

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE PRAISES HISTORIC BLACK KANSAS TOWN OF NICODEMUS
ON 105TH ANNIVERSARY

WASHINGTON -- Kansas Senator Bob Dole today, in a Congressional Record statement, praised the small town of Nicodemus, Kansas, on its 105th Anniversary:

"SEPTEMBER 17, 1983, MARKS THE 105TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF NICODEMUS, KANSAS. IT IS A SMALL TOWN -- THE POPULATION IS LESS THAN ONE HUNDRED -- YET NICODEMUS STANDS AS A TOWERING MONUMENT TO THE IDEALS OF AMERICA. FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, NICODEMUS HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF BLACK PRIDE AND ACHIEVEMENT, A TOWN OF BLACK AMERICANS WHO ONLY ASKED FOR AN EQUAL CHANCE TO SHARE IN THE DREAM OF THIS GREAT NATION. WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT NICODEMUS, YOU TALK ABOUT ROOTS.

THE 1870'S WERE A TURBULENT TIME IN AMERICAN HISTORY. SLAVERY HAD BEEN ABOLISHED, YET MOST BLACK AMERICANS WERE STILL HELD IN BONDAGE BY POVERTY, LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES, ILLITERACY, AND RAMPANT DISCRIMINATION. THEY WERE NOT SLAVES, BUT NEITHER WERE THEY FREE.

IN 1877, FREEDMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES FROM KENTUCKY AND TENNESSEE WERE TOLD OF A PLACE IN KANSAS THAT COULD BE THEIR "PROMISED LAND -- THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY." HERE, THEY HEARD, WAS A STATE THAT HAD ALWAYS BEEN FREE, AND THE LAND WAS THEIRS' TO HOMESTEAD. THEY NEED ONLY PAY FIVE DOLLARS PLUS RAIL FARE.

NEARLY THREE HUNDRED FORMER SLAVES MADE THAT LONG TRIP IN RIVER BOATS AND BOXCARS. FROM THE TRAIN STATION IT WAS A WALK OF SOME 30 MILES TO A SPOT ON THE ROLLING KANSAS PRAIRIE THAT WAS TO BE THEIR NEW HOME. IN EVERY DIRECTION, ALL THEY SAW WERE ENDLESS GRASSLANDS AND, TOO, THE ENDLESS VISTA THAT ONLY HOPE CAN PROVIDE. DISCOURAGEMENT AT THIS UNFAMILIAR SIGHT WAS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT THEY CHOSE TO MAKE THE BEST OF THINGS, AND DIG IN -- LITERALLY. LIKE MANY PIONEERS OF THEIR DAY, EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD PUT IN LONG DAYS OF BACKBREAKING LABOR -- WORKING THE HARD GROUND, SHOVELING DUGOUTS IN WHICH TO LIVE AND CATCHING PRAIRIE WILDLIFE FOR FOOD. THESE EARLY SETTLERS HAD ONLY THREE HORSES AND SOME INADEQUATE HAND TOOLS TO WORK WITH, BUT, THROUGH SHEER DETERMINATION, MANAGED TO BUILD A PROPER TOWN IN TIME.

THE DUGOUTS GAVE WAY TO SOD HOUSES, THEN TO WOODEN STRUCTURES AND FARMS. NICODEMUS SOON BOASTED A THRIVING ECONOMY, COMPLETE WITH LIVERY STABLES, A HOTEL, RESTAURANT, CHURCH, BANK, POST OFFICE, AND TWO NEWSPAPERS. BY 1880, THE SURROUNDING COUNTY HAD A POPULATION OF MORE THAN 500 FORMER SLAVES AND NICODEMUS HAD ESTABLISHED THE FIRST SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE COUNTY.

PERHAPS THE STORY OF A GROWING MIDWESTERN COMMUNITY DURING THE LATE 1800'S IS NOT UNIQUE, BUT THE FACT THAT THIS PARTICULAR TOWN WAS FOUNDED AND SETTLED ENTIRELY BY FORMER SLAVES IS WORTHY OF A SPECIAL PLACE IN AMERICAN HISTORY. NICODEMUS LIVES ON TODAY, AND ITS RESIDENTS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY PROUD OF WHAT THEY AND THEIR ANCESTORS HAVE ACCOMPLISHED.

AT "HOMECOMING" EACH YEAR, FORMER RESIDENTS RETURN TO REACQUAINT THEMSELVES WITH THEIR HERITAGE. THE SENATOR FROM KANSAS SALUTES THE PEOPLE OF NICODEMUS ON THIS ANNIVERSARY AND OFFERS BEST WISHES FOR MANY MORE IN THE YEARS TO COME."