In 1858, even before the survival of the town was certain, Manhattan’s Methodists founded Blue Mont Central College, the brainchild of Goodnow, a teacher by trade back in his native Rhode Island. (The college

was transferred to the state in 1863 to become the predecessor of Kansas State University.) According to its charter, the college was to promote “the mental, moral and physical well-being of those who may be trained under its auspices, and thus impart a healthy and vigorous tone to the community” (117). And, Olson writes, that “healthy and vigorous tone” could be seen as late as 1879 in the town’s reaction to a group of destitute Black Exodusters; expelled from nearby Wyandotte City, they were “well received upon their arrival in Manhattan” (181).

Olson argues that, by the time Goodnow died in 1894 and the influence of the founding generation had faded, Manhattan’s tone had “stagnated” (5). At the turn of the century, he writes, the town’s people had maintained their religious values and their support of education, but the progressive traditions of the founders had been replaced by intolerant conservatism. By then, for example, the town’s residents no longer welcomed ethnically diverse newcomers. It appears that Olson is, in part, responding to Thomas Frank’s *What’s the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (1996). Olson’s answer is rooted in Manhattan’s history.

*Frontier Manhattan* is an interesting examination of one town’s foundations. However, the author makes no attempt to compare Manhattan’s story with that of other towns, either within or without Kansas. Olson writes for a general audience, and his book will be most attractive to readers with direct or historical connections to the town itself; it is filled with information about individuals and families. It is unfortunate, therefore, that there is little discussion of Manhattan’s place in the larger story of the Midwest and the nation. The Midwest has become a popular field, and direct comparisons are increasingly possible. Still, historians of the Midwest should consult Olson’s work for its illustration of a small town’s historical reaction to modernization.

*Colonel Baker’s Field: An American Pioneer Story*, by Judy Salamacha and Sandy Mittelsteadt, with Chris Brewer; illustrated by Jody Salamacha-Hollier. Exeter, CA: Bear State Books, 2013. xvi, 244 pp. Maps, illustrations, chapter notes, timeline, photography and illustrator notes, bibliography. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Barbara Brower is professor of geography at Portland State University. Although her primary scholarly work is on indigenous groups and ethnic minorities in Asia, she has also pursued some research on Iowa migrants to California.

Thomas Baker’s early life followed the pattern set by many other mid-western pioneers. Born in Ohio in 1810, he moved as a young man to