

## A LETTER TO ROCK COUNTY Part 2, from Eureka, Kansas

Researched by Bobbie Bradley  
Written by Jennifer Eager Ehle

Genealogists, like other professions, frequently seek assistance from their co-workers. Bobbie Bradley was able to provide a wealth of information on the Foster family of Somersetshire, England and Eureka, Kansas by using the following websites FamilySearch.org; Ancestry.com; Genealogy Bank.com; Newspaperarchive (through Badgerlink.com); Findagrave.com and USGENWEB.com.

The full name of our alleged author appears to have been Frederic Phocion Foster, born 04 July 1865 in North Curry, Somerset, England and died 25 January 1931 in Kansas City, Kansas.

The bulk of Bobbie's research focused on Fred's parents, who have been identified as Phocion and Mary A. Foster. They were the parents of five children: Phocion, Mary, Emily (Foster) McClelland, Frederic Phocion, and William Herbert Foster. The family left England, immigrated to the United States via the ship Atlanta, and arrived in New York on 22 June 1868. The reason for the family's immigration was probably influenced by Phocion's recent arrest, court appearance in an Ecclesiastical Court, a fine and incarceration for non-payment of church rates.

A newspaper article, dated 21 September 1867 from the Columbian Register (New Haven, CT.), stated: "Mr. Phocion Foster, a farmer, of North Curry, Somersetshire, England, was lately called upon to pay 15s., 7d., with three farthlags besides, for the repairs of a church which he never caters, and for the support of a mode of worship which in his heart he believes to be in some important features opposed to in the Scriptures. Mr. Foster refused to pay both, on conscientious and legal grounds, and he in consequence was subjected to process in the Ecclesiastical Court. The costs of the action amount to 147 fs, 1 1-2d., with 1 pound 15s. for a monition from the bishop; total 149 pounds 15s. and 8 1-4d.; and on account of these debts he is now in the county jail, his property is to be sold, and he is a heggared man."

Some background information: An Ecclesiastical Court had jurisdiction mainly in spiritual or religious matters. A monition can be imposed in person by a bishop or by an ecclesiastical court, which in Phocion's case was imposed by the Bishop. A beggared man is someone reduced to poverty.

In 1870, the Foster family was residing near Eagle, Waukesha County, Wisconsin. Phocion was practicing his former occupation as a farmer. The value of his real estate was \$4000.00 and his personal property was valued at \$1000.00. In 1871 and 1873, he was listed as having delinquent taxes.

On 4 November 1871, Phocion M. Foster completed in Waukesha County, Circuit Court a Declaration of Intention to become a citizen of the United States. Mr. Foster declared that as an alien and being a free white person, he was born in England on or about the year eighteen hundred twenty-six during which he immigrated to the United States and landed at the port of New York on or about the month of June A.D. 1868. It was his intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to renounce forever all fealty, allegiance and fidelity to any or every foreign Prince, Potentate, State or Sovereignty whatever, and particularly to Victoria Queen of Great Britain and Ireland.”

According to the 1880 U.S. Federal Census, Mary Ann was a widow, residing in Milton, Rock County, with two of her children. Her husband and son Fred were not identified. This is an error, as Phocion was not deceased. The couple may have been residing separately though.

Phocion Mitchell Foster died on 16 November 1886, just 16 days after his son Fred wrote the letter to his “friend.” Phocion was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Eureka, Kansas. His wife’s remains would be added in 1911. [There is a discrepancy regarding Phocion’s date of birth; the tombstone identifies the birth date as 12 March 1803, while the Declaration of Intention recorded the date as 1826].

Phocion’s widow, Mary A. Foster, resided in Eureka until her death and internment in 1911. The 1895 state census identified her as an inhabitant of Eureka, who was residing with her sons F. P. and W.H. Foster, all born in England. In 1900, she was residing alone in Eureka, since Fred had moved to Kansas City.

The original letter, printed in last week’s newspaper, presents a snapshot of life in Eureka in 1886 and of a family struggling to survive financially. The second article, part II, is an example of the vast amount of information that is available on the internet and the benefit of asking a friend for assistance.

The reason as to why F.P. Foster wrote this letter to his “friend” remains unclear, but it was most likely for financial reasons. There is no recognizable familial connection between the Eagers and the Fosters. It is possible that

Almeron Eager knew the Foster family in Waukesha and Milton, but there is no proof.