

# Theodore S. Case

Soldier, Scientist, Physician  
1832-1900

by Daniel Coleman

A homegrown Benjamin Franklin and frontier Renaissance man with multiple talents, Theodore Case was Kansas City's most versatile founder. Whether acting as a physician, who published Kansas City's first scientific journal to satisfy his literary interests, or a military supply expert using his organizational skills as city treasurer, Case's accomplishments as a soldier, scientist, author, and politician combined in novel ways to benefit Kansas City's early development.

Theodore Spencer Case was born January 26, 1832, in Jackson, Georgia, the oldest of four sons. His parents moved to Columbus, Ohio, shortly after his birth. Theodore received an excellent public school education in Columbus and found solace in his studies after the death of his mother, which occurred when he was 15. He completed his undergraduate studies at Marietta College in Ohio and earned a Master of Arts degree from the school in 1851.

Case began his career as a man of science and never abandoned that important component of his intellectual makeup. He taught mathematics for a time after graduating from Marietta, then studied medicine and received an M.D. from Starling Medical College in Columbus. He gained his first professional experience as a physician at the Ohio State Penitentiary. A few years later, during the spring of 1857, Case moved west to the Town of Kansas, a muddy village of some 2,000 inhabitants taking shape on the banks of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers.

A staunch Republican who cast one of the few Missouri votes for Abraham Lincoln in 1860, Case enlisted soon after the Civil War began in 1861. He joined Colonel Robert T. Van Horn's 13th Missouri Volunteers as a private, but was elected second lieutenant of his company within weeks. Case's major contribution to the Union war effort came in the role of quartermaster, providing troops with clothing, equipment, and food. He so excelled in this capacity that he received an appointment to the position of assistant quartermaster of the entire region. At the conclusion of the war



he was appointed quartermaster general of Missouri, reaching the rank of colonel before he concluded his duties in 1866.

Case's activities as a civic leader began in the days leading up to the war, when he was elected alderman in the 1860 election. He played an important role in Kansas City's Civil War destiny when, through personal persuasion and his writing in local newspapers, he influenced area Republicans to support the mayoral candidacy of an anti-secession Democrat Robert T. Van Horn in 1861. Case later served as an election judge, city treasurer, and postmaster of Kansas City, a position to which he was appointed by three consecutive U.S. presidents.

But it is for his literary accomplishments that Case is most revered today. He wrote for and edited two of western Missouri's earliest Republican newspapers, *Free State Republican* and the German-language *Post*, and during the Civil War he wrote and published the *Quartermaster's Guide*, a manual that received praise from the quartermaster general of the United States. Case, who taught chemistry in his later years at the Kansas City Medical College, established several early scientific journals, as well: the *Kansas City Medical and Surgical Review* and the *Kansas City Review of Science and Industry*. Crowning his voluminous output was the 726-page history of Kansas City he published in 1888, a magnum opus upon which historians today still rely.

Case married his first wife, Julia Lykins, the daughter of early Kansas City mayor Dr. Johnston Lykins, in 1858. In 1874, two years after Julia's death, Case married Fidelia O. Wright. Three children survived him when he died at age 78 on February 16, 1900.

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