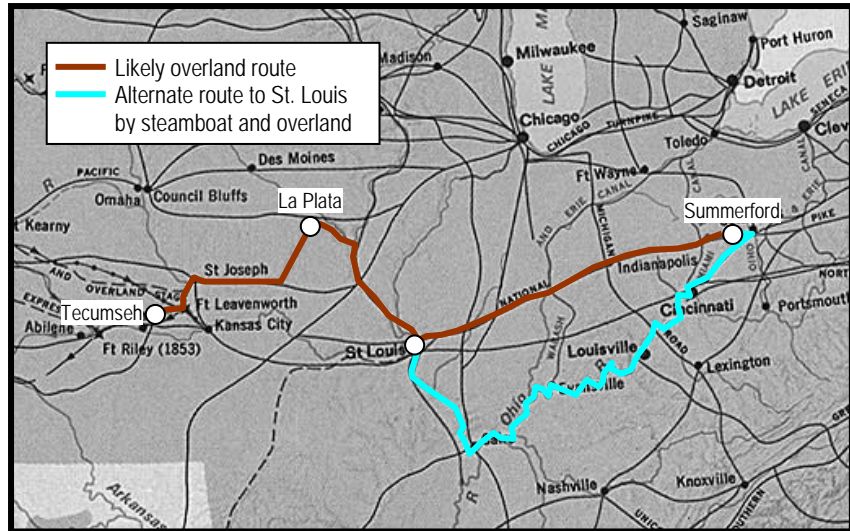


## ROMIGH FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO KANSAS (excerpted from *Chasing Clara*)

Remarkably, Lizzie Romigh Brandley's father, Daniel Romigh, was 69 years old—well past the average life expectancy for a man of his generation—when the family decided to embark upon a long and unpredictable relocation to Kansas in the spring of 1857.

Clara Brandley's family history records do not explain the move, but the Romighs left for Kansas at a tempestuous and formative juncture in territorial history. The passage of the controversial Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 spurred a significant wave of immigration. Some came for the prospect of inexpensive land and a fresh start. Entrepreneurs arrived with an eye toward starting a lucrative business or speculating in cheap land. Yet another segment came or was enticed to come for the specific purpose of influencing the vote on a state constitution, the outcome of which would determine whether Kansas prohibited or permitted slavery. Even those who came without a strong stance on either side of the issue sometimes found themselves caught in the crossfire of dissenting opinion, anger and violence. In short, the Romighs decided to come to Kansas territory at an uncertain time in the history of what later became known as the Free State.



### Speculation on the Journey to Kansas

The Romigh's eldest son, 25-year-old William Slaughter Romigh, came to Kansas in advance of the rest of the family as was typical at the time. The second traveling party probably consisted of Daniel, Eliza and five children—John (18), Rosa (17), Daniel (16), Lizzie (14) and Sarah (6).

Determining the exact route and modes of travel is virtually impossible. Clara offers scant and conflicting information in two different accounts. In one, a biography of her mother, she mentions that they traveled "by steamboat and prairie schooner." In the *Chase County Historical Sketches*, she quotes her mother as saying, "We made the trip in a covered wagon."

The latter seems more likely, since the Romighs lived near an east-west travel route known variously as the National Road, Cumberland Road or National Pike, a toll road commencing far to the east in Cumberland, Maryland and terminating in Illinois just east of St. Louis. Among the road's advantages were bridges and ferries across waterways and vital services like inns and blacksmiths at regular intervals. Today, U.S. Highway 40 and Interstate 70 parallel the National Road.

An alternate route by steamboat on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers would have been costly and time-consuming, although many Ohioans came to Kansas by that roundabout path. Many of them also continued west by steamboat on the Missouri River to Kansas City or Leavenworth.

Clara's records note that the Romighs stopped for several weeks in northern Missouri at La Plata, where they visited Eliza's sister Terencia and her husband, Thomas Clark. Ironically, this stop on their itinerary placed them within one-tenth of a degree of latitude from that of Summerford where they began the trip. Today, Interstates 70, 72 and 74 allow a much more direct route, but at the time, the available roads and trails capable of accommodating a team and a fully loaded 10-12 foot wagon set the limits of travel.

On a personal level, the Romighs faced another challenge in 1857. Either shortly before leaving, or along the way, Lizzie's younger sister Terencia died at the age of 13. The exact

date and cause of her death are unknown, but surely the Romighs carried a palpable burden of loss on their 850-mile trip to a new beginning in unknown country.

How might 14-year-old Lizzie have been affected by a journey of this magnitude? There is little doubt, judging by her later accomplishments, that the odyssey influenced her character and perspective in significant ways, cultivating a spirit of independence, physical courage and an equanimity that enabled her to handle crisis and bear burdens with grace.

Here is what Clara recorded about her mother's big adventure:

[Lizzie] often told, in later years, of their long trip across the State of Missouri where they were hampered by mud, hub deep, and often were unable to progress more than a few miles a day. She said that when they reached their destination at Tecumseh, Kansas, it was early in May, the grass was green and spring flowers blooming and they felt like they had reached Paradise. They stayed at Tecumseh one year, then moved to a claim near Cottonwood Falls, Kansas.

That we know anything at all about this trip—or much about the sequence of events in family history—is thanks to a witness who was not even born when the Romighs ventured from Ohio to Kansas. Clara must have heard these stories many times and in various versions over the years. The details burned themselves into her memory and imagination and became part of a bequest she set down in writing nearly seventy years after the wagon pulled into “Paradise.”

When the Romighs reach Chase County in 1858, Cottonwood Falls was only a small settlement of a few families. The Romighs staked a claim on the Cottonwood River a mile west of town. After only four years in Kansas and 1,200 miles of migration in his lifetime, Daniel Romigh died in 1862, leaving his three sons and three daughters to make their own way and their own mark on the impressionable new State of Kansas.