

# Kansas Senator acted on conscience not pressure

By Ron Wilson

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"Profiles in Courage." That's the name of a best-selling book written by President John F. Kennedy in the 1950s. It chronicled eight U.S. Senators and their acts of principle and integrity in the face of public opposition. One of these men was a senator from Kansas. His former homesite can be found in rural Kansas along the Native Stone Scenic Byway.

In a previous Kansas Profile, we learned about the many attractions found along the Native Stone Scenic Byway which are now described on a new CD. The byway is a 48-mile highway route between Topeka

and Alma. It highlights this region where rich history, natural rock outcroppings and beautiful stone buildings can all be found. A little known part of this history is the now-abandoned homesite of Edmund G. Ross, Republican senator from Kansas.

The Rosses were active abolitionists from Wisconsin. Several Ross family members came to Kansas to help assure that it became a free state after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. When pro-slavery forces attacked and burned the free-state town of Lawrence, Edmund G. Ross decided to come too.

Edmund and his wife Fannie first settled in Topeka and went into the newspaper business before joining the rest of the Ross family in Wabaunsee County. While there,

he was elected a delegate to the free-state constitutional convention at Wyandotte, under which Kansas was admitted to the Union as a free state. During this time, Ross lived in a now-abandoned home which is located approximately 2 miles south of Kansas Highway 4 and about a quarter-mile southeast of the intersection of Echo Cliff Road and Goldfinch Road. It is west of the community of Dover, which has a population of perhaps 50 people. Now, that's rural.

After the drought of 1860, Edmund and Fannie moved back to Topeka and re-entered the newspaper business. When President Lincoln called for troops in 1862, Edmund responded and was made a captain under Colonel Samuel Crawford's Kansas Regiment. He fought in

the "Battle of the Blue" which was called the "Gettysburg of the West" and had two horses shot out from under him.

After the war, Colonel Crawford was elected Governor of Kansas. When it became necessary to appoint a replacement to the U.S. Senate, Crawford remembered Edmund's bravery and leadership skills and appointed him to fill the vacancy.

When Ross got to the Senate, one of the key issues before Congress was how to govern the south in the post-Civil War era. The U.S. House of Representatives voted to impeach President Andrew Johnson because of his leniency toward the South. President Johnson's case went to trial before the U.S. Senate, including Ross.

Ross strongly opposed President Johnson's policies but in his heart, he did not believe that the President's actions constituted an impeachable offense. All Senators except Ross declared how they would vote. With all the other votes committed, the outcome of the trial and the entire fate of the Presidency came down to this one man: Edmund G. Ross. Despite tremendous pressure from the politicians and overwhelming public opinion, Ross voted not to impeach. For this act of conscience, John F. Kennedy included him in his book about Senatorial courage.

After his vote he was vilified by the public. But history vindicated Edmund Ross. Kennedy's book quotes from a Kansas newspaper published decades later: "By the firmness and courage of Senator

Ross the country was saved from calamity greater than war, while it confined him to a political martyrdom... He acted for his conscience and with a lofty patriotism, regardless of what he knew must be ruinous consequences to himself. He acted right."

"Profiles in Courage." That's a best-selling book with a connection to rural Kansas, and more importantly to a Kansas Senator who acted on his principles and what he believed to be right, even in the face of opposition. Edmund G. Ross' self-sacrifice and integrity made a difference in the future of the nation.

We appreciate the Native Stone Scenic Byway including this history. For more information, go to www.wabaunsee.com.

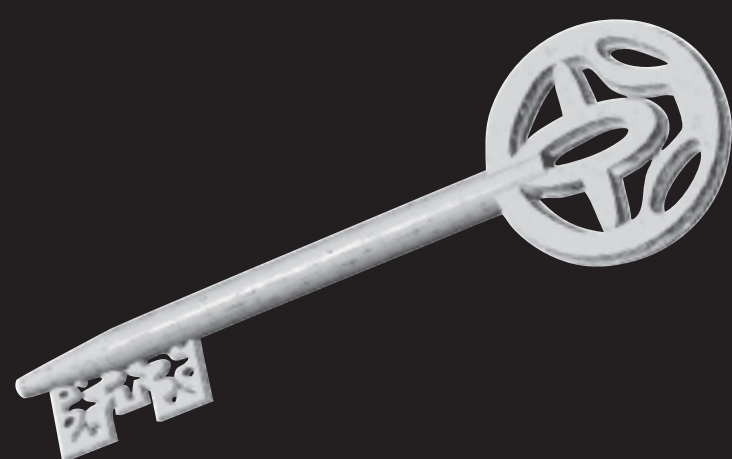
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