



# To The Stars: Over Rough Roads

*Donald F. Nelson*

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## **To The Stars: Over Rough Roads** Donald F. Nelson

Missionary, educator, entrepreneur, and restless progressive, Andrew Atchison led a peripatetic 19th century life committed to the welfare of others - recently freed slaves, Indians on reservations, immigrant Chinese building the Panama Canal - in locales ranging from Kansas to New Mexico, Texas to Missouri, Louisiana to Panama. Orphaned at twelve in Ohio, Atchison left a mark that stretched West - "To the Stars," as told by Don Nelson in this engaging account of the distinctively American life of his maternal grandfather. Using unpublished primary documents, Nelson explores an under appreciated theme of our history - the ethnic complexity of settling the American West following the Civil War. Committed throughout his life to helping the "poorest of the poor," Andrew Atchison - a devout Presbyterian who graduated from the young University of Kansas in a class of ten - embodied the finer impulses of that uneasy settlement. He founded the Freedmen's Academy of Kansas to educate freed slaves following the collapse of Reconstruction. He was principal of the Haskell Institute, a federal, multitribe Indian school in Lawrence, Kansas. He founded a college in El Paso, Texas, and was fired from a professorship at the Louisiana State Normal for tutoring black children in the evenings. In Panama while the Canal was being constructed, he established the Yook Choy School for immigrant Chinese men. Andrew Atchison led an uncommonly rich life. The conflicts Atchison encountered and the opportunities he created presaged the American experience of the 20th century. His life has as much resonance today as ever - evidence, as Faulker famously claimed that "the past is never dead. It's not even past."

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