

EMBATTLED LAWRENCE

Conflict & Community

Edited by Dennis Domer & Barbara Watkins



EMBATTLED LAWRENCE KANSAS

EDITED BY DENNIS DOMER



CONFLICT & COMMUNITY

WATKINS MUSEUM OF HISTORY

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land jutted outward creating a natural path for the constructed flume opening that would carry the water beneath the mill building.

The mill building was designed to serve as the region's first central-station power distributor, which would transfer the Kaw's motive force to other businesses. Contracts were in place for the twenty-five hundred horsepower that the mill's spinning wheels would generate, and above-ground cables had been strung throughout a few blocks of the town to transfer the wheel's spinning motion to each site.²⁰ These spinning cables remained taut by periodically passing through pulley stations. Pulleys then transferred the motion to another cable until the motive force reached the contracted user. Through this network, Lawrence had arrived at its vision of progress. A local newspaper described the day:

**LAWRENCE A MANUFACTURING CITY:
The Dam Completed**

On Tuesday Morning at half past eight Mr. Zimmerman hoisted the last stone to place on the dam coping and the structure was practically complete. . . . Lawrence may now plume itself on being a manufacturing city indeed. It cannot be long until capital will be determined hither . . . and we look to see mill after mill erected until every foot pound of power is utilized.²¹

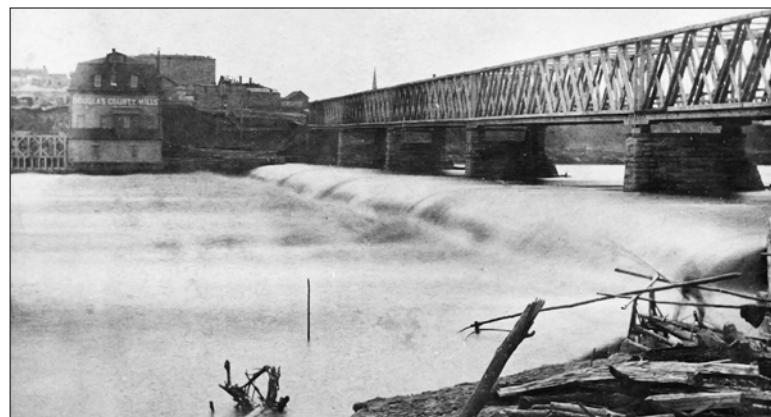
Despite the existing contracts for its power, the dam proved to be only a shadow of what Lawrence citizens had hoped. It washed out in the spring, and in April 1876 an entire section of the dam was permanently destroyed. The structure could not be fully repaired until its ownership changed. In 1878 the Lawrence Land and Water Power Company went into receivership, and through inheritance and foreclosure, J. D. Bowersock became its sole owner. The job ahead of him would be to shore up both the structure of the dam and the townspeople's confidence in it.

Photographs taken in 1880, just after Bowersock's improvements had been completed, provide the earliest visual record of the mill and dam. In these photos the dam appears as a barrage, or an elevation in the river, that creates a waterfall during high water levels, but it absolutely halts the river's flow during normal levels. To the south bank, a stone wall channels a portion of the river into a dam run, which has been carved into the existing land beneath the very square Douglas County Mill building, which housed all the dam works.

More details are revealed by an 1886 photo in which the water is seen streaming through a race below the building and pushing the wooden wheels beneath the mill. The foaming water then passes into an exposed area encased in local limestone at the rear of the dam. The iron works above the flume area control rear release gates. When the 1880 structure ran normally, the water exited from the flume and joined again with the flowing river. Gates in the opening of the original race are also present in the photo. It is unclear why the 1860 mill at this point would have had gates at each end; possibly the rear gates seen in the 1886 photo were original and the front gates were added later. If this were the case, the change was no doubt made due to a major design flaw: gates only in the rear would offer one explanation for the massive damage sustained by the structure in a series of floods.

No photos remain of the inside of the mill building, but the original wheels were most likely tub style and not vertical.²² The 1883 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* show six wheels in operation.²³ As these wheels were driven, gears transferred the water's force through a series of axles that brought the energy to the millstones on the main floor of the mill. Gears and leather belts transmitted this power to the millstone, often making the milling area a dangerous labyrinth of moving parts.

The simplicity of waterpower made it a potential resource for many communities. Waterpower, writes historian Louis Hunter, "represented mechanical power in its most 'democratic,' that is to say, egalitarian, form."²⁴ However, the 1880 U.S. Census listed Minnesota and Kansas as the only two states west of the Mississippi using waterpower: Minnesota used two sites, but Kansas had developed only one. If the use of waterpower indeed earmarked a progressive community, Lawrence residents were obviously justified in their self-promotion. But the 1880



The dam appears as a barrage that creates a waterfall during high water levels, but it halts the river's flow during normal levels, ca. 1880. Courtesy of Douglas County Historical Society, Watkins Museum of History.

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In this 1886 photo, the Kaw River exits the power station housed beneath the Douglas County Mill. Courtesy of Douglas County Historical Society, Watkins Museum of History.



22. No major structural changes were made to the mill between 1880 and 1886. The 1886 Sanborn map lists six turbines in use. Judging by the structure of the building six full-size, vertical waterwheels would have been impossible. It is likely that six tub wheels were available in the Douglas County Mill in 1880.