GEORGE TOBEY ANTHONY

Leavenworth (Republican), 8 January 1877–13 January 1879

Born 9 June 1824, Mayfield (Fulton County), New York; son of Benjamin Anthony, a farmer, and Anna Odell Anthony, 4 sisters and brothers; educated during winter months annually at county school, apprenticed in tin and coppersmithing; military experience in Civil War, captain (brevetted major) in Seventeenth New York Independent Battery; married Rosa A. Lyon, 1 son; religious preference Quaker but member of no church; a diabetic, died 5 August 1896, of pneumonia, in Topeka; buried in the Topeka Cemetery.

In 1876 George Tobey Anthony won nomination for governor from the Republican state convention, where he gained a majority vote on the seventh ballot in a highly competitive contest against six other candidates. He won election with 69,176 votes against John Martin, Democratic candidate, with 46,201. M. E. Hudson, Independent-Reform candidate, and J. Paulson, Temperance, received a total of 6,020 votes. Although Anthony’s visibility with the public was no doubt enhanced by his famous cousin—suffragette Susan B. Anthony, sister of Leavenworth publisher Daniel R. Anthony—the new governor was an able speaker and debater in his own right. He was the first Kansas governor to present his message to the state legislature orally; in addition, he addressed the legislature just before he retired as governor.
Shortly after the patent on the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, the first telephones were installed in Kansas. During his administration, problems associated with the Panic of 1873 still handicapped the economy. Anthony therefore supported only those programs that required little state funding—a state reformatory for younger criminals, a state commission of fisheries, and a stronger temperance movement. A major crisis for him was the railroad strike in 1877, as Kansans emulated workers in the East. Anthony sent state militia to Emporia to protect private property. When a soldier accidentally killed a Congregational minister, Anthony promptly recalled the militia; however, this debacle gave ammunition to his opponents. Anthony had the upper hand in the 1878 Republican state convention, but his votes peaked at 106 after seventeen ballots. Opposed by future governors John P. St. John and John A. Martin, each of whom had substantial support, Anthony broke the impasse by throwing his votes to St. John, thus giving him the nomination.

As a young man, Anthony had opened his own tinshop in Medina, New York, immediately after his apprenticeship in the trade. Later he had a commission business in New York City. From 1861 to 1864 he was loan commissioner for Orleans County, New York. He moved to Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1865 to become editor of the Daily Bulletin, owned by a cousin, Dan Anthony. A Republican, he was appointed assistant assessor of internal revenue in 1867 and collector of internal revenue in 1868. In 1867 he purchased the Kansas Farmer, using it to back diversified farming in Kansas during the six years of his ownership. He was president of the State Board of Agriculture (1873–76), which had been created in 1872. Anthony not only had an impact on its development but also was at the helm in the days when this agency both catered to the needs of Kansas farmers and served as the official immigration bureau for the state.

Similarly influential was Anthony’s presidency of the State Board of Centennial Managers (1874–76), an agency created to organize the participation of Kansas in the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. This board, motivated by a desire to change the Kansas image from a “bleeding,” starving, drouth-stricken, and grasshopper-infested state to a land of bountiful crops, had many ideas for a Kan-
sas exhibit. They convinced the state legislature to expend almost 4 percent of the annual state budget to erect the Kansas building at the Philadelphia fair and to display in elaborate fashion the abundance of Kansas agriculture.

Following his two years as governor, Anthony managed a Pottawatomie County farm and invested in railroads, including the Mexican Central for which he was general superintendent from 1881 to 1883. He spoke throughout Kansas on behalf of temperance when the constitutional amendment on prohibition came up in 1880. He was elected to the state house of representatives in 1885 from Leavenworth County. At that time he was president of the Wyandotte and Northwestern Railway Company. He was a member of the Board of Railroad Commissioners (1889–93), a delegate to the Trans-Mississippi Congress in New Orleans (1892), and the appointed state superintendent of insurance (1895). Throughout, his family home remained in Ottawa where he served a number of years as editor of the weekly and daily Republican. In 1892 the Republican State Convention nominated him for congressman-at-large, but he lost to William A. Harris, the Democratic-Populist candidate. Anthony, county seat of Harper County, was founded while he was governor and was named for him.