

PRENTIS

(engaged in looking around, not noticing her departure)

Let's see. Three churches...(he walks off looking for different building, then at rear of theater, says this:)

I went back to Atchison, reported what I's seen. The paper, the Weekly Champion, carried this opinion about Nicodemus two years later: Someday, Nicodemus may be no more than a name, "the waning and fading designation of a spot where men once lived; but to those who know the truth of history, the name will always recall the bravest attempt ever made by people of any color to establish homes in the high plains of western Kansas." (he exits)

WOMAN

(now appears again in modern dress)

I hear it was right after that gentleman's visit to Nicodemus that my great great-grandmother and the townspeople began formally celebrating the day of our founding, September 17. Been doing it ever since. And there's also Emancipation Day, August 1st. Mr. Prentis should have stayed around another month, and he'd have seen a big celebration.

By the middle of the 1880's Nicodemus had a baseball team, a literary society, and a benefit society. Way that worked is if someone got himself into a sorrowful situation, the benefit society helped him get through it. That's the kind of community Nicodemus always has been and still is. We had druggists, a lawyer, even a harness and boot repair shop here at one time. Biggest school in the county for awhile. First band opened in 1887, run by a white man. Never any drinking establishments in this town in the early days. Things got crowded enough toward the end of the 1880's that, in one week, there were 222 new people in town, and not enough beds for them.

There was in anticipation of the railroad coming. Nicodemus was supposed to get both the Missouri Pacific and the Union Pacific. Union Pacific even laid tracks here in 1887. But finally they decided on staying south of the river, and Hill City got the train service instead of us.

Look up the road to Smith County, or east to Stockton. You'll see the same kind of this happening. Northwest Kansas is losing its population. All kinds of reasons. Same as anywhere else, the young folks are leaving the country and moving to the cities. See a lot of them back here for Emancipation Day every year, though. We call it Homecoming,. Usually there's hundreds of them. And in all my years here--that's 90 of them--I've never been hungry a day. You know, years ago they called us "The Largest Colored Colony." Today they call us a national treasure. I just call us "home."

(She begins singing some from opening of play as Lights fade gradually to black.)