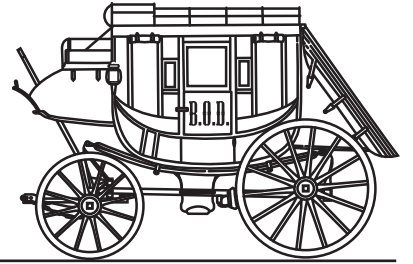


# OVERLAND DESPATCH

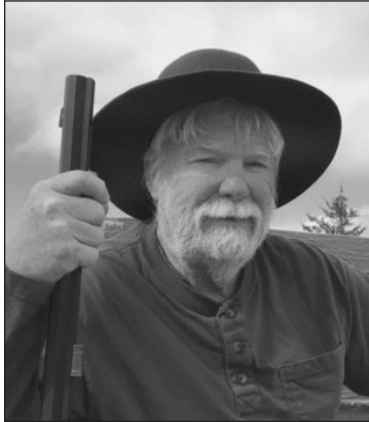


Volume XVI No. IV

WINTER 2024

## *Remember the Smoky Hill Trail*

**Hello** to all of the Smoky Hill Trail Association members from the flatlands of Eastern Colorado. We have just returned from the 2024 conference in Atchison, Kansas. It was a beautiful location with trees, hills and water.



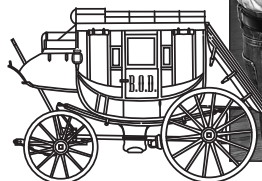
To begin the conference, a "Meet and Greet" informal gathering, took place at the Atchison County Historical Santa Fe Depot. We were greeted by Steve Caplinger, Director of the Museum. We had two trolley tours, that everyone thoroughly enjoyed, learning a lot about the history of our host city. After the trolley tours were finished, a whiskey tasting sampling and cash bar, was enjoyed by all who participated.

Day two started at 8 A.M. with coffee and pastries, with the first speaker being Garrett Seuser, speaking to the many varied artifacts he has found around old Fort Harker, where it sat on the Smoky Hill Trail. Kim Schutte was the second speaker of the morning, with information about the history of the Mormons in the Midwest, called "The Bloody 1830's". Kim kept us captivated with this little-known time in history, before the Mormons moved to Utah in 1847. Rick Hamby was the next speaker, a dynamic personality who just happens to own an original stagecoach. Rick and his crew, invited us all to join them by way of a slide show, "Dust in the Wind A Journey from Mount Sunflower Kansas to Monument Rocks, Kansas." The next speaker, James Cormode, explained the difference between a trail and a road, as it pertained to early travel, by way of horses or wheeled vehicles. The first being a pathway for horses, and a road was utilized by wagons. The last speaker for day two was Steve Caplinger, ➤



Tony Wernsman is preusing through the GPS trial marker records that Nancy Arendt brought to the conference.

*An ongoing project!*



## OVERLAND DESPATCH

is the official publication of the Smoky Hill Trail Association, Inc., a nonprofit, 501(c)(3), corporation chartered in the State of Kansas. Primary missions of the Association are to preserve, protect, promote and interpret the Smoky Hill Trail for the benefit of present and future generations, and to promote awareness of the historical legacy associated with the remnants and locations that represent the historical trail and Butterfield's Overland Despatch (BOD) and its successors as well as the railroad that replaced the overland trail. Letters and articles are welcome and can be submitted to [smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com](mailto:smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com) or mailed to the address below.

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## MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Association is open to all. Members receive the **OVERLAND DESPATCH** newsletter quarterly. Memberships are on the upcoming calendar year until December 31. Annual dues are:

- \$25.00 for Individual
- \$30.00 for Family / Living at same address
- \$40.00 for Institution / Nonprofit Organizations
- \$50.00 for Business
- \$100.00 for Patron (Support the Organization)
- \$500.00 Lifetime Membership\*

\* May be paid in quarterly installments during one or two years.

Membership fees may be paid through PayPal using email address: [smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com](mailto:smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com) or mailed to the address below. Other donations are always welcome and appreciated.

Smoky Hill Trail Association  
PO Box 978 / Hays, KS 67601

## SHTA OFFICERS

President: Bob Andersen, Genoa, CO  
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Newsletter Editor: Tanner Mayhew, St. Joseph, MO

speaking to the influence Atchison County had on westward expansion. At that point, Atchison was much larger than it's Eastern counterpart, St. Joseph and continued to have a larger population all through the 1800's to the early 1900's.

A short Board Meeting was then held, hearing reports from all members on the progress of their various projects. The nominating committee, put forth Bob Andersen as President, Marla Matkin as Vice President, Marilyn Copeland as Treasurer, and Mary Andersen as Secretary. Mary Lattin and Nancy Arendt agreed to continue to be board members. Garrett Seuser was nominated to fill Marla's position, with a unanimous vote for Garrett to serve for a five-year term. A motion was then made to adjourn, with another unanimous vote.

The Banquet was held at Cedar Ridge Banquet Hall, a short drive north of and west of the museum. A more beautiful location would be hard to find, and the meal was absolutely delicious. This time served as a chance for everyone to mingle and enjoy the venue and the company of all the people there.

Our guest speaker at this time, Deb Goodrich, as she told the captivating history of Charles Curtis, Vice President of the United States during the Hoover administration. Mr. Curtis was a member of the Kaw nation, being the first. Native American to serve in the U.S. Congress, serving in both the House of Representatives, then the Senate, before becoming Senate Majority Leader from 1924 to 1929. Mr. Curtis was elected Vice President, when Herbert Hoover became president in 1928, a land slide victory.



"Meet & Greet Time" Spirit tasting offered by local distillery MGP



Charles Curtis remains the highest ranking enrolled Native American to serve in the Federal Government. Mr. Curtis was born in Kansas Territory in 1860, a year before Kansas became a state.

Day three started once again with coffee and pastries. The first speaker of the day, Sarah Elder, highlighted the connecting lines of railroads and ferries that lead to Atchison. Jackie Lewin gave the last presentation of the conference about the men; Russell, Majors and Waddell, that created the Pony Express.

*It was a great conference!*



Robert Andersen  
Smoky Hill Trail Association  
President

## THANK YOU TO OUR PRESENTERS AT THE MUSUM



Garrett Seuser



Kim Schutte



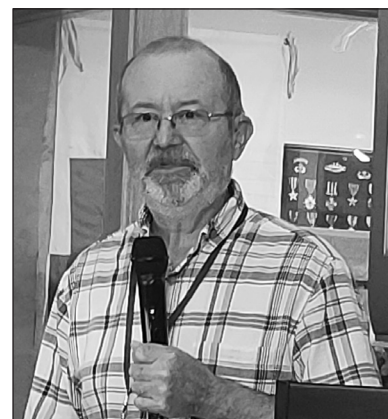
Rick Hamby and Dennis Crider



Rick Hamby presents a copy of his book; *"The Last Stage to Matador"* to Pattie Mayhew in remembrance of her late husband Jim.



James Cormode



Steve Caplinger



Pattie Mayhew received an Award of Merit in appreciation for her and her late husband Jim for promoting the Smoky Hill Trail Association.



Sarah Elder



Jackie Lewin





Boarding the Trolley to take a guided historic tour of Atchison



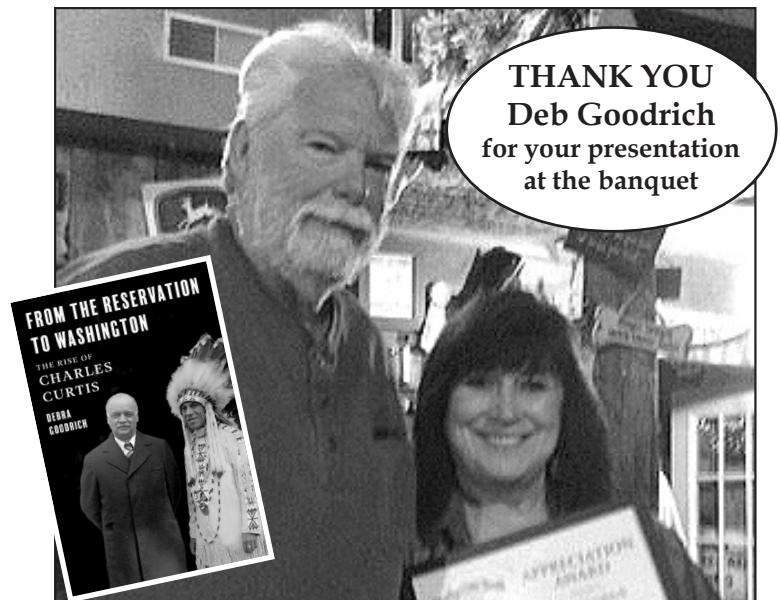
Conversation after unloading Rick Hamby's stagecoach



Tom French took over as stagecoach driver on the last day of the "Dust in the West" event after Bill Hobbs broke his hip.



Good time during the banquet at Cedar Ridge



Bob Andersen thanks Deb Goodrich for her presentation about her new book; *From the Reservation to Washington - The Rise of Charles Curtis* (available on Amazon)



Marla Matkin, Deb Goodrich and Brian Smith share smiles at the banquet



The Smoky Hill Trail Association  
would like to express their appreciation to  
the following for making the  
conference a success.

**Jill Thorne**, *Director of the Atchison Area Chamber of Commerce*

**Steve Caplinger**, *Director of the Santa Fe Depot Museum*

**Atchison County Historical Society  
Museum and Staff**

<https://atchisonhistory.org>

• This museum is a must visit! •

*"Dust in the Wind, along the Smoky Hill Trail"*

**Rick Hamby & Crew** for bringing your stagecoach

**Dennis Crider**, *photographer*

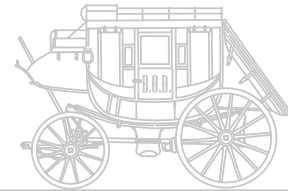
<https://criderphotography.biz>

--AND EVERYONE THAT ATTENDED--

*Thank You!*

*Smoky Hill Trail*  
ASSOCIATION

2024 CONFERENCE  
**QUEST  
WEST**



ATCHISON





**Editor:** Following is **Part 2** of the “James Miles Coombs” story that was written by Brian Smith about his third Great Grandfather. Part 1 was featured in the Summer 2024 issue of the *Overland Despatch*. If you missed it, you may read it on our website: [www.smokyhilltrail.com/historical-newsletters](http://www.smokyhilltrail.com/historical-newsletters) - click on “Summer 2024” issue. I had the pleasure to meet Brian at our conference in Atchison. Brian is authoring a book about James’ exploits. He requests to our readers, if you have information about James M. Coombs, please share it with him. You may email: [smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com](mailto:smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com) -- and we will forward your information to Brian.

Enjoy.....

## PART 2

### James Miles Coombs – Biography

#### The Law, Hospitality and Politics (1875-1881)

James’ continued involvement in law enforcement included the role of monitoring the railroad stockyards as Deputy Sheriff in Ellis, which was located about ten miles west of Fort Hays. Fort Hays was originally established as Fort Fletcher in late 1865 to protect the Butterfield stage wagons from attacks by marauding Arapaho and Cheyenne. However, the fort was abandoned between May and October of 1866 due to overwhelming ambush activity. The fort was relocated and reactivated as Fort Hays in 1867, with the stated mission of defending railroad workers.

The change in mission during that short time was an indicator of the shift in importance from stage lines to railroads. James was associated with both



Last Monday night, three mares and one horse, a spring wagon, harness, &c., belonging to Mrs. Chatharine Link, who lives on the Smoky Hill river, were stolen from her premises. Two bad characters, Abraham Persinger and William Wynn, are known to be the guilty parties. Wynn worked for Mrs. Link for some time. The parties were seen the same evening with property answering the description of that stolen. It is reported that when last seen, they were in town, in the neighborhood of Eberhardt & Sudendorf’s lumber yard, and were going southward. Persinger and Wynn were recently arrested for horse stealing by J. M. Coombs and were taken to Ellis, but broke jail and came back to Saline county. Several parties are now scouring the country in search of the thieves. At the present writing nothing further has been heard from the pursuers and the pursued.

*The Saline County Journal Herald*, Sep. 9, 1875

**Mr. J. M. Coombs has been appointed railroad policeman. He stations himself at the depot upon the arrival of trains, for the purpose of preserving the peace. He bears a commission from Mayor Bishop, also one from superintendent Dorrance, and is paid for his services by the railroad company.**

*Saline County Journal*, July 22, 1875

and leveraged those associations. By the mid 1870’s, the majority of cattle movement had shifted west alongside the Kansas Pacific line from Brookville to Ellis. James did not go to Ellis until July of 1876, after the threats had been reduced.

There was no shortage of lawlessness in Ellis, however. In early August of 1876, someone stole James’ horse named Yellow Jacket from the stockyard while he was eating dinner. Fortunately, he was able to locate Yellow Jacket a couple of weeks later. He didn’t find out who had stolen the horse, but it was a reminder that Ellis was still on the edge of an expanding country, and law enforcement was needed. James worked in Ellis between July and November of 1876. The rest of the family appears to have been back in Brookville during his work, and it is not clear if he lived alone in Ellis during that period, or if he “took the train” to work.

On his return to Brookville, James took up the duty of City Marshal. It is also evident that James was paid by Saline County as a “special constable,” based on an entry in the Saline County journal in January of 1878. In August of that year, James was sued for assault. While he was cleared of any wrongdoing, he relinquished the City Marshal position to W. S. Geiger.

After removing himself from the responsibilities of City Marshal, James was subsequently nominated and elected in November of 1878 as a constable for Spring Creek Township, in which Brookville resides. It was during this time that James was described in several newspaper accounts maintaining order. While there were shoplifters, transients on the train and other reasonably mundane interactions, James also dealt with livestock thieves and murderers.

In 1880, the term as township constable came to an end, and James jumped back into his role as the City Marshal in Brookville.

In another recurring theme, the calling to civic duty for James also included firefighting. James served as Chief Nozzleman on the Brookville fire company, according to an item in the Saline County Journal from January of 1876. In late March of 1880, the train depot in Brookville caught fire and was destroyed. James led the efforts to contain and extinguish the fire. On the upside, the railroad built a new depot!

## Caught at Last.

**J. M. Coombs, of Brookville, and Loomis & Keep, of Terra Cotta, came in with a prisoner last night. The man being the one who stole a pair of mules from Loomis Brothers last October. -- Mr. Coombs found the prisoner near Chapman's Creek, Dickinson county, and by a bold, brilliant maneuver captured him, recovered the mules, wagon &c., and the fellow is now in our jail. He is a bad man and he is sorry he was taken unaware, as he wanted to shoot his captors. He is a hard customer and the penitentiary is a good place for him.**

*Ellsworth Reporter, Jan. 9, 1879*

The depot was only one of numerous buildings that sprang up in Brookville with the arrival of the railroad. By 1875, James Miles Coombs and his family were well established in Saline County. He was an active member of the community from its founding, and not just as a civil servant. His commitment to local development in Brookville was noteworthy.

James served as the first school district director and was one of the original members of the Brookville City Council at the town's inception in 1870/71. According to numerous contemporary newspaper accounts, James also initiated and managed the construction of a flour mill, the first school and public park in Brookville.

Without missing a beat, James and attorney Judge Simonton saw an opportunity in April of 1877 to pursue a new business venture, and they began leasing a hotel from Mrs. Barney Bohan:

*"Messrs. J. M. Coombs and Judge Simonton, a lawyer who has lately settled at Brookville, have rented the hotel recently conducted by Mrs. Barney Bohan at that place, and will accommodate the public with lodgings and meals."*

*Saline County Journal, 19 April 1877*

Mrs. Bohan's husband was the proprietor until 1874, when he killed two brothers in a bar fight and was subsequently imprisoned.

What started as Bohan's Tavern around 1870 eventually became the Brookville Hotel after James took full control. *The Saline County Journal* prefaced the re-opening on February 7th of 1878:

*"Mr. J. M. Coombs will open on Monday next, 11th, a first-class hotel. The traveling public will do well to give him a call; and all wanting board by day or week are invited to give him a trial."*

The Ellsworth Reporter described the opening in an item from February 14th:

*"Our place is to be well supplied with hotel and restau-ration-al accommodations this year. Mr. JM Coombs has opened the Brookville hotel for all the world and the rest of mankind (except deadbeats) if they will come this way a few at a time."*

The Brookville Hotel lives on today in Abilene as Legacy Kansas.

With a hotel to run and the railroad reducing the demand for livery services, James took a step back from the Pioneer stable, letting his son Charlie manage it, relocating operations to another piece of property in town.

Charlie also worked as a telegrapher (starting at age 16) for the railroad in Ellsworth, Kansas in March of 1878. Charlie worked the remainder of his career as a telegraph operator, and helped found the Order of Railroad Telegraphers in 1888.

Other family changes took place during this time as well. In September of 1877, my great-great grandmother, Clara Bentley Coombs, married, George Crawshaw. George was a railroad station agent and telegrapher who hailed from Yates Center, Kansas.

Sadly, James and Deborah lost their youngest son Elbert to sickness in December of 1877. Elbert was buried in the Brookville cemetery.

In February of 1879, Della Mary Coombs, the eldest daughter, married Edwin Clark Blanchard. E.C. Blanchard was a section superintendent for the railroad, and served on the Brookville City Council starting in 1881.

None of the family changes slowed James down. In 1879, he donated the land and managed the construction of Brookville's city hall, which still stands today at the Northeast corner of Second and Perry streets. In fact, the property donated for the city hall was originally the location of Pioneer Livery stable.

**Brookville was organized as a city of the third class in 1871. The first mayor was S. M. Palmer, now register of the United States land office at Salina. The first members of the council were: W. F. Leslie, W. H. McFarron, J. M. Coombs, S. J. Wilcox, John J. Crittenden. The city clerk was J. S. Wilcox.**

*Brookville Times, Dec. 29, 1887*

*Continued next page* ➤



The Saline County Journal described the process in an article from September of 1879:

*"People have commenced erecting substantial buildings at Brookville. We noticed half a dozen nice little cottages, with French roofs, built of the brown sandstone so abundant out in the neighborhood. The City Hall, which will be a very fine building when completed, is built of the same material. The blocks of the front are large and nicely dressed, with beveled edges, and this dressing is a la Coombs. Mr. Coombs is the "Superintendent of Construction." The stonework of the building is nearly completed."*

James' efforts in community development continued in 1880 when he played a pivotal role in establishing Brookville's first city park. He negotiated with railroad representatives and contributed to the park's development, which became a significant community asset.

Brookville was growing – along with James' influence. As a respected pioneer and driver of growth, James commanded the attention of just about everyone he encountered. We previously described the early connection with Senator James Lane. In June of 1875, then Lieutenant Frank West of the 6th U.S. Cavalry visited with James in Salina. Frank was three years out of West Point at the time and had met James during his time at Fort Hays. No one knew at that time that Lieutenant West would go on to receive the Medal of Honor and retire as a Colonel in the 2nd Cavalry at age 64!

**On Sunday evening some party was very troublesome around Matt. Mathew's restaurant, and some one informed Marshal Coombs, who visited the scene of action and proceeded to arrest the offending party. He tried to bluff Mr. C. but its no use to resist Mr. Coombs, for he always fetches them in. Mr. C. was then informed that some one was breaking open cars at the depot, and he immediately proceded thither and succeeded in capturing three more prisoners. They were also brought up town and lodged in squire Granger's office, with the other prisoners, and young Perkins & Moses were employed to take charge of them for the night, which they did. At a preliminary examination on Monday morning before Judge Moore the first party was given one hour in which to leave town, which he did. The other parties, it appears, had broken open a freight car and stolen some canned meat, and then gone into a lumber car to rest for the night. They were in default of bail committed to the county Jail to await the Nov. term of court. Although no goods were found in their possession the evidence was sufficient to commit them.**

*Saline County Journal, July 10, 1879*

In October of 1877, James was appointed to serve on the committee for the Republican convention. August of 1878 found James elected as a delegate to the state Republican convention. In 1880, James was a census enumerator for Spring Creek Township. These initial forays into local politics provided James with the insight and connections to expand his opportunities and influence.

## 1880-1890: Expanding Influence and National Engagement

By 1880, James was firmly engaged in political activity, and maintained his position as the City Marshal in Brookville. While there were many serious issues, it seems that James had some time for humor, as was related by the *Salina Herald* in November: *"Gather'um In. This is a Latin phrase, and refers to two well-known young men of this city. It will be explained by the following telegraphic correspondence:*

**Salina. Nov. 19 - J. M. Coombs, Brookville.**

*Look out for two conspicuous tramps from the West, known as Robb and Hyde.*

Crowley.

**Brookville. Nov. 19 - J. W. Crowley, Salina.**

*Do you want them arrested, and on what charges?*

J. M. Coombs.

**Salina. Nov. 19 - J. M. Coombs, Brookville.**

*Yes; for Robb-ing and Hyde-ing through Kansas and Colorado.*

Crowley.

*The two gentlemen referred to have been making an overland tour of the two states, and are on their way home. Mr. Hyde, we are pleased to state, is improved in health."*

The levity from the previous year gave way to a tumultuous 1881. James Abram Garfield was elected as a Republican President but succumbed to his injuries from an assassin on September 18th. James helped organize a memorial to the slain President.

However, as a delegate to the state Republican convention, it is likely that James voted for Garfield's rival, James Blaine. There are two reasons for this assumption. The first is that James Coombs was a "stalwart" – a beneficiary of being connected in what was known as the Spoils System. This system allowed elected officials to appoint subordinates to various civil service positions based on political and financial connections, instead of through the standardized merit system common today. Garfield was a "half breed," which described people who wanted to remove the favoritism from



civil service appointments.

The second (and main) reason is due to the fact that James was later a member of the "Anti Civil Service League" – an organization formed to preserve the Spoils System.

Following Garfield's death and the installment of Chester Arthur as President, James' opportunities increased. Arthur was a Stalwart, and appointed Henry M. Teller as his Secretary of the Interior in 1882. Teller served as a Major General in the Colorado militia from 1864-1867. Following that, he was a Colorado Senator from 1876 until his Interior appointment in 1882.

The militia service coincides with James' travels and possible enlistment there. Both of James' sons were born in Colorado just prior to 1864 (Charles in 1861 and Elbert in 1863).

Another attribute shared between Teller and James was their belief that native Americans were not being treated fairly by the federal government. While they did not refute all ideas of Manifest Destiny, they believed that allocating land and forced movement to reservations was wrong. These were not wildly popular opinions in the Old West, but for those early settlers who lived alongside native Americans, it was not unheard of.

With all these things in mind, James decided to test the waters for an appointment:

*"Mr. J. M. Coombs, left for Ft Worth Texas, a few days ago. When he left here he was not sure whether he would accept a position on the Texas Pacific, or would go east from Ft Worth. We hope that Jim will strike something fat."*

*The Brookville Transcript, Feb, 23, 1882*

A month later, the question was answered:

*"We understand that J.M. Coombs has got an appointment as chief of the Metropolitan force in Washington. This is a good selection."*

*The Brookville Transcript, Mar. 23 1882*

The newspaper article refers to the "Metropolitan Force." Research has found that this was not a municipal police force, but a forerunner of the National Park Police, which was under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. The personnel of this group were called "watchmen."

In September of 1882, James and Deborah moved to Washington D.C.

During his tenure with the park police, he was also involved in helping farmers with agricultural reports and distributing valuable resources such as seeds and census records back to the residents in Saline County. This indicates that the appointment

involved duties not related to law enforcement. It is unclear how the additional roles came to be, but an item in the Brookville transcript from April of 1883 does not mention anything about law enforcement:

*"Interesting to Those who are Interested  
in Agricultural Interests.*

*EDITOR TRANSCRIPT: I am authorized by the proper authority to say to the farmers of Saline County that I will furnish them the agricultural and other reports, upon receipt of postal card requesting the same, and giving their address in full. These reports are for the benefit of all farmers, and will be sent to all, regardless of politics, nationality, or previous conditions of servitude. Address,*

*J. M. Coombs.*

*Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.  
Salina papers please copy."*

The people living in Salina were apparently happy with seeds sent to them from James as well:

*"Last Spring our old friend and neighbor James Coombs, now residing at the National Capitol, kindly remembered many of his numerous Kansas friends by sending them seeds procured from the Department of Agriculture. The season has been a surprise in the way of successful planting. Everything put in the soil has prospered. There may possibly be larger or better product. Kansas vegetables and Kansas grain can give the human race new ideas in regards to the possibilities in seeds. In gardening as in everything else, you may manage to succeed alone, but with Jim Coombs' help surprising success is easy enough.*

*The TRANSCRIPT voices the sentiment of the town and Township and county when it wishes our former townsman long life and the prosperity he deserves."* *The Brookville Transcript, 18 July 1884*

The next year, James is praised for his contributions by representatives of all parties in Brookville:

*"We, the undersigned citizens of Brookville and vicinity wish to publicly thank Mr. J. M. Coombs for the disinterested kindness in distributing seeds, grape cuttings and public documents, regardless of politics, since his residence in Washington, thereby doing a public good for this vicinity.*


*Richard King } Independent*

*C. Garloch, James Wallace, Joe Dinkler, } Democrats*

*Andrew Weiser, Chas. Dent } Republicans*

*The Brookville Transcript, 10 Apr 1885*

James and Deborah returned to Brookville for a brief time between 1887 and 1888 before returning to

*Continued next page* 

## **- Jas. Coombs was visiting Senator Ingall's at Atchison, last week.**

*The Brookville Transcript, Nov. 23 10, 1888*

Washington D.C.

In 1891, James' daughter Clara remarried to Mahlon Niles Towns after a separation from George Crawshaw. Mahlon was from Ravenna, Ohio and worked as a railroad station manager, reporting to Edwin Clark Blanchard out of Minneapolis towards the end of his career.

### **1892-1903: Later Years and Legacy**

An item in *The Democratic Press* from Ravenna in June of 1892 provides a view into the changes that occurred for James:

*"J.M. Coombs, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, took the P. & W. last week for his return trip to Washington, D.C., terminating a two week visit with his daughter, Mrs. M.N. Towns, of Charlestown. His wife, who accompanied him to Ohio, will remain in Charlestown this summer. Mr. Coombs has been in Washington for the past ten years, and while the beauties of the Capital are to him, as to every resident of that city, beyond comparison with other places, he nevertheless said that Ravenna possesses the highest attractions for him as a residence town, and so delighted was he with the place that he proposes erecting a handsome residence here. We hope he will do so."*

James having the title of Assistant Secretary of the Interior is something I had never run across in my research or considered. However, that title was short lived, as a new administration took office and was prepared to "clean house."

### **"INTERIOR WATCHMEN.**

***It is Rumored That Sweeping Dismissals Will Soon Take Place.***

*There was a tremor running through the ranks of the Interior Department watchmen today. They feel that their official lives are drawing to a close. They feel that a Democletian razor is hovering above their top knots, and that the hair is about to break. They are nervously anxious. They believe that they are soon to be retired from the service of their country. They seem to have received news ex cathedra that they are to go. Several of them told the reporter for The Star today that they were goners; that the appointment clerk had said so by implication many times before, and that they had understood that he had said so specifically today. There is a general air of crepe and mourning upon the countenances of these gentlemen. In fact, there are not many of the republican watchmen who have not already*

*gone. Of the thirty-eight borne on the rolls of the department when Secretary Hoke Smith took hold only seventeen remain to tell the tale of the awful slaughter of their comrades. Twenty-one have been resigned and have journeyed to where the woodbine twineth. The death list is as follows: Samuel Jones, Maryland; Robert White, Virginia; Stewart M. Lewis, Virginia; LeGrande M. Faire, South Carolina; William Gassaway, Ohio; George W. Fairbrother, District of Columbia; David C. Heoges, Pennsylvania; David L. Thomas, Ohio; James M. Coombs, Kansas; John A. Daley, Pennsylvania; John S. McIntosh, New York; James Graham, Pennsylvania; Richard Kirtchmeyer, Ohio; Julius M. Chase, New York; Gilbert R. York, New York; Philander McMullin, Iowa; James Reed, Pennsylvania; --. Willington, Ohio; William Branninger, District of Columbia; Peter S. Blake, Delaware, and J.C. McConahay, Kansas.*

*All of these vacancies have been filled, so it is said on competent authority, with democrats. Of the four packers, two have shuffled off the harness. They are John T. Jackson and Charles T. Bonn. There have been some casualties in the messenger force, but the exact number is not known. The bouncements which have occurred in this branch of the service, so far as known, are Charles S. Wicklin, Iowa; Homer H. Winchell, Missouri; Felix Muldoon, District of Columbia; Hersey K. Freeman, Alabama, and Eugene S. Thomas, Indiana. The Star reporter has not been able to officially verify this prophecy of impending doom. So far as he has been able to learn there exists no immediate reason for this earthquake which is shivering in the watchmen's joints. On all sides, though, it is thought that they will have to go. Of the two lieutenants of the watch, one, Lieut. James E. Richmond, has severed his connection with the department. It is believed that Capt. Hill is all right by reason of his clerkship in the department, and that is soon as fired he will slide into the other place. The captain of the watch is salaried at \$1000, the lieutenants \$840, and the privates \$720. The position is not one which implies much perspiration, but it is by no means a sinecure."*

*Washington Evening Star, 28 Aug 1893*

Despite this uncertainty, James remained active in various organizations, including serving as the sergeant-at-arms of the Anti-Civil Service League in 1897. He also managed to work as a War Department Messenger in 1902, at the age of 77.

As he continued to remain active, James and Deborah moved to Duluth, Minnesota to live with their daughter Della and her husband Edwin Clark Blanchard...

*"Yesterday forenoon he busied himself at sweeping snow off the sidewalk in front of the*



*Blanchard residence, and at about 11 o'clock walked into the house. He remarked to his daughter that he felt a pain in his left side, over his heart. Mrs. Blanchard reproved him for exerting himself and started to get him some refreshments. Captain Coombs went into the library, a favorite nook for him, for he was a great reader, and picking up a newspaper, sat down in a chair. He soon started up and walked into the sitting room. Suddenly he sat down in a chair there and his limbs straightened out as if he were in great pain. Mrs. Blanchard secured assistance and carried the unconscious body to a bed. Another member of the household telephoned for Dr. Magie. The physician soon arrived, but the patient was dead. He was supposed to died almost immediately after leaving the library. During the early part of the forenoon Captain Coombs was in good spirits and apparently excellent health for one of his advanced age."*

Sunday News Tribune, Duluth, MN – 29 Nov 1903

James was 79 years old at the time of his passing. Deborah was 80 and was bedridden at the time. She lived until 1913 and had moved in with my great-great grandmother in Minneapolis at the time of her death there on the 29th of November.

James was interred initially in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Duluth, then his remains were sent to Ravenna, Ohio for final burial:

*"Death of Civil War Veteran. The remains of Captain James Coombs arrived in Ravenna this morning from Minneapolis, Minn., where he died last winter. The deceased was a Civil War veteran and formerly lived in Charlestown, where he will be buried by the side of his son, Charles Coombs. He was the father-in-law of Mahlon Towns, a brother of W.F. Towns of this city."*

The Ravenna Republican, 19 May 1904

The article incorrectly states the place of death, but James' death certificate confirms Duluth and the move to Ohio. Deborah was buried in Minneapolis. Of the family, only Elbert was buried in Kansas in the Brookville cemetery.

Throughout his life, James served both his community and country, and worked to improve the lives of his family and his neighbors. To live a life as full and busy as James did in modern times would be nearly impossible. He was just one of many pioneers who had the courage to seek out opportunity in a country that was not yet complete. Living on the fringe of society - taking risks so that others could experience the wonders and opportunities he did. James and Deborah were true pioneers. They helped

shape the state we know today as Kansas. They helped lay the ruts in the ground in the early days of the Smoky Hill Trail and witnessed the laying of the steel ribbons that declared an end to the old ways. Most importantly, they left their own trails, both private and public, for others to follow and learn from. I am honored to share their story with all of you, and I hope to see you along the trail!

### Brian Smith



### Aged Couple Separated.

After having been married fifty years death yesterday separated Captain and Mrs. J. M. Coombs, parents of Mrs. E. C. Blanchard. The husband received a sudden summons, at the age of 79 years. His wife, who is 80 years old, is very feeble and sick in bed at her daughter's home.

She takes the death of her husband very philosophically, as she had evidently long been prepared for the inevitable separation.

Captain Coombs joined the famous gold rush to California in 1849, going in a sailing ship around Cape Horn. For many years he was connected with either the departments of the interior, agriculture or war of the United States. He was one of the pioneer residents of Kansas and also of Colorado, and was with General James Lane in the Civil War.

Minneapolis Daily Times, Nov. 29, 1903



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## NEW MEMBERS

*Welcome to the Trail.*

**Brian & Kathy Adams**  
Caulfield, MO

**Tom French**  
Pomona, MO

**Beverly Boyles**  
West Plains, MO

**Terry Clark**  
Omaha, NE

**Dennis & Phyllis Crider**  
West Plains, MO

**Adriane Falco**  
Stilwell, KS

**Rick & Linda Hamby**  
Caulfield, MO

**Charles Weickert**  
Marysville, KS

**Rod Hamby**  
Caulfield, MO

**Henry Smith**  
Raman, CO

**Bill Hobbs**  
Springfield, MO

**Kathleen Morrissey**  
West Plains, MO



## Reminder . . .

*Make sure your membership is up-to-date!*

Questions, Ideas, Comments, Newsletter Articles  
Email To: [smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com](mailto:smokyhilltrailassn@gmail.com)

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*Happy Holidays*