

William S. Gregory

First Mayor of Kansas City
1825-1877

by Susan Jezak Ford

William Gregory was elected Kansas City's first mayor when the town had only 63 voting citizens. Nine votes ensured his victory in 1853 over his opponent, Dr. Benoist Troost.

Our city was little more than a levy on the river when Gregory arrived here after the great flood of 1844. He came from his home state of Kentucky, where he was born and raised after being orphaned as an infant. As a 19-year-old newcomer to the area, Gregory and his wife, Elizabeth, purchased a farm in Jackson County two miles from town. He joined petitioners in 1850 to incorporate the Town of Kansas and began a mercantile business with his brother, James.

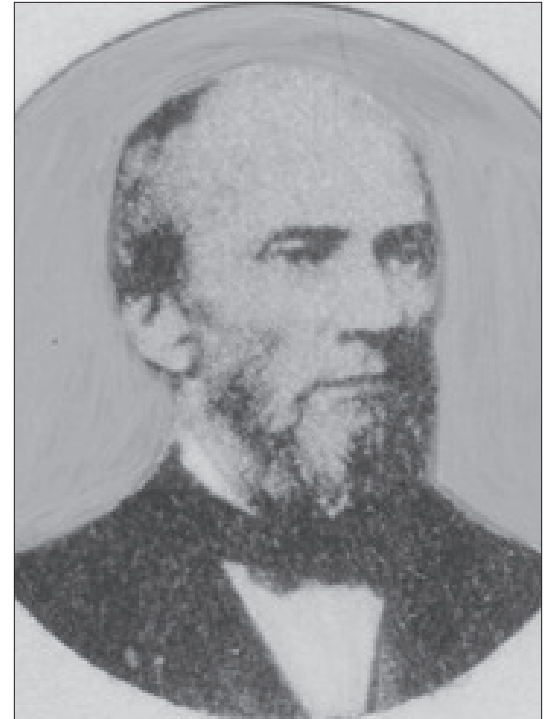
Gregory was elected mayor on April 18, 1853. During his ten-month tenure, he appointed a city treasurer, assessor, marshal, tax collector, and attorney. He helped write the city charter and signed Kansas City's first laws. It was soon discovered that the city charter required that the mayor be a resident of the incorporated area. Because his farm was well beyond the eastern city limit of Locust Street, Gregory resigned, and Dr. Johnston Lykins completed the term. Gregory continued to serve the city as an alderman.

Gregory's wife Elizabeth died in the 1849 cholera epidemic, and he married her sister, Mary, in 1852. As a southern sympathizer, he moved to St. Louis during the Civil War. He returned to Kansas City in 1867 as part of Gregory and Co., a very successful wholesale grocery business.

Kidney failure claimed Gregory on August 11, 1887, after a lengthy illness. In 1930, a city resident called attention to the fact that no street in Kansas City had been named for our first mayor. The Park Board adopted a resolution to rename 71st Street in honor of the man who could fairly be called the father of Kansas City.

Sources

Green, George Fuller. *A Condensed History of the Kansas City Area: Its Mayors and Some V.I.P.s.* Kansas City: The Lowell Press, 1968.



The Kansas City Times, 5 Dec. 1930.

Lee, Fred C. "Gone But Not Forgotten: William S. Gregory, an Old Resident of Kansas City Dies." *The Kansas City Genealogist* 34 (Winter 1994): 146-148.

The United States Biographical Dictionary. New York: Biographical Publishing Co., 1878.

© 1999