

Robert T. Van Horn

Newspaperman and Civic Leader
1824-1916

by Barbara Magerl

In 1855, Robert T. Van Horn arrived in Kansas City with \$250 to buy a small weekly newspaper. The 30-year-old man from Pennsylvania and the young town were meant for each other.

His newspaper background, a little legal knowledge, and personal honesty made him popular in a town of about 500 residents. By 1857 he was named Post Master and by 1861 he was mayor—this despite the fact he was a Union supporter in a mostly Confederate area during border warfare times.

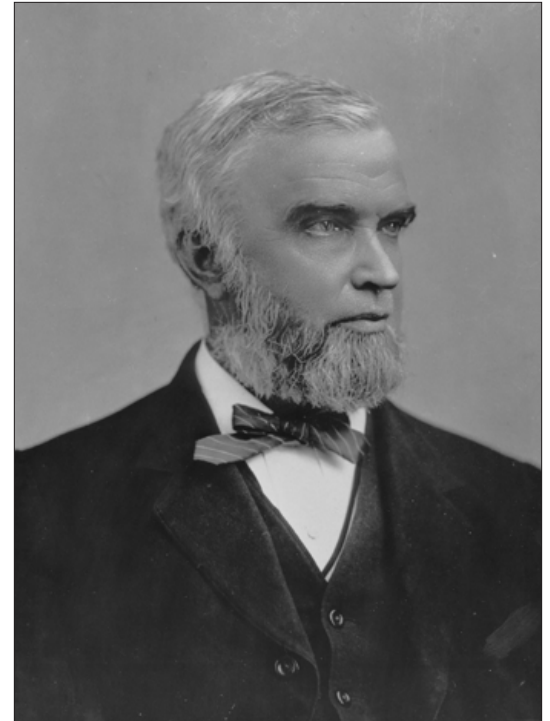
A descendant of New York Dutch patriots who fought in the American Revolution, Van Horn followed his family tradition. As 1,000 Confederate troops and supporters threatened Kansas City in 1861, he was appointed a U.S. Army Major. He organized a Home Guards unit to help troops from Ft. Leavenworth keep the city in Union hands. Later, as a Colonel, he fought in two major battles in Mississippi.

From 1864 to 1871, Van Horn served three consecutive terms in Congress. A member of the railroad committee, Van Horn supported a bill that gave the Hannibal Bridge to Kansas City, ensuring its future as a major railroad center. He returned to Congress in the 1880s and again in the 1890s.

Van Horn kept newspapering for 40 years as a writer, editor, or publisher. The paper he bought in the 1850s, the Kansas City Journal, became the first daily newspaper in Jackson County.

Van Horn's first house was located at 11th and Walnut streets, later the heart of downtown. In the 1890s, he and his wife built a gracious suburban home near the Independence interurban line. The nearby road was named Van Horn, but later became Truman Road. Van Horn High School, located on the family home site, bears his name.

Visionary, legislator, business booster, outstanding editor—he lived it all. Early residents considered Colonel Van Horn an intellectual



giant, a one-of-a-kind leader who helped turn Kansas City into a metropolis.

Sources

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