

Thomas J. Goforth

Westport Mayor
1805-1882

by Susan Jezak Ford

Old Westport was a bustling town, supplying settlers with provisions and a last glimpse of civilization before they headed west. Among the men who ran businesses and upheld the laws of the town was Thomas J. Goforth, a local character who earned the respect of his fellow citizens. Working as a sign painter, justice of the peace, and mayor of Westport, Goforth left his mark on Westport's early days.

Goforth came to Westport, possibly as early as 1850, with his wife and two daughters. By the mid-1850s, the lively town contained 13 stores, five wagon shops, three hotels, and one slaughterhouse, plus several schools and saloons. Westport outfitted freighters, families, soldiers, and gold-seekers heading west and provided a stopping place for Mexican citizens heading east. Goforth began serving as a frequent Justice of the Peace in 1854 and continued until 1882. He was elected as the first mayor of the town in 1857, a position that was reelected every year. Goforth held the office six times between 1857 and 1879.

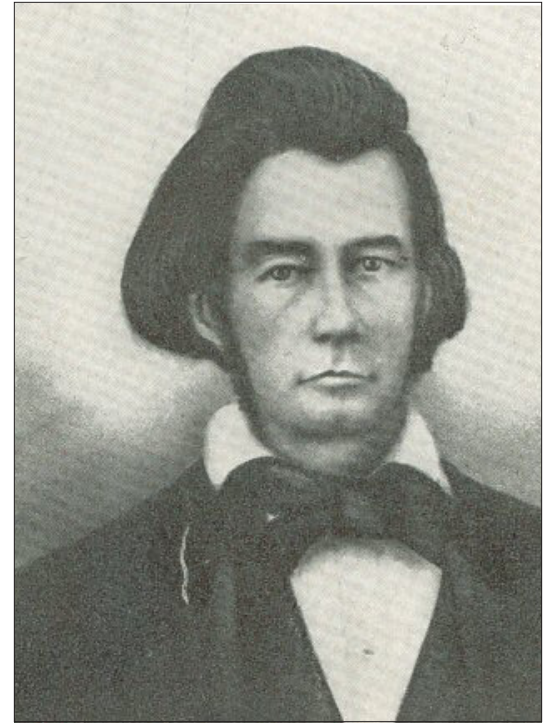
Local legends describe Goforth as a tall man who strolled around Westport Square carrying a cane and wearing a top hat. He held a variety of occupations, but is listed most frequently in city directories as a sign painter and lawyer. He lived with his family in a small house at 4050 Pennsylvania, located on the site of today's Manor Square.

Westport was annexed by Kansas City in 1897, 15 years after Goforth's death. As a well-known and supportive local citizen, Thomas J. Goforth had played an important role in the development and success of the frontier town.

Sources

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