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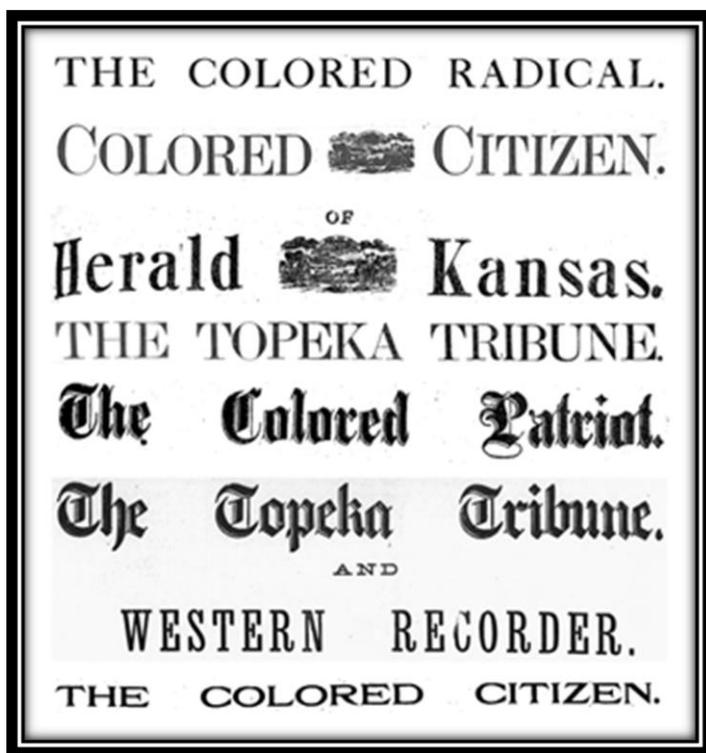
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William Lewis Eagleson and the Origins of African American Newspapers in Kansas

Mark E. Eberle

In 1916, William Connelley, Secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, published a summary of active and defunct newspapers in Kansas.¹ This was particularly appropriate given that the historical society was founded by the Kansas Editors' and Publishers' Association in 1875 to collect newspapers and manuscripts from the territorial period. That mission was expanded to document the state's history and serve as the repository of official government records in 1879 and 1905, respectively.

As the Kansas State Historical Society began its work in the late 1870s, the first African American newspapers in the state were established, and they were among those documented by Connelley. Subsequent summaries of African American newspapers in Kansas have been compiled online by the Kansas State Historical Society and the Library of Congress, and in the extensive bibliography of African American newspapers across the country edited by James Danky and Maureen Hady in 1998.²

Beyond these important compilations, there have been three studies published about historical aspects of African American newspapers in Kansas. In 1986, Nudie Williams described the role of the newspapers in Kansas and elsewhere during the Kansas Exodus around 1879, when thousands of African Americans emigrated from the South to Kansas. In 1996, Dorothy Smith wrote a book chapter about the general history of African American newspapers in the state and their relationships with the Black community. Aleen Ratzlaff's 2001 PhD dissertation and a book chapter derived from it in 2009 explored the newspapers and the connections they fostered among African American communities in the northeastern, southeastern, and southcentral regions of the state during the nineteenth century.³ In addition to these publications, Randall Woods' 1981 biography of John Waller, one of the early Black newspaper publishers in the state, was made available in 2021 as an open resource by the University Press of Kansas.⁴

Increased access to searchable online newspapers and other digital records unavailable to previous researchers makes it possible to better document the history of early newspapers in Kansas. To that end, the first essay in this monograph focuses principally on African American newspapers published during the nineteenth century in the state capital of Topeka and the legacy of the *Colored Citizen*. This serves as a prelude to the second essay, which is a biography of William Lewis Eagleson, editor of the *Colored Citizen*, the first newspaper in the state published as an entirely African American enterprise.

The *Colored Citizen* and Its Successors

Determinations of the relative noteworthy status of an historical event, such as the first to accomplish an important task, are subject to caveats. This applies to the identification of the first African American newspaper in Kansas. However, there are only two contenders.

From July to November 1876, the weekly *Colored Radical* represented both Leavenworth and Lawrence, which were the respective homes of the editor, Reverend Thomas W. Henderson of the A.M.E. Church, and the business manager, Allen Williams. Though both Henderson and Williams were Black, the white-owned printshop in Lawrence that published the *Daily Tribune* did the printing. The *Colored Radical* self-identified as a “political and family paper,” and the content was a mix of pro-Republican politics and news of interest to the local African American community. A subscription of 50¢ was offered through December 1, and exchanges with other newspapers were requested to run “to the end of the campaign.” Having no ambition to publish beyond the election, the newspaper folded after the November 16 edition.⁵ At the time, newspapers such as the *Colored Radical* were referred to as a campaign paper or campaign sheet. Five of the fourteen issues have survived.

One of the notices in white-owned newspapers that announced the “campaign paper published by the colored people of Lawrence and Leavenworth” appeared in the *Fort Scott Daily Monitor* in August 1876. The *Daily Monitor* also reported the *Colored Radical*’s demise in November. Whether these announcements played a role in subsequent events in Fort Scott and Topeka is unknown, but the following autumn, a newspaper named the *Colored Citizen* was established in Fort Scott. It began as a small, weekly newspaper of twelve columns on 9 September 1877. The publisher was reported to be the Equal Rights Club, with William Lewis Eagleson serving as editor and business manager. As in Lawrence, the *Colored Citizen* was printed by the publisher of a white-owned newspaper, the *Fort Scott Pioneer*.⁶

No copies of the 1877 editions of the *Colored Citizen* have survived, but numerous items were reprinted in the *Fort Scott Pioneer*. This is important historically, because it preserved a portion of the material covered in the *Colored Citizen*. The items reprinted by the *Pioneer* included a call for a Black citizen to be hired as a janitor for the local schools and anger about the dismissal of the city’s only Black police officer, James Eagleson, William’s brother. James worked as a barber and was also active in Republican politics. At the time, the position of police officer was a political appointment by the city council. James became a member of the local police force in May 1877, but he was discharged in August under the accusation of being drunk on duty. The *Colored Citizen* also decried the condition of the local school for Black children. “Millions to repair and clean the white schools, but not a nickel for the [n ____] shanty on the Plaza. It wouldn’t do to have a colored man on the School Board, you know.”⁷ James Eagleson’s time as a police officer and the school board election are described in more detail in the second essay.

The white-owned *Fort Scott Daily Monitor* was unimpressed with the views of the new paper, attacking it and editor William Eagleson. “We suppose the *Colored Citizen* has a mission to perform, or else it would not have been born, and that mission if we read it aright is to bring about a social equality between the two races, using as its levers both political and private patronage.”⁸ The *Daily Monitor* suggested the two appointed positions Eagleson wrote about—a Black police officer and a janitor at the school—were examples of unwarranted political patronage meant to bring about social equality between the white and Black citizens of Fort Scott. Certainly, neither was among the more powerful

political positions in the city, but they were viewed as rewards for supporters of the party in power. This included African American voters, most of whom voted for Republicans. Coincidentally, it was in 1877 that a Black baseball team in Fort Scott, the Star Base Ball Club, defeated the white town team to claim the local championship, a claim disputed by the town team through nonsensical arguments. The ball club was named for the Star Barber Shop, and James Eagleson was one of the owners.⁹

The *Colored Citizen* ceased publication in late 1877, but the following February, William and James Eagleson purchased equipment from the *Chetopa Herald*, 60 miles southwest of Fort Scott, with the intention of resurrecting their newspaper. They set up their newspaper office in Fort Scott in the Oulds Block on the west side of Market Square (immediately west of the fort). The *Colored Citizen* made its return as a weekly newspaper on March 1. “It has been much improved and enlarged, being a twenty-eight column paper, instead of a vest pocket edition while in its incipiency.”¹⁰ Thus, in March 1878, the resurrected *Colored Citizen* became the first newspaper in Kansas to be published—written, edited, and printed—as a Black-owned enterprise.

Probably feeling the newspaper would be more successful in a city with a larger African American population, as well as being the state capital, the *Colored Citizen* moved to Topeka in July 1878.* William Eagleson rented a building at the corner of Tenth and Kansas Avenues in Topeka, where he and James moved their newspaper office (the office moved to another building later in the year). William retained his position as editor, while James served as the business manager and continued his work as a barber. Joining William as an editor was Reverend Thomas W. Henderson, former editor of the *Colored Radical*. There is no evidence the two editors had met previously, but Henderson was known in Fort Scott. In 1870, the city’s new African American Masons’ lodge was named Henderson Lodge Number 12 “after Deputy Grand Master, T.W. Henderson.” He made occasional trips to Fort Scott in subsequent years, but his known trips occurred before William Eagleson arrived in the city in 1877. Nevertheless, in June 1878, before the *Colored Citizen* left Fort Scott, Eagleson proposed Henderson for Lieutenant Governor. At the Republican nominating convention, Henderson received the most votes (72 of 271) among five candidates on the first ballot but fell to 25 votes on the second ballot and withdrew.¹¹ At a national level, he would become a prominent member of the A.M.E. Church.

Thomas Wellington Henderson was born free in Greensboro, North Carolina in October 1845. In 1860, he lived with his mother and siblings in Ohio, where he was educated at Oberlin College. Reverend Henderson, D.D., married Rebecca Elizabeth Bishop in 1866 and became the pastor of a new A.M.E. Church in Lawrence in December 1868. He was soon advocating for integrated schools in the city and won election to the local school board in

* For perspective, the cities in Kansas with the largest populations in 1880 were Leavenworth (16,546), Topeka (15,452), Atchison (15,105), Lawrence (8,510), Wyandotte City (6,149), Fort Scott (5,372), and Wichita (4,911). The largest African American populations in Kansas in 1880 were in Topeka (3,648), Leavenworth (3,293), Wyandotte City (2,095), Atchison (2,787), Lawrence (1,995), and Fort Scott (1,086). Wyandotte City would later merge with nearby towns to become Kansas City, Kansas.

1870 and 1871. In the autumn of 1871, he was transferred to Hannibal, Missouri, and later to Kansas City. However, his family remained in Lawrence, where he was a frequent visitor. In 1873, one of the Henderson's three children passed away in Lawrence. In October 1875, Henderson was assigned to the A.M.E. Church in Leavenworth, where he edited the *Colored Radical* the following year. Two years later, he was assigned to the church in Topeka and soon joined Eagleson as editor of the *Colored Citizen*. In October 1879, Henderson was transferred to St. Louis, and his subsequent congregations included those in Chicago, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. He closed five decades with the A.M.E. Church in Newport, Rhode Island from 1911 to 1915, when ill health forced his retirement. Reverend Thomas W. Henderson passed away in Philadelphia in June 1915 and was buried in Eden Cemetery.¹²

Meanwhile, back in Topeka, the *Colored Citizen* was published through January 1880, and issues from 29 April 1878 to 12 December 1879 have been preserved. Henderson left the newspaper when he was transferred to St. Louis in October 1879, and Eagleson did not remain much longer, as the newspaper underwent "sundry mutations and suspensions" through 1885 (Table 1).¹³ On 31 January 1880, the paper's name was changed to the *Kansas Herald*, which coincided with a change in management. H.C. Rutherford joined William Eagleson and became the senior editor and publisher in the partnership. The name was altered to the *Herald of Kansas* on February 13, because the rights to the name *Kansas Herald* belonged to another publisher. This arrangement lasted through April, and then Eagleson retired from his position with the paper at the beginning of May.¹⁴

After Eagleson's departure, the *Herald of Kansas* ran only a few more weeks, folding after the June 11 issue. It was replaced on June 24 by the *Topeka Tribune*, published by Edward H. White from the same office on Fifth Street between Kansas Avenue and Jackson Street. Rutherford continued to be associated with the *Tribune*, taking on the role of local editor in October. As with the *Herald*, the operation of the *Tribune* sputtered near the end of 1880, and on December 3, it was reported that Eagleson had "taken possession of the material." However, on Christmas Day, the *Tribune* returned, with White still in charge and offering a partial explanation for the problem. "We have now purchased our outfit entire, and are prepared to perform punctually, all that we promise." In addition, he announced in the Christmas and New Year's Day editions that Rutherford was no longer associated with the newspaper, though no reason was offered for his departure. Although Rutherford was gone, Eagleson joined the "reportorial staff" of the *Tribune* from 1 January to 19 March 1881.¹⁵

In September 1881, the *Topeka Tribune* switched briefly to a bimonthly newspaper as White sought unsuccessfully to transform it into a triweekly publication. On October 6, the paper was relaunched with a change in its name to the *Kansas State Tribune*. Its professional lineage was listed in the masthead on the top of the first page—*Colored Citizen*, *Herald of Kansas*, and *Topeka Tribune*. In addition, Cyrus Corning joined White, assuming the role of senior editor. Perhaps most importantly, the newspaper was preparing to abandon its longtime support for the Republican Party. In a column reprinted in the next few editions, White explained the reason for this change in political allegiance.¹⁶

Table 1.—Chronological list of the first two African American newspapers published in Kansas and subsequent newspapers published in Topeka during the nineteenth century.

City	Newspaper	Editor(s)	Year(s)
Leavenworth and Lawrence	<i>Colored Radical</i>	Thomas W. Henderson	1876
Fort Scott	<i>Colored Citizen</i>	William L. Eagleson	1877–1878
Topeka	<i>Colored Citizen</i>	William L. Eagleson Thomas W. Henderson	1878–1880
	<i>Herald of Kansas</i>	H.C. Rutherford William L. Eagleson	1880
	<i>Tribune</i>	Edward H. White	1880–1881
	<i>Colored Patriot</i>	Edward H. White	1882
	<i>Tribune</i>	Edward H. White ^a Solomon Watkins	1883–1885
	<i>Benevolent Banner</i>	Peter W. Barker D.B. Garrett Alonzo D. DeFrantz	1887
	<i>American Citizen</i> ^b	J. Hume Childers <i>et al.</i>	1888–1889
	<i>Call</i>	William M. Pope <i>et al.</i>	1891–1898
	<i>Times-Observer</i>	J. Hume Childers <i>et al.</i>	1891–1892
	<i>State Ledger</i>	Fred L. Jeltz	1892–1906
	<i>Baptist Headlight</i> ^c	Peter W. Barker	1893–1894
	<i>Kansas Blackman</i> ^d	W.D. Driver	1894
	<i>Colored Citizen</i>	Albert R. Eagleson ^e Marshall G. Holloway	1897–1900
	<i>Plaindealer</i>	J. Hume Childers <i>et al.</i> ^f	1899–1958

^a The editors were E.H. White (June 1883–September 1883), S. Watkins (June 1883–October 1884), S.W. Winn (August 1883–May 1885), and J.M. Brown (October 1884–May 1885). W.J. Johnson was the Topeka editor after the *Tribune* and *Western Recorder* of Lawrence and Atchison were merged (May 1885–October 1885).

^b The newspaper moved to Kansas City in July 1889.

^c Merged with the *Baptist World* in Wichita in September 1894.

^d Founded in Topeka in April and moved to Coffeyville in August.

^e M.G. Holloway was editor through January 1898, and A.R. Eagleson was editor through 1898. Fred A. Turner briefly replaced Holloway before Price C. Thomas joined A.R. Eagleson as an editor in August 1898. After A.R. Eagleson departed, his father, William L. Eagleson, briefly joined Thomas as an editor in early 1899. Price Thomas, James Beck, and G.W. Jones served as editors through 1900.

^f Nick Chiles was the founding publisher of the *Plaindealer*, with J. Hume Childers serving as the first editor. Chiles took over as editor in 1907. The paper moved to Kansas City in 1932.

The act of changing party allegiance or espousing new political affiliations, might, under different circumstances than ours, demand a recital of reasons; but inasmuch as we have from time to time publicly declared both by tongue and pen that we would not remain in the Republican party unless it recognized and protected our rights as it has repeatedly pledged to do, we deem it now unnecessary. We fought for Republican principles during four years of bloody war; we have voted for and suffered martyrdom for the same during sixteen years since that war, and yet we find no more respect or consideration for us in that party than at the beginning. Our men and women are still murdered and outraged North, South, East and West, without let or hinderance; our right of an unintimidated vote and a fair count is not respected; caste schools still brand and disgrace us; public inns and conveyances still refuse with impunity to recognize our humanity. We have as regards all these things toiled and waited in vain. All these intolerable evils we have suffered under the eyes of a so-called Republican Administration. When we have begged for protection, they, the Republicans, have pleaded inability to help us. *A party that cannot protect its constituents when in power does not deserve to exist.*¹⁷ [Italics in the original.]

After the October 6 edition, the *Kansas State Tribune* became dormant. The principal challenge faced by the *Colored Citizen* and its successors during the late 1870s and 1880s was funding. One of their primary sources of revenue was individual subscribers, and they relied on “agents” to solicit and retain the subscribers. For example, the *Topeka Tribune* had agents in Atchison, Emporia, Lawrence, Leavenworth, North Lawrence, Olathe, and Parsons.¹⁸ On New Year’s Day in 1881, White openly chastised some of the *Tribune*’s agents for not adding to the list of subscribers.

What is the matter with our agents at Leavenworth, Lawrence, Atchison and Emporia; subscriptions are coming up from all other parts of the State, while these cities send us comparatively none of late. The people will subscribe if you will solicit them. Each of these places should subscribe for 300 copies.

TRIBUNE agents are making a recanvass of the city [of Topeka] and State. Our city agents have brought in more than one hundred new subscribers during the last five days. We shall try hard to merit the continued favor, with which our efforts have met. We propose to make the TRIBUNE necessary to every well regulated family in the State.¹⁹

Beginning in 1878–1879, the African American population of Kansas increased with the arrival of immigrants—Exodusters—from the South following the end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of federal troops after the 1876 election. The Black population in the state increased from 17,108 in 1870 to 43,107 in 1880. In Topeka, the Black population increased from 473 in 1870 to 3,648 in 1880. However, most, but certainly not all, of the new arrivals during the Kansas Exodus were destitute and not yet in a position to support newspapers or other community resources beyond their immediate needs.²⁰

Individual subscriptions were not the only source of revenue, however. In 1879, the Eaglesons tried an unusual fundraiser in Topeka to support the *Colored Citizen*. Subscription papers of the type used to support community endeavors, such as town baseball teams, were circulated, and “those who signed them would pay so much money toward assisting the Eagleson Brothers to continue the publication of the *Colored Citizen*.” In addition, a “grand supper” was to be served for an admission of 25¢.²¹ Similarly, political parties and religious organizations sometimes contributed money to newspapers. For example, a meeting in Kansas City of Baptist ministers and deacons approved a request to donate all collections offered by the participants above the costs of the meeting to a newly established newspaper in Topeka, the *Benevolent Banner*.²² The *Kansas State Ledger* acknowledged another source of assistance. “F.L. Jeltz returns many thanks to the railroad companies that have so kindly assisted during the year 1892, and the infancy of his paper, the LEDGER, which now has become one of the leading organs of the state of Kansas—2,000 readers.”²³

Newspapers also earned revenue from advertising. In the same issue of the *Topeka Tribune* in which White chastised his agents, the paper consisted of 24 columns (four pages of six columns each). About half of the total space was devoted to advertisements. This included an ad for the *Tribune* that filled unsold space. The advertising space was sold in increments of one, two, three, or six column inches or an entire column. The cost of ads for one month (four issues) ranged from \$1.00 for one column inch to \$8.00 for an entire column. Discounts were offered to advertisers who committed to periods longer than one month.²⁴ In addition, newspaper publishers supplemented their income through job printing for other customers. No information was found about how much money this generated for the *Colored Citizen* or its successors, but the publishers frequently encouraged customers to schedule printing jobs.

Many of the newspaper editors also held jobs in other fields. William Eagleson was a barber, among other positions, as will be described in the second essay. Reverend Thomas Henderson and Reverend Peter Barker were clergy in the A.M.E. and Baptist churches, respectively. Edward White and Solomon Watkins were graduates of Oberlin College in Ohio and were employed as teachers. White was also a lawyer, as was John Waller. Jasper Hume Childers worked as a business clerk and later owned his own businesses, as did Nick Chiles.²⁵ Fred Jeltz was an exception. He was regularly listed in censuses and city directories as an editor or journalist, though he had previously been a teacher. He completed his education at Tougaloo University in Jackson, Mississippi, graduating in 1877.²⁶

Following the dormancy of the *Topeka Tribune* in October 1881, the *Colored Patriot* began publication in Topeka on 20 April 1882. Despite the new name, its editor was Edward White, who was returning to the Republican fold after his brief departure in 1881 to support the antimonopoly Greenback Labor Party. He began publishing the newspaper with few assistants, and he advertised for city editors in Atchison, Emporia, Kansas City, Lawrence, and Leavenworth, as well as five agents to canvass Topeka for subscribers. White also encouraged correspondents to submit information regarding their local African American communities on topics such as business activities, education, property ownership, and “moral status.”²⁷ In view of all these requests for assistance, it is not surprising that the *Colored Patriot* managed to run only two months.

Although White made no claim of professional heritage by listing the *Colored Citizen*, *Herald of Kansas*, and *Topeka Tribune* in the masthead of the *Colored Patriot*, he did so in 1883, when the *Tribune* was resurrected. The new masthead listed the *Citizen*, *Tribune*, *Patriot*, and *Topeka Tribune*, “revived.” Whether it was intentional or not, the *Herald of Kansas*, which had been edited by H.C. Rutherford, was omitted. White was joined as editor by Solomon Watkins, who continued to teach in Topeka, as did his wife, Dora. In the initial issue on 7 June 1883, the *Tribune* claimed to have 700 subscribers in Topeka and was seeking 300 more. However, White left the *Tribune* in September, ending his final stint as a newspaper editor.

White was born in Clarksville, Tennessee on 27 November 1847. He attended Wilberforce and Oberlin Colleges in Ohio, graduating from the latter in 1872. He also studied law at Howard University. After completing his studies, White moved to Topeka in 1876. In addition to being a newspaper editor, he taught school and practiced law. He also served as a member of the city school board. In March 1884, White moved to a farm outside Topeka where he was shot and killed at age 37 in a dispute with one of his tenants. The trial was covered in detail by several Topeka newspapers. Edward and his wife, Caledonia (Callie), had four children. His body was returned to Tennessee for burial.²⁸

Shortly before White left the *Topeka Tribune*, the newspaper expanded from four to eight pages on 23 August 1884, but it switched back to four pages on 2 May 1885. A week later, it merged with the *Western Recorder*,²⁹ which had been founded by John Waller in Lawrence in March 1883 (the paper moved to Atchison in July 1884). The combined newspaper was published by Winn, Brown and Company, but W.J. Johnson became the local editor in Topeka. Initially, the paper was called the *Topeka Tribune and Western Recorder*, but the name was later shortened to *Topeka Tribune-Recorder*. The newspaper folded in October 1885, giving as the primary reason the many subscribers who failed to make their payments. In addition, the editors and publishers had their other jobs in the community, which limited the time they could devote to their newspaper work.³⁰ The lineage that began with the *Colored Citizen* in 1878 was seemingly at an end.

Additional African American newspapers were published in Topeka through the end of the nineteenth century and beyond (Table 1). Some were of short duration, such as the *Benevolent Banner* (1887), *American Citizen* (1888–1889; moved to Kansas City in July 1889), *Times-Observer* (1891–1892), *Baptist Headlight* (1893–1894), and *Kansas Blackman* (1894; moved to Coffeyville in August, and the printshop was destroyed in a fire in January 1895).³¹ However, three other papers had longer runs in Topeka, and a familiar masthead returned.

The *Topeka Call* was established by William M. Pope and ran from 1891 to 1898. As the number of newspapers increased, friction sometimes arose between the outspoken editors. In one such case, it turned violent between Pope and W.D. Driver of the *Kansas Blackman*. “One day the Blackman made Pope so mad that he ‘departed his raiment’ to the extent of taking off his coat and rolling up his sleeves, and went out to look for Editor Driver.” Pope found Driver, and as a result of instigating the fisticuffs, Pope was fined \$10 plus \$87.25 court costs. However, Driver had returned to his boyhood home of Coffeyville by the time the legal action was settled in 1895. He died of typhoid fever on Christmas morning 1897 at age 28.³²

Pope also died young. According to the 1895 census for Kansas, the Tennessee native was 28 years old. In April 1896, he died of smallpox, though his wife and two children did not become ill. A case of smallpox would cause great anxiety in a community. Consequently, there was no funeral for the editor, and Pope was buried in the Topeka Cemetery at night under the direction of the local board of health. All of the furniture and possessions in his room were burned.³³ J.B. Bass, who had worked with Pope at the *Call*, took over as editor.

The *Kansas State Ledger* was published in Topeka by Frederick Layton Jeltz from 1892 to 1906. He was born in Jackson, Mississippi in June 1865 and came to Kansas about 1891. He first worked with Pope as business manager at the *Topeka Call* in 1892 before starting the *Ledger* on July 22.³⁴ Jeltz hired Black and white employees and male and female employees, but the hiring of the white employees drew criticism. Jeltz defended the practice.³⁵

We draw no color line. It will not do; it tends to excite controversies between the two races. We employ white help at this office as well as colored. In fact, we divide up the employment. We draw no color line.³⁶

Fred Jeltz and William Pope tried unsuccessfully to establish daily newspapers in the summer of 1893—the *Daily Ledger* and *Evening Call*, respectively. In 1894, it was reported that they would jointly publish a daily newspaper—the *Daily World*—but those plans were never realized. As mentioned previously, Jeltz regularly listed his employment as a journalist in censuses and city directories. In addition, he was active in Republican politics, but like some of his contemporaries, Jeltz took an independent stance in 1893 as a result of unfulfilled promises by Republican politicians and their failure to support Black candidates.³⁷

The LEDGER is published in the interest of the negro race, regardless of politics. We shall ever demand that the negro be respected, and ask an equal show with white men. ... Ever since this paper has been in existence, it has been run under a republican management, and has worked faithfully for the success of that party. Hereafter, the paper will be independent, and will work for the party that will do the most toward giving the negro race the proper recognition that justly belongs to them.³⁸

Jeltz stopped publishing the *Kansas State Ledger* in August 1906, but occasional issues were published in subsequent years (no copies are known to have survived). In March 1908, he launched the *American Times* (only the four weekly editions from that month have been preserved). In May 1914, he was also reported to have purchased Wichita's *Searchlight* and *Reflector*, which would be published in connection with his newspaper in Newton named the *Times-Ledger*, combining the names of his first two newspapers. (He lived in Newton briefly but remained a Topeka voter.) Beginning in 1911, Jeltz occasionally published the *Times-Ledger*, which was associated with Topeka and Lawrence. No copies are known to exist, but snippets were sometimes published in the *Topeka Daily Capital* under the heading "Jolts from Jeltz" and occasionally in other columns. In 1917, the *Times-Ledger* was described as four pages, 7 by 9 inches.³⁹

One of Jeltz's daughters died in October 1908, which might have contributed to his subsequent challenges. The following March, his wife had him arrested. Jeltz was suffering from alcoholism and associated mental health issues, and she feared he might harm someone. On the testimony of his family and two doctors, the probate court declared him to be *non compos mentis* (not of sound mind). No room was available at the state hospital, so he was cared for by caring friends and soon returned to journalism and politics. Frederick L. Jeltz died in Topeka in March 1937 at age 72 and was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery.⁴⁰

In June 1897, the *Colored Citizen* was resurrected one last time. Albert R. Eagleson was editor through the end of 1898, and cofounder Marshall G. Holloway was an editor until January of that year. Fred A. Turner initially replaced Holloway as the coeditor before Price C. Thomas, who served as business manager, joined Eagleson as an associate editor in August. After A.R. Eagleson departed at the end of 1898, his father, William L. Eagleson, founder of the original *Colored Citizen* in 1877, briefly joined Thomas as an editor in early 1899, though he continued to operate his Welcome Barber Shop. In June 1900, Thomas continued as editor but was joined by James Beck as managing editor and G.W. Jones as associate editor. The trio would publish the newspaper through November. Lieutenant Colonel Beck had recently commanded the 23rd Kansas Volunteer Infantry, an all-Black regiment, including all of the officers. He was a Populist, which agreed with the political views of Governor John W. Leedy, who authorized the organization of the regiment.⁴¹

Albert R. Eagleson did more than inherit his father's interest in journalism. He was born on 25 December 1871 in East St. Louis, Illinois. While publishing the *Colored Citizen*, he served as the clerk on a recruiting trip in July 1898 to fill the ranks of the 23rd Kansas Infantry. The assistant recruiting officer on the trip was Price Thomas. However, neither served with the regiment, which was deployed for garrison duty in Cuba immediately after the Spanish-American War.⁴² After leaving the *Colored Citizen*, Eagleson worked for the *Topeka Plaindealer* when it was founded in 1899. Later that year, he operated a laundry in Dodge City with Frank Moss. Eagleson then lived in Denver about four years before moving to Detroit, Lawrence, and back to Topeka. In the 1900 census for Denver, his profession was listed as printer, but the 1902 and 1903 city directories listed his occupation as porter. While in Denver, he married Corrine Hoyt from Lawrence. Albert then attended school in Nashville, Tennessee to train as a dentist, graduating from Meharry Medical College in 1908. Eagleson began his practice in Guthrie, Oklahoma and also scheduled appointments in Langston (more on Langston in the second essay). In March 1916, he moved to Kansas City, Missouri. Besides dentistry, Eagleson was involved in the community. For example, in 1928, he was elected president of the City League in Kansas City, consisting of eight baseball teams.⁴³ A.R. Eagleson died at his home at 2434 The Paseo in Kansas City on 12 December 1938, just 13 days short of his 67th birthday. He was buried in Highland Cemetery, Kansas City, Missouri.

The *Topeka Plaindealer* was the third paper to be established in the 1890s that enjoyed a long run, the longest of any of the city's African American newspapers. The *Plaindealer* got its start on 6 January 1899 by securing the *Call* after it folded in 1898. Jasper Hume Childers was the first editor. He had previously served as editor for the *American Citizen* and *Times-Observer*,

and Associate Editor of the *Call*.⁴⁴ Usually going by the name J. Hume Childers, he was born in Dry Ridge, Kentucky on 7 August 1867 and moved with his family to Michigan in 1872. Childers arrived in Topeka about 1887, working in a dry goods store and as a clerk for the Kansas Loan and Trust Company before taking part ownership in clothes cleaning businesses in 1901. He served as editor of the *Plaindealer* from January 1899 to January 1907. Childers then became a real estate agent and returned to journalism as editor of the *Kansas Watchman*, followed by a stint as staff correspondent for the *Plaindealer*. He became sick during the winter of 1907–1908, though the illness was not specified. Childers first traveled back to Michigan briefly in April and then to Colorado in an unsuccessful attempt to recover his health. He returned to Topeka in November 1909. J. Hume Childers died on 17 July 1910 at only 42 years of age and was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Topeka.⁴⁵

The publisher of the *Topeka Plaindealer* was Nicholas “Nick” Chiles. He was born in South Carolina in December 1863 according to the 1900 census (he was listed as Nikolas Childs). However, his reported birth years in other federal and state censuses ranged from 1860 to 1870. His obituary listed the year as 1867. Growing up in Abbeville and Greenville, he moved briefly to Chicago and then to Topeka. Chiles owned a grocery, restaurant, and hotel, in addition to publishing the *Plaindealer* for 30 years.⁴⁶

Although it was an open secret that he sold liquor, Chiles also published a newspaper named the *Smasher’s Mail*, which was edited by Carrie Nation, the well-known temperance advocate. In the first edition, published on 9 March 1901, Nation acknowledged the puzzling relationship with Chiles. “I have no apologies to make in having Nick Chiles for publisher of The Smasher’s Mail. Our Saviour ate with publicans and sinner[s] to do them good.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere in that edition, their relationship was explained in more detail.

When Mrs. Nation began her crusade against the joints of Topeka, and the so-called Law and Order people organized under the influence of an aroused public sentiment[,] Mr. Chiles manifested a deep interest in her work. As a result of the crusade[,] Mrs. Nation was arrested for destroying private property and placed in the County jail[,] there she was deserted by her so-called friends. She called upon Nick Chiles to come forward and furnish her bond[,] this he did. Mrs. Nation[,] being a Christian woman and desiring to promote the best interest of the community, and also to manifest her appreciation of the kindly interest of Mr. Chiles, invited him to associate himself with her in the publication of The Smasher’s Mail.⁴⁸

The nature of the brief collaboration between Chiles and Nation has been considered in detail by Seth Bate.⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, their business relationship was short lived. Its end was announced in the third edition, published on March 30. Nation continued to publish the *Smasher’s Mail* in Topeka, though its frequency was reduced to a biweekly paper in April and a monthly paper in May until publication ended in December 1901.⁵⁰

Chiles continued as publisher of the *Plaindealer*. On 4 January 1907, J. Hume Childers ended his tenure as editor, and Chiles assumed that role until his death on 29 October 1929. His first wife, Minnie, had passed away in 1917. The couple had two daughters—Arnicholas

(Chiles) Williams (born in South Carolina in 1884) and Thelma Ida May Mercer (Chiles) Taylor (born in Kansas in 1900). Nick remarried in 1926, and his second wife, Henrietta, assumed the role of business manager of the *Plaindealer*. Following the death of Nick Chiles, the *Plaindealer* was sold. It was moved to Kansas City in 1932, though a Topeka edition was still published. As with fellow editors Fred Jeltz and J. Hume Childers, Nick Chiles was buried in Topeka's Mount Auburn Cemetery.⁵¹

Of course, African American newspapers were not limited to Topeka. They were published in at least 20 cities based on the holdings of the Kansas State Historical Society (Table 2). Most were in the eastern half of the state, the exceptions being Nicodemus and Stockton in northwestern Kansas. In the twentieth century, the most successful (longest running) newspapers were published in the three largest metropolitan areas. The *Plaindealer* moved from Topeka to Kansas City, where it was published through 1958. In Topeka, the *Kansas Whip* (later named the *Kansas Eagle* and *Kansas American*) was published from 1934 to 1955. In Wichita, the leading newspaper was the *Negro Star*, published from 1908 to 1953 (publication dates taken from Danky and Hady 1998, p 402). What they all have in common is a shared heritage that began with the *Colored Citizen* in Fort Scott and Topeka in 1877–1878 published by William Lewis Eagleson.

Table 2.—Twenty cities in Kansas in which African American newspapers were published (more than one issue). One or more newspapers were published in each city during the periods indicated. A few additional newspapers were published briefly after 1970.

City	1878–1900	1901–1922	1923–1960
Atchison	●		
Baxter Springs	●		
Cherokee	●		
Coffeyville	●	●	
Emporia			●
Fort Scott	●	●	
Hutchinson		●	
Independence			●
Kansas City	●	●	●
Lawrence	●		
Leavenworth	●		
Nicodemus	●		
Parsons	●		
Pittsburg	●	●	
Salina		●	
Sedan	●	●	
Stockton		●	
Topeka	●	●	●
Weir City	●		
Wichita	●	●	●

William Lewis Eagleson

William Lewis Eagleson was born on 9 August 1835 in St. Louis, Missouri to William Louis and Catharine (Filliet) Eagleson. At their marriage in St. Louis a year later on 4 October 1836, the French Catholic Church records listed the elder William as a “free mulatto” (he was born in Pennsylvania about 1812), and Catharine was described as “emancipated according to law from the slavery” (she was born in Missouri about 1817–1819). According to the 1850 and 1856 censuses, their growing family lived in Keokuk, along the Mississippi River in southeastern Iowa. The elder William worked as a barber in 1850, as did the younger William in 1856. Catharine was listed alone with her children in the 1856 census and a Keokuk city directory, suggesting her husband might have died between 1850 and 1855.

The next known appearance of William Lewis Eagleson in contemporary documents was a record of his marriage to Elizabeth McKinney in St. Louis, Missouri on 2 December 1865. She was born in Tennessee in December 1842. The couple moved back and forth across the Mississippi River, living in both Missouri and Illinois. According to the 1880 census, their oldest daughter, Kate, was born in Missouri about 1865. In July 1868, a claim of \$45.15 was paid to William by the Freedman’s Bureau in St. Louis. The next two children, sons Albert and William, were born in Illinois in 1871 and about 1874. A third son, Edward, was born in Missouri about 1877. Collectively, this information indicates that William returned from Iowa to live in the St. Louis area in the 1860s and stayed through the mid-1870s, although no record of him in the 1860 or 1870 censuses for Iowa, Missouri, or Illinois was found.

Eagleson moved to Kansas in 1877, joining his brother James in Fort Scott. The first mention of James in the city was in November 1873, when he merged his barbershop with that of two other barbers at the intersection of Main and Market Streets (the latter is now Old Fort Boulevard). It was named the Star Barber Shop, which would lend its name to a Black baseball club. The partnership of the three barbers was dissolved in September 1874, with David Gordon and James Eagleson taking the Star Barber Shop name with them to a building down Main Street. James was also a member of the local Jubilee Troupe, which toured eastern Kansas in October 1875, at which time he sold his interest in the barbershop to Gordon. In November, he reconnected with former partner A.M. Thornton to open the Temple of Fashion Barber Shop at the Opera House.⁵² In addition to these newspaper reports, James and Anna Eagleson appeared in the 1870 census for Fort Scott, along with two of his younger brothers. All three siblings were listed as barbers. James and Anna were also included in the 1875 state census at Fort Scott.

In addition to barbering, James was active in Republican politics. At a convention in March 1877, he was one of two men nominated for constable in Fort Scott. The *Fort Scott Pioneer* commented on the nomination. “The radicals have nominated a colored man[,] Mr. Eagleson[,] for constable and he is a respectable and intelligent man, but will they vote for him?” In addition, Republicans nominated a Black candidate, Reverend P.A. Hubbard of the A.M.E. Church, for the school board, on which four of the six candidates would serve. The Republican slate was opposed by a matching “independent” ticket. The Republicans nearly swept the election, but Eagleson and a white candidate for constable were defeated, as was

Hubbard. The *New Century* (reprinted in the *Fort Scott Pioneer*) commented on the outcome, noting that the Black vote contributed to the Republican victory.⁵³

The colored men on that ticket were all defeated, which fact ought to open their eyes if anything can do it. They ought to see now that they were put on that ticket only as bait to catch the colored vote, and there never was any intention of electing them. They have thrown their influence to secure victory for a bad cause. They have gained nothing for themselves, and now have ample time to reflect on their folly and repent at their leisure.⁵⁴

Neither the *Fort Scott Pioneer* nor the *New Century* were Republican newspapers, but their commentary may have influenced future actions. At the city council meeting three weeks later, the three-member Ways and Means Committee reported recommendations on a set of petitions referred to them at the previous city council meeting. After a recommendation to table a petition to appoint a white man to serve as a police officer came a petition involving James Eagleson.

Petition in favor of Jas. Eagleson for police. In this case we would prefer that the Mayor and Council jointly decide the question as to the policy of the appointment of a colored policeman; at the same time stating our belief in this matter to be that it would be right and proper that the colored population should be entitled to the consideration of our votes, and that should the selection of one of them be made to serve as policeman, we would favor the name of the party here petitioned for, James Eagleson.⁵⁵

On May 1, the city council confirmed the mayor's reappointment of Fred Welsbach and the appointment of James Eagleson as police officers. Eagleson "wore the star" as Fort Scott's first Black police officer on 2 May 1877. In August, he was praised for his quick actions when a fire broke out in a house after a woman had gone to church on Sunday evening, leaving her 7-year-old daughter alone at home, where a kerosene lamp was burning. "The lamp exploded and set fire to the house; fortunately Officer Eagleson was on duty and wide awake. He burst into the house, and by the aid of some neighbors, extinguished the fire and saved the property and the life of the child." The following week, the city council found Eagleson guilty "on a charge of drunkenness while on duty" by a vote of 5-2 and voted 6-1 to fire him. No other details were reported.⁵⁶ A month later, William Eagleson first published the *Colored Citizen* (as described on page 2). Among his editorials were those that decried the firing of his brother and the election loss of Reverend P.A. Hubbard as a candidate for the school board.

Following the brief run of the *Colored Citizen* in the autumn of 1877, William and James Eagleson purchased equipment to publish a newspaper on their own, without relying on another printshop, and they resurrected the *Colored Citizen* at Fort Scott in March 1878 (see page 3). In July, they arranged to move their publishing business to Topeka. William and his family appeared in the 1880, 1885, and 1895 censuses (1890 census records are not available). James worked as a barber, while William was active as a journalist and held a variety of other jobs while living in Topeka.

What became of James Eagleson after the move to Topeka is a mystery. In the June 1880 census in Kansas City, Missouri, Anna was listed as a married boarder, but there was no mention of James. However, in August 1880, he spoke about the challenges presented by large numbers of Black immigrants from the South during the Kansas Exodus at a meeting in Topeka. The last mention found of James was in January 1881, when Anna filed for divorce in Kansas City on the grounds of desertion. The writ was sent to Colorado. James was not listed among the surviving family members of William Eagleson in his obituary in 1899.⁵⁷

As was the case for several Black newspaper editors, journalism was not William Eagleson's only employment while he edited a newspaper. On 15 January 1879, on the third ballot, he was elected to the position of First Assistant Doorkeeper of the Kansas House of Representatives. (There were also positions of Doorkeeper and Second Assistant Doorkeeper.) On the first ballot, he led the six candidates with 46 of 123 votes cast. The three lowest candidates were dropped, and Eagleson again led the three remaining candidates on the second ballot with 54 votes of 127, but he still lacked a majority. He won on the final ballot with 63 of 124 votes. That same day, Reverend Thomas Henderson, who served as editor of the *Colored Citizen* with Eagleson, was unsuccessful in his bid for the position of House Chaplain, losing on a final vote of 63–57. However, Reverend J.G. Eckles resigned the post on February 7, and Reverend Henderson was elected by acclamation to fill the vacancy.⁵⁸ The *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, which incorrectly referred to Eagleson as a candidate for the House Sergeant-at-Arms, had spoken on his behalf.

W.L. Eagleson, of the *Colored Citizen* of this city, is a candidate for Sergeant-at-arms of the House, and he ought to have it. The *Citizen* is a credit, mechanically and editorially, to the State. It is the only paper in the West owned and edited by colored men. We hope that Mr. Eagleson may be elected by a unanimous vote. It is but just that he should be.⁵⁹

A short biography of the new First Assistant Doorkeeper was published in March 1879. It reported that he came to Kansas from St. Louis in 1876. It also stated that he was a printer, a trade he learned under Dennis Mahoney, who had been the editor of the *Miner's Express*, published in Dubuque, Iowa from 1849 to 1854.⁶⁰ Among his other activities during his first years in Topeka, Eagleson was installed as the treasurer of the Colored Masons of Topeka in 1879 and was elected to the board of directors of the Topeka Central Band in 1883.⁶¹

In addition to their various vocations, and sometimes as part of them, Eagleson and Henderson advocated solutions for the concerns of the African American community. For example, in February 1876, Henderson and four other prominent Black citizens had spoken in the chamber of the Kansas Senate “for the purpose of laying before the members of the legislature their views upon the school question” of segregated facilities. On March 2, the legislature passed a bill consolidating all school regulations. The new bill included amendments to the existing law such that it “makes no distinction in public schools on account of race, color, or previous condition, and makes it unlawful to maintain any public school where all are not admitted.” Yet, in 1878, Eagleson and Henderson's *Colored Citizen* was compelled to publish an argument against segregated education, which was being

reconsidered for legal sanction in elementary and junior high schools in larger cities, a law that would be passed in 1879 (use of commas altered in this quote).⁶²

We hear of no Irish schools, no German schools, no Swedish schools. No, not one. All the children in the city are at liberty to attend the school nearest them, except the poor child that God, for some reason, chose to create with a black face instead of a white one. Our board of education, contrary to the law of the State, the law of God, and the laws of humanity, persist in keeping up race distinctions by keeping up race schools. Several times colored people from all parts of the State have petitioned the legislature to so amend the school laws as to prevent such distinction being made, and at the last session the word white was stricken from the school laws, but the boards of education still persist in going on with their negro schools in spite of law or right. ... We hold that nothing now in existence in this State does help so much towards keeping up the low, mean prejudice against the colored man as these separate schools. Now why are we thus punished? ... We say to every colored man and woman in the city to come together and resolve that you will no longer submit to unjust discrimination on account of your color. This thing has gone on long enough, and now, if it can be stopped, let's stop it. A lawyer has been employed, and the matter will in a day or so be tested. In a word, we say to colored men, stand up for your rights. Let us never yield another inch.⁶³

On 29 January 1879, Henderson also spoke and offered a set of resolutions at a "large and enthusiastic meeting of the colored residents of the city of Topeka held at the A.M.E. church." On this occasion, the subject was the employment of Black men and women by local businesses. Although the African American community spent a sizable sum of money at white-owned businesses, "none of the said merchants give employment to any colored person, except as porters or drivers for their wagons, notwithstanding the fact that there are many colored men and women in the city who are well qualified to act in the capacity of clerks or salesmen, and who would be glad to accept situations of the kind." Those present at the meeting expressed resolve to patronize those businesses that recognized the "propriety of employing among their clerks some of our competent young men or women."⁶⁴

Eagleson, Henderson, and others were also advocates for assisting the Exodusters coming to Kansas from the South, many of whom were in dire straits financially. In 1879, Eagleson and Henderson were among the organizers of the Kansas State Colored Emigration Bureau, which was headquartered at the office of the *Colored Citizen*. As with organizations such as the Masons, as well as churches and newspapers, the emigration bureau existed in parallel with its white counterpart. In March 1880, Eagleson was among those selected to travel to Washington, DC to possibly testify before the Senate's Exodus Investigating Committee in April, though he was not called. By this time, H.C. Rutherford had become senior editor of the newspaper and changed the name to the *Herald of Kansas*. Shortly after his return from Washington, Eagleson announced he was retiring from his editorial duties.⁶⁵

Though no longer working as an editor, Eagleson remained active in the community. In August 1880, he and two other men organized the largest Emancipation Day celebration

in Kansas to that time. An estimated crowd of 5,000 people gathered in Topeka for a meal prepared by “Uncle Nelse” Williams of Auburn (southwest of Topeka), “the renowned barbecue cook of Kansas.” This was followed by speeches and music. Excursion trains brought hundreds of people from Atchison, Lawrence, and Wichita.⁶⁶

In September 1881, Eagleson opened a meeting at the Second Baptist Church to revisit the “school question” regarding segregated schools in Topeka. He and E.H. White served on a five-person committee that wrote a resolution criticizing the law that “prevents our children from enjoying the same school facilities as the white” children and chastising the Republican Party that “passed and sustained” this law, despite the loyalty of Black voters to the party.⁶⁷ In spite of such efforts, the issue would not be resolved for seven decades. In the meantime, Eagleson and C.L. deRandamie sought to improve the education received by public school students and “inaugurated among the colored people [in 1897] a movement by which they hope[d] to secure in the public schools of the city instruction in actual business transactions, banking and commercial methods ... at least on one day of each week.”⁶⁸

In addition to journalism, the principal occupation in which Eagleson would periodically engage was barbering. Ever the advocate, in 1881, Eagleson proposed to name his business the Equal Rights Barber Shop.⁶⁹ Yet, these seemed to be periods of employment that simply filled the time between positions he held in local, state, or federal government.

One of the positions Eagleson held the longest was that of jailer for the city of Topeka. As with the Fort Scott police, the job of jailor was a political appointment. His first stint as turnkey ran from 1883 to 1884. Just when he began work is uncertain. The first mention found was a report of him thwarting a plan by four prisoners to escape in May 1883. Eagleson learned of the plot and returned the leader to his cell before taking the other prisoners on their work detail. Later in the month, a prisoner briefly escaped but was caught by Eagleson. In September, “J. Johnson, a Swede,” was arrested for intoxication and sent to jail. Once in his cell, he became violent. Eagleson went in to quiet him down but was attacked, “and the affair was generally gory.” With the help of another prisoner, Johnson was forced back into his cell. This was no soft patronage job. However, it had its occasional perks. One inmate had been fined \$40 for stealing two chickens. The court gave the chickens to Eagleson, who remarked, “it’s the first time he ever ate chickens which cost \$20 each.” In addition to taking care of the prisoners and the jail, Eagleson was a police officer and was occasionally called upon to assist with police actions outside the jail.⁷⁰

In April 1884, an event occurred that would end with the resignation of Eagleson as city jailer. John Buntin had been working on the Santa Fe Railway tracks near Reading, about 40 miles southwest of Topeka. On April 15, he decided to return to Ohio, where his family lived. He hopped on a train and jumped off when it stopped briefly in Topeka, so he could search for an open boxcar to ride in. When he jumped down, he fell under the train as it began to move again, and his left leg was “horribly mangled by falling under the wheels.” It was 2:35 in the morning. Buntin was interviewed about some of the events later in the day by a reporter for the *Topeka Daily Capital*. Rather than carrying the severely injured Buntin to shelter, other railroad workers simply offered to call the depot master. The depot master telephoned for two hours, calling “various city authorities” for assistance, but “no answer

was given satisfactorily.” Buntin was finally placed in an omnibus “and driven from hotel to hotel, house to house, and no one would take him in, not even police headquarters.” By the time they finally found a place for him to rest indoors, three and a half hours had elapsed.⁷¹

There was little the doctors summoned that morning could do, and Buntin died two days later. Attempts to shift blame for the long delay in getting him care had already begun among the railroad, county, city, and others, and the full truth is hard to discern. The county coroner, who was also one of the attending physicians, decided not to hold an inquest, but a petition was quickly submitted, demanding an inquest for the purpose of assigning blame. No report of an inquest was found. In the press, much of the blame was directed at the railroad for leaving Buntin in the open railyard for so long. The hotels that later refused him shelter were also faulted. Much of the blame directed at the city was centered on Buntin not being admitted to the city jail. Some people thought the jail was the proper place for him to be taken, because Buntin was just a tramp, a criminal, not a paying passenger on the train. However, as Eagleson told the reporter for the *Daily Capital*, “his advice to the railroad men who telephoned him was that the office of the prison was not a fit place to bring a man in Buntin’s condition, as there was not a shovel full of coal in the building” for heat. The final tragedy in the incident was a letter from Buntin’s father in Ohio to the Topeka undertaker regarding the return of his body. Buntin’s father requested that his son be buried in Topeka at county expense. “My sympathies are for the living and not for the dead.”⁷²

Blame fell on Eagleson because he did not immediately agree to house the injured Buntin at the city jail. “At the suggestion of the Mayor,” Bradford Miller, Eagleson resigned on April 23. The mayor had taken office on January 1 and was not the one who appointed Eagleson. The *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* commented on his resignation. “Mr. Eagleson has held the place a long time and been looked upon as a faithful man. A strict adherence to and obedience of all orders from his superiors has characterized his service and many of the unfortunates who show up periodically will be sorry he has gone.” Eagleson was immediately replaced by a white jailer named E.W. Davies.⁷³

Ed Davies only held the job of city jailer about 13 months. In August 1884, three Black women were arrested for prostitution. They had been repeatedly incarcerated since April, and Mayor Miller told the city marshal, “something must be done to make the prison life disagreeable to the prostitutes.” Two of the women were told to rake some hay scattered in front of the jail, which they refused to do. As punishment, the marshal ordered jailer Davies to place a ball and chain on their ankles, and they were left where they sat in front of the jail. Not surprisingly, the sight of two Black women in chains drew a crowd. William Eagleson and three others went to see the mayor, who denied that he knew anything about the treatment of the women. He wrote an order for the chains to be removed and the women returned to jail. The committee of four delivered the order to the marshal and jailer, who complied. That evening, in front of the post office at Fifth Street and Kansas Avenue, a crowd gathered, estimated to be 1,000–2,000 people, many of whom were white. Speakers stood on a dry goods box to address the crowd, denouncing not only the action earlier in the day, but also Mayor Miller and other political targets. The mayor had asked that the gathering not be held and promised to “right the whole trouble”—after the upcoming election.⁷⁴

However, Miller decided against seeking reelection in 1885, and Democrat Robert Cofran was elected to replace him as mayor in April 1885. In May, Cofran made an unexpected appointment for a Democrat at the time, as noted by the *Topeka Tribune and Western Recorder*. “Mr. Davis [sic], the white Republican, has been removed, and Mr. W.L. Eagleson, a colored man, appointed in his place.” The surprise was not that a Republican jailer had been replaced by a Democratic mayor but that a Democratic mayor had replaced him with a Black jailer. At the time, the Democratic Party was associated with white politicians in the South. Eagleson was finally confirmed by the city council in July. Usually referred to as Bill rather than William, Eagleson’s duties were the same as during his first stint—taking care of prisoners, maintaining the jail, and occasionally assisting with other police activities. As in his politics, he became an advocate while serving as jailer. In one instance, he recommended “the wearing of cuirasses by our city police” after an officer was shot. His tenure in the position was still subject to the whims of political patronage, and he left the job after the election of a new mayor in April 1887. Serving at the same time as Eagleson was Ben Perkins, the only other Black member of the police force. In April 1888, Perkins “delivered an interesting and instructive dissertation ... at the police station on the ethics of police duty.”⁷⁵

As the jailer for the city of Topeka, Eagleson became acquainted with the prisoners and aspects of the human condition. In addition to the prisoners, Eagleson had charge of a collection of knives, guns, burglar’s tools, and other items taken from the inmates. Perhaps the most unusual items left behind by some of the prisoners were diaries. One contained “verses in each of three languages, English, French and German.” The *Topeka Daily Capital* described some of the most poignant contents of the diaries that spoke to the challenging times faced by people during this period (with changes made here in the use of commas).⁷⁶

Some of the diaries contain fragmentary sketches of the lives of the writers. What a world of conjecture is awakened by the few scattered lines! Here is a sentence about a day of want and hunger and cold but not a line of the crime which may have followed it. As the leaves are turned, occasionally is found a passage referring to friends at home, hundreds of miles away perhaps, and as a line of sentiment about home or the friends of youth or long-forgotten days suddenly remembered begins to take form, the pencil stops, and the sentence remains unfinished. We can imagine the rest.⁷⁷

Eagleson also compiled records on the numbers of arrests by each city officer, most of which were for drunkenness. Prohibition was a major political topic at the time. In 1886, the only full calendar year he was employed, there were about 500 total arrests. Of these, most of the 181 arrests for violations other than public intoxication were for prostitution, vagrancy, disturbing the peace, and fast driving. The numbers of arrests each month ranged from 12 in August to 45 in November. During periods of cold weather in the winter, “tramps” (mostly unemployed men) also “applied for lodging and something to eat at the police station.”⁷⁸

In October 1886, a reporter for the *Topeka Daily Capital* sought Eagleson’s views on the “tramps” he cared for at the city jail. The unnamed reporter wrote that “Mr. Bill Eagleson” was “as competent to enlighten the public on the subject as any man in the city. In addition

to this, he is a humane man with a big heart, who would not color the facts in favor of the police.” Eagleson explained that tramps were more common during the winter, when men were laid off from track work by the railroads. There were fewer tramps during the summer. During the winter, he might care for 20–30 tramps each night. Each would be given a place to sleep and a warm breakfast. He was then “allowed to depart in peace.” Some people likely would object to the cost of the charity offered by the city police, but Eagleson disagreed. “When asked about the effect of the city feeding tramps, Mr. Eagleson said it was the best policy that could be pursued by the city. If this was not done, they would beg or steal, and being fed by the public was less expense.”⁷⁹

In August, shortly after ending his service as jailer, a reporter from the *Daily Capital* again sought Eagleson, along with former city marshal Tim Donovan, to ask their opinions about a recent wave of unsolved robberies in Topeka. “Ex-City Jailer Bill Eagleson is a very shrewd and observing man, and it is very doubtful if there is a man in the city who has had more experience with crooks and criminals than he has.” Eagleson stated categorically that the crooks were not from the local African American community or the tramps. They were professional criminals who moved from city to city. Donovan concurred. “Thieves are not tramps, but generally wear good clothes and hang around good hotels, while the police are hunting the usual resorts of the tramps.”⁸⁰

After leaving his job as city jailer in April 1887, Eagleson returned to barbering. Then, on 1 August 1888, he was appointed to a position in the Topeka post office, another patronage job. It was offered by a Democratic postmaster, who had earlier appointed another African American to a job. Eagleson was paid \$500 per month, and he held the position until his resignation on 1 May 1889.⁸¹

Egleson’s government jobs reflected his change in support of political parties and a short-lived change in Kansas politics. Most African Americans supported the Republican Party, a sentimental allegiance to the party of Abraham Lincoln. In 1886, Black voters even failed to support an African American candidate—William D. Kelley—for state auditor on the Democratic ticket, despite the failure of Republicans to renominate Edward P. McCabe of Nicodemus after he had been elected to the office as a Republican in 1882 and 1884. McCabe was the first African American to hold a statewide office. The distrust was strong for a Democratic Party associated with the South that most African Americans in Kansas had recently fled. However, anger grew during the 1880s at the failure of the Republican Party to recognize African American support and to nominate or support Black candidates.⁸² This led some African Americans to declare independence from all political parties, while others switched parties. Eagleson was in the latter group.

Although the Republican Party dominated Kansas politics, Populist candidates briefly overcame that dominance. In 1890, the Kansas People’s Party—the Populists—was born of challenging circumstances associated with widespread drought and economic depression. In the election that autumn, Populists won control of the state house of representatives and five of the state’s seven seats in the US Congress. At the time, state legislatures still chose senators, and Populist William Peffer was elected in 1891 to replace a Republican who had served since 1873. In 1893–1895 and 1897–1899, Kansas had Populist governors, though John

Leedy was elected in 1896 as a fusion candidate, combining support from Populists and Democrats. Disagreements within the Populist ranks about fusion with the Democrats was a factor in splitting the People's Party and its decline through the end of the century.⁸³

In 1885, Eagleson was elected president of the Democratic Club organized by African Americans in Topeka three months after he was reappointed city jailer by the new Democratic mayor.⁸⁴ He would also support Populist candidates, which brought him further patronage, as will be described later. Though some former Republicans returned to the party, Eagleson never did.

In the years after leaving the *Herald of Kansas* in 1880, Eagleson had planned periodically to start another newspaper or, at least, a campaign paper supporting Democratic candidates.⁸⁵ However, experience had shown that financial success was elusive, and probably more so for an African American newspaper espousing support for Democrats. There was an alternative, though. In the presidential election year of 1888, Eagleson was given a byline as a columnist for the white-owned *Kansas Democrat*. "Mr. Eagleson will reign over his department, and be alone responsible for what he says. He has ideas of his own, and will from his platform each Saturday, express views touching the political, moral and social welfare of the colored people as may seem to him well and proper." Editor John Waller of the *American Citizen*, an African American newspaper in Kansas City, observed, "We believe it is the first instance in the history of Kansas, where a colored man has been offered a position on a white man's paper." Waller was a Republican, so while he wished Eagleson well in his endeavor and respected him personally, he would disagree with his politics. Eagleson's column, "Items of Interest to the Colored People of Kansas," ran every Saturday that year from May 5 to November 3 on page two of the *Democrat*, which was devoted to politics.⁸⁶

The next new adventure for Eagleson after the election of 1888 and his stint with the post office was not long in coming. In fact, his resignation from the post office might have been prompted to some extent by events to the south. Beginning in 1889 and continuing into the 1890s, land in the Oklahoma Territory was periodically opened to settlement. As with the Kansas Exodus a decade earlier, there were those who promoted the opportunity for African Americans to leave the South for new homes, where they could own the land on which they lived. The dream held by some promoters of a future state dominated by African Americans was short lived, but several Black communities were established. The most successful of these Black towns in Oklahoma was Langston, between Oklahoma City and Stillwater.* Arthur Tolson has documented much about the town's founding, which would be associated with two of its prominent promoters—Edward P. McCabe and William Eagleson.⁸⁷

As mentioned earlier, Eagleson was among the leaders in Topeka's African American community who strongly supported the Exoduster movement and helped organize the Kansas State Colored Emigration Bureau to assist those in need. A decade later, his fervor for emigration from the South was undiminished as he promoted the exodus to the Oklahoma

* Langston was unique among the African American towns established in Kansas and Oklahoma during the late 1800s in that it became the home in 1897 of a land-grant institution of higher education—the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal School, now Langston University (Tolson 1952, pages 30–56). It is the only historically Black college or university in Oklahoma.

Territory. In July 1889, Eagleson became the corresponding secretary and manager of the Oklahoma Immigration Association organized in Topeka. He printed a circular distributed in the South that encouraged potential emigrants to move west.⁸⁸ His work promoting emigration to Oklahoma continued, and in April 1891, Eagleson moved to Langston and became editor of the *Langston City Herald*, which was established on May 2. The *Herald* was the first African American weekly newspaper in what would become the state of Oklahoma.* Eagleson remained the *Herald's* editor until October 1892. Through the newspaper, he continued to promote emigration to Langston but began repeating a notice under the headline "Come Prepared or Not at All." It was a warning that new settlers needed the means to sustain themselves while they established crops or other sources of income. In addition to journalism, Eagleson was elected to serve as Langston's justice of the peace in 1892.⁸⁹ Then, after spending most of 1891 and 1892 as an active resident of Langston, he returned to Topeka.

In addition to support of Black immigrants coming to Kansas and Oklahoma, Eagleson had one more relocation project in mind. In January 1896, he proposed establishing a Black community named Sumner just a few miles east of Topeka. He secured a section of land near Tecumseh and expected financial assistance from "some eastern people." In April, the Sumner City Townsite Company obtained a charter and reported a capital stock of \$20,000. Yet nothing came of the project. From 1897 to 1899, local African American newspapers wondered what happened. No answers were provided, but Eagleson made one final plea for his dream in early 1899, when he briefly returned to work as a newspaper editor.⁹⁰

In addition to journalism, barbering, and the other jobs already mentioned, Eagleson worked as a janitor at the Topeka City Library and the offices of the Santa Fe Railway. His later support of Populist politics also figured in his appointment as the messenger for Governor John W. Leedy, a Populist who held the office from January 1897 to January 1899.⁹¹

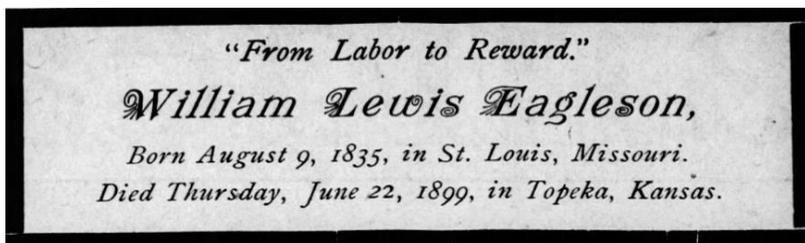
It was after working for the governor that Eagleson returned to journalism one final time. It was reported in February 1897 that he planned to start "a Populist newspaper for the colored people of Topeka," but nothing came from that plan. However, it might have inspired his son, Albert, to revive the *Colored Citizen* that summer with Marshall Holloway. Its politics were independent rather than Populist, but William Eagleson joined as editor in early 1899, after Albert left the paper and Governor Leedy left office.⁹²

On 6 January 1899, the *Topeka Plaindealer* reported that "William Eagleson and Price Thomas, of the *Colored Citizen*, were agreeable PLAINDEALER callers last week." Yet only three weeks later, the newspaper reported, "William Eagleson has been very sick the last week or two." Details of his ailment were not mentioned, but in 1886, the *Kansas Democrat* had reported "Jailor Eagleson" suffered from "rheumatism of the heart." Whether he had actually suffered from rheumatic fever is unknown, but the note suggests he experienced

* A monthly African American newspaper—the *Oklahoma Guide*—was published in Oklahoma City in 1889. A weekly newspaper under that name was published in Guthrie from 1892 to 1922. It became the *People's Elevator* and moved to Independence, Wichita, and finally Kansas City, Kansas (Danky and Hady 1998, p 459; Williams 1996, p 268).

cardiovascular trouble. He reportedly had been in failing health since January 1898. The *Plainealer* updated Eagleson's condition through the spring of 1899. In February, he was reported to be "much improved after a very serious illness," but in April, May, and June he was "quite ill" at his home on Quincy Street. In June, it was mentioned that "besides having asthma, [he] has two large ulcers on each leg, which will require a surgical operation. Careful treatment will prolong Mr. Eagleson's days."⁹³

On June 16, the same day the latest prognosis was reported, the *Plainealer* also published a frontpage article under the headline, "Bill Eagleson. He Suggests That Prominent Topeka Citizens Get Together and Institute a Home for the Aged." While Eagleson was seriously ill at his home, he was interviewed by a correspondent from the *Plainealer*. "Yes, I am working on this matter and I want to interest the leading Negroes of Topeka and Shawnee county in the scheme. We have old and decrepit colored people sick and dying on our streets, without home or friendly rest wherein a friendly hand will care for them in their last hours." He went on to describe how to go about accomplishing his goal of a senior home and hospital by establishing a committee of prominent Black citizens to oversee the effort, raising funds, and placing its operation in the hands of the local Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Masons "for careful and economical management." Six days later, William Eagleson died, an advocate for the African American community to the end. The *Plainealer* ran a two-column obituary under an elegant headline on June 30, with a portion of the introduction excerpted here.⁹⁴



In death's removal of William L. Eagleson from the theater of human activities, is chronicled the regretful departure of a man who labored hard and earnestly to the end that his race's interests and welfare might be promoted.

In the life of William L. Eagleson is another shining example of the man who dies fighting for that which he honestly and unflinchingly contends is right. ... William Eagleson and others of his beliefs and convictions, those who have manfully stood to their guns, did not live to see the fruits of their labors fully developed, but they died with consolation that they planted an idea that will eventually grow to maturity and beneficial results.⁹⁵

The obituary went on to recount aspects of Eagleson's life—his family, occupations, advocacy for justice, support of Black immigrants from the South, and memberships in social organizations.⁹⁶ There was much to tell.

Though never a slave, William Lewis Eagleson experienced firsthand the challenges faced by a Black man in nineteenth century America, both before and after the Civil War. As a journalist and a jailer, he learned of the hardships that could afflict all people, regardless of

skin color, whether native born or immigrant. In response, he felt compassion, passionately expressed. As the editor of the first newspaper in Kansas published as a Black-owned enterprise, the editor of the first weekly African American newspaper in Oklahoma, and the first Black columnist hired by a white-owned newspaper in Kansas, Eagleson wrote about injustice and proposed solutions, bringing these subjects into public view for all to see. Too many in the community chose to ignore the issues, but knowledge of his role in a free press and his advocacy for justice, respect, and opportunities in a society open to all serves as a valuable reminder to subsequent generations of the ongoing importance of these endeavors.

Acknowledgements

Most newspapers were accessed through Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank.com, and the African American Newspapers collection in the Gateway to Oklahoma History (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/explore/collections/AFRAN/>). Microfilm reels of the *Colored Citizen* were viewed at the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka. Census records and other documents were accessed through Ancestry.com. Some books and journal articles were read online through the HathiTrust, Internet Archive, Google Books, JSTOR, and state, federal, and university websites.

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- ⁷⁵ *Kansas Daily State Journal*, 4 March 1886, p 4 4; 18 March 1886, p 1; 3 August 1886, p 1; 5 August 1886, p 1; 28 September 1886, p 1; 16 December 1886, p 1; 20 April 1887, p. • *Kansas Democrat*, 13 September 1886, p 4; 6 December 1886, p 4; 22 February 1887, p 4; 11 April 1887, p 4; 18 April 1888, p 4. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 5 April 1885, p 4; 11 April 1885, p 4; 21 May 1885, p 4; 7 July 1885, p 8; 22 July 1885, p 4; 29 August 1885, p 4; 29 September 1885, p 2; 12 February 1886, p 8; 18 March 1886, p 4; 1 February 1887, p 5. • *Topeka Daily Citizen*, 13 May 1885, p 1; 16 May 1885, p 2; 18 June 1885, p 4; 21 October 1885, p 4; 25 December 1885, p 4; 13 March 1886, p 8; 16 March 1886, p 4; 18 March 1886, p 4. • *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 16 May 1885, p 4; 18 June 1885, p 4; 11 August 1886, p 4; 5 September 1885, p 4; 1 October 1885, p 13; 2 March 1886, p 4; 20 March 1886, p 5; 22 April 1886, p 5; 19 June 1886, p 5; 27 November 1886, p 8; 13 February 1887, p 3. • *Topeka Daily Journal*, 4 October 1885, p 4; 17 February 1886, p 4. • *Topeka Tribune and Western Recorder*, 23 May 1885, p 1.
- ⁷⁶ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 18 April 1884, p 5.
- ⁷⁷ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 18 April 1884, p 5.
- ⁷⁸ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 19 December 1886, p 7; 7 August 1887, p 10. • *Topeka Daily Citizen*, 31 December 1885, p 8. • *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 18 March 1887, p 8.
- ⁷⁹ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 15 October 1886, p 4.
- ⁸⁰ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 7 August 1887, p 10.
- ⁸¹ *Kansas Democrat*, 1 August 1888, p 4; 2 May 1889, p 4.

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- ⁸² *Kansas Democrat*, 5 November 1886, p 2. • *National Workman*, 26 October 1882, p 1. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 13 April 1880, p 4; 5 August 1880, p 4; 31 May 1882, p 8; 1 June 1882, p 8. • *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 14 July 1880, p 4; 22 September 1880, p 2; 16 November 1880, p 1; 11 May 1882, p 3; 16 June 1882, p 1. • Woods (1981, pages 52–53, 90–93).
- ⁸³ Miner (2002, pages 171–189). • Wishart (2013, pages 110–134).
- ⁸⁴ *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 15 August 1885, p 3. • *Topeka State Journal*, 26 May 1885, p 2.
- ⁸⁵ *Kansas Daily State Journal*, 20 April 1887, p 4. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 11 March 1881, p 5. • *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 11 August 1886, p 4.
- ⁸⁶ *Kansas Democrat*, 5 May 1888, p 2; 12 May 1888, p 2; 3 November 1888, p 2.
- ⁸⁷ Littlefield and Underhill (1973). • Tolson (1952, pages 4–16). • Woods (1981, pages 20–21).
- ⁸⁸ *Kansas Democrat*, 8 July 1889, p 8; 18 July 1889, p 8; 29 January 1891, p 4. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 7 July 1889, p 5; 18 July 1889, p 4; 22 August 1889, p 5; 15 January 1890, p 5; 19 March 1890, p 8.
- ⁸⁹ *Kansas Democrat*, 20 April 1891, p 8; 25 July 1891, p 4. • *Langston City Herald*, 19 December 1891, p 2; 15 October 1892, p 4. • Danky and Hady (1998, page 332). • Foreman (1936, page 347). • Littlefield and Underhill (1973, page 345). • Tolson (1952, pages 16, 19, 74–75).
- ⁹⁰ *Colored Citizen*, 15 July 1897, p 1; 25 February 1899, p 1. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 21 April 1896, p 3. • *Topeka Plaindealer*, 6 January 1899, p 2. • *Topeka State Journal*, 28 January 1896, p 5.
- ⁹¹ *State Ledger*, 15 January 1897, p 1. • *Topeka Plaindealer*, 6 January 1899, p 2; 30 June 1899, p 2. • *Topeka State Journal*, 16 February 1897, p 8. • Socolofsky (1990, pages 126–129).
- ⁹² *Colored Citizen*, 25 February 1899, p 4. • *Topeka State Journal*, 16 February 1897, p 8; 22 June 1897, p 5.
- ⁹³ *Kansas Democrat*, 6 July 1886, p 4. • *Topeka Plaindealer*, 6 January 1899, p 3; 27 January 1899, p 3; 24 February 1899, p 3; 14 April 1899, p 4; 12 May 1899, p 4; 16 June 1899, p 3; 30 June 1899, p 2.
- ⁹⁴ *Topeka Plaindealer*, 16 June 1899, p 1; 30 June 1899, p 2.
- ⁹⁵ *Topeka Plaindealer*, 30 June 1899, p 2.
- ⁹⁶ *Topeka Plaindealer*, 30 June 1899, p 2.

