



Lesson Plan The Race West

“Lexington is one of the towns from which outfits are made in merchandise, mules, oxen and wagons for the Santa Fe or New Mexican trade. The fur traders who pass to the mountains by land make this town a place of rendezvous, and frequently are going out and coming in their wagons and packed mules, at the same period of going and coming that is chosen by the Mexican traders...” Alphonso Wetmore, *Gazetteer of the State of Missouri*, 1837.

By the late 1830s, warehouses lined the Lexington riverfront. Steamboats brought manufactured goods up river, and carried down river agricultural products like hemp and tobacco. The community benefited from the success of hemp cultivation. Hemp (chopping and cleaning houses), and manufacturing houses exported large quantities of their products.

As many Americans moved west, those from the southern states settled areas along the Missouri River. Oliver Anderson capitalized on the opportunities found in hemp production, and in 1852 sent the largest shipment of bale rope recorded to St. Louis.

Slavery provided cheap labor needed in Lafayette County’s agriculturally based economy. Hemp cultivation and processing required much hand labor. On the eve of the Civil War, this county had one of the largest slave populations in the state.

The lesson about the Race West is based on written histories, newspaper articles and ads. Materials for students include maps, microfilmed newspaper articles and ads. The lesson could be used in teaching units on spatial relationships and community structure, settlement and change. It could also strengthen skills of observation, analysis and problem solving.

Objectives for Students

- To analyze the settlement patterns of early Lexington settlers.
- To explain why Lexington grew into the fifth largest town in Missouri in the 1850s.
- To show an understanding of the dependence of hemp cultivation on slavery.
- To explain the effects of the Civil War on Lexington.

Setting the Stage

Explain to the students that the Missouri River region from the Boonslick to Weston were settled by those from southern states such as Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee. Settlers were attracted to the area because of the rich river bottom land, ability to export their product by river, and because Missouri was a slave state. A personal history of Oliver Anderson reflects this trend. In 1848, he moved to Lexington from Kentucky. Experienced in hemp production, he and his son-in-law invested in a hemp warehouse, ropewalk and forwarding and commission house. With his business doing well, he began building his home in 1851.

As demand for goods and services increased, local businessmen moved to fill these needs. Retailers, manufactures and professionals competed with one another for local patrons. As a local newspaper reporter stated, “The prospects of improvement are good. There seems to be great certainty that many are going to California, but enough will be left to carry forward the building up of our young city. The farmer will receive liberal prices for his produce and thus the town will be benefited. We know of several private residences now in contemplation, and there is a strong probability that a new and large hotel will be built, a city council room, and fire engine house, a Catholic Church, and the wings of the Masonic College.” *Lexington Weekly Express*, Jan. 9, 1848.

Review with the students the importance of the Missouri River as a transporter of goods. A quote from Edgar Holt cautions that, “An absence of monotony was characteristic of the Missouri steamboating. Aside from constant expectations of being snagged, there was always the possibility of a boiler explosion,” *Missouri River Transportation in the Expansion of the West*. This was symbolized in Lexington by the Saluda steamboat explosion in 1852.

Explain to the students the need for free labor for the harvesting and manufacturing of hemp products. Hemp producers owned or hired slaves to cut the hemp plant in early fall. After being allowed to dry, the hemp was gathered in shocks and left until mid-fall. At that time, the stalks were spread out over the field and left to rot in the dew, rain and snow. In mid-winter, the stalks were gathered up and run through a hand brake which broke the bark on the stalk from the fibers underneath. The fibers were then folded in half and twisted into hands, or a unit of length equal to four inches. These were often pressed into bales and sold by the ton or made into rope at ropewalks. It is interesting to note that Lafayette County sent some of the largest shipments of hemp to St. Louis in the 1850s, and it also had one of the largest slave populations in the state.

Review with the students the effect of the Civil War on the town of Lexington as well as its inhabitants. A good example is Oliver Anderson, who was forced to sell his home, property and belongings in 1859. The instability of the hemp market had forced him into bankruptcy. Involvement in pro-Southern organizations led to his arrest and banishment from the state by Union occupying forces in 1862.

Locating the Site

Provide the students with copies of maps #1 and #2 to complete the following exercises:

- A. Ask the students to locate the Missouri River by tracing it with a blue crayon on map #1.
 - Have them speculate on why the river was so important.
 - Ask the students to locate Lexington on the map by placing a red dot on it.

- B. Analyze the Birdseye View, map #2
 - Describe what you see. Does this look like a prosperous town?
 - List three to five things which might make Lexington prosperous.

Determining the Facts

- A. Provide the students with a copy of the county census.
- Compare where the people came from
- B. Provide the students with the newspaper quotation from Oliver Anderson, *Lexington Express*, June 1, 1854, (article #1) and *Lexington Express*, Sept. 20, 1854 (article #2).
- Discuss reasons Oliver Anderson may have moved to Lexington.
- C. Provide the students with the map of Missouri showing percentage of slaves per county (map #3).
- Ask the students what the statistics reflect about slaves in Missouri and particularly Lafayette County.
- A. Provide the students with the newspaper copy from the *American Citizen*, Feb., 27, 1856, (article #3) and the *Lexington Express*, May 31, 1854 (article #4).
- Ask the students how this article makes them feel. Why?

Putting it all Together

- A. Provide the students with Anderson's Public Sale Bill and newspaper article of the close of Anderson's sale from the *Lexington Express*, Nov. 26, 1859 (article #5).
- What do you think happened to Oliver Anderson?
- Explain that Anderson continued living in Lexington until his arrest by Union soldiers and banishment from the state in 1862.
- B. Provide the students with the newspaper article from the *Lexington Weekly Union*, Dec. 20, 1862 (article #6).
- Ask several students to read the article aloud.
 - How does this make you feel? Why?

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