

# **YESTERYEARS**

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**The Jefferson County  
Historical Society**

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**October 2021**

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The Jefferson County Historical Society and the Jefferson County Genealogical Society have merged. A Genealogy Committee now represents the interests of the former Genealogical Society.

*Yesteryears* is published online as a PDF document and made available on the Old Jefferson Town website. Newsletters & Yesteryears: <https://www.oldjeffersontown.com/newsletters>

For more information, or to volunteer, contact the Jefferson County Historical Society, P.O. Box 146, Oskaloosa, KS 66066, email, [oldjefftown@gmail.com](mailto:oldjefftown@gmail.com)

Individual articles from past issues of *Yesteryears* are posted online at [storiesofyesteryears.blogspot.com](https://storiesofyesteryears.blogspot.com)

Explore the new resources of the Old Jefferson Town website: <https://www.oldjeffersontown.com/>

**We are a work in progress! This is just a beginning!**

Our volunteers have been working diligently to provide you with access to Old Jefferson Town artifacts. You will want to check in with us frequently as we add more to our public access catalog.

As you browse, if you see something that you can give us more information about, please use the feedback link at the top of the page. We'd love to hear from you. If you see typing errors, please help us by letting us know. You won't hurt our feelings!

Photos and primary source materials also are available on the OJT website. Use the following link to see what we've been up to. Public Site link: <https://oldjeffersontown.catalogaccess.com/>



## In Memoriam: Robert Lee “Bob” Varner

February 21, 1930 - April 11, 2021

Robert Lee “Bob” Varner, 91, of Oskaloosa, died Sunday, April 11, 2021, at F.W. Huston Senior Living Center in Winchester. Bob was born February 21, 1930, at Topeka, the son of James Marten and Minnie Mae Klein Varner. He had lived in Oskaloosa since 1933 and was a 1948 graduate of Oskaloosa High School. He served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean war from June 25, 1951, to June 21, 1955. Bob was a lifelong farmer and stockman in the Oskaloosa area, never retiring. He was an active Life Member of Larner-Segraves American Legion Post #36 in Oskaloosa, serving as Secretary, Treasurer, Manager and Post Commander. Bob was proud of placing flags in Pleasant View Cemetery for Memorial Day for more than 40 years. He also served as a Pleasant View Cemetery Board Member for 40 years. He was a longtime member and supporter of the Oskaloosa Volunteer Fire Department and a volunteer for the Jefferson County Genealogical Society.

Survivors include many nieces and nephews and great nieces and great nephews. He was preceded in death by three brothers, John Varner Sr., George Varner and James “Jim” Varner.

Memorials are suggested to American Legion Post #36 or to Jefferson County Service Organization in care of the Barnett Family Funeral Home, P.O. Box 602, Oskaloosa, KS 66066. [www.barnettfamilyfh.com](http://www.barnettfamilyfh.com).

## Book Review: *Slavery on the Periphery:*

### *The Kansas-Missouri Border in the Antebellum and Civil War Eras*

By Kristen Epps, The University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, 2018, Paperback ISBN 978-0-8203-5478-1

During a summer internship at the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka, Kristen Epps began researching the presence of African Americans on the Kansas-Missouri border in the tumultuous days of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Inspired by the work of Abzug “Zu” Adams, who collected stories of enslaved people, Epps set out to chronicle “the rise and fall of slavery in this region from the earliest years of white settlement in the 1820s into the post-Civil War period.” Her goal was to place enslaved people at the center of this history: “Slavery as a labor system . . . was part of life in these frontier communities, and consequently, African Americans are a visible presence in this story.”

The book analyzes material from 19 counties on the border: Buchanan, Platte, Clay, Jackson, Cass, Bates, and Vernon in Missouri; and Doniphan, Atchison, Shawnee, Jefferson, Leavenworth, Wyandotte, Douglas, Johnson, Franklin, Miami, Linn, and Bourbon in Kansas. Many names of people and places will be familiar to those interested in local history.

Slavery in this area resembled the Upper South’s small-scale farming pattern more than the Deep South’s plantation system. Enslaved people in the west were more likely to perform a variety of tasks, to make unsupervised trips, to work independently or even to be hired out to other employers. “Abroad marriages,” where spouses lived in different households, were common. This contributed to a Black population familiar with the local terrain and able to use that knowledge to resist white control.

Throughout the book, Epps gives examples and stories of Black people and communities on the border. **Marcus** and **Charity Freeman**, brought to Jefferson County by the **Bayne** family, provide examples of hiring out and abroad marriage. Marcus was hired out as a printer’s assistant in Kansas City and as a cook in Lawrence. Charity married **Bob Skaggs**, who was enslaved by a neighbor of the Baynes family.

In 1858, **Jim Daniels** of Vernon County, Missouri, learned that he, his wife, **Narcisa**, and their children were to be sold. Daniels traveled across the border on a pretext to seek out the aid of **John Brown**. Epps tells the familiar story of the raid, which freed eleven people from bondage, from the point of view of Daniels. His knowledge of the territory and intelligent planning helped to make the raid a success.

Many of the stories in this book are not well known, and those that are familiar are viewed from different perspectives. Epps makes good her claim: “Bondspeople in this region were not an artificially constructed symbol, a tool of propaganda, created to rally antislavery proponents to the cause. These were real people, with real stories.”

# Ghost Towns of Jefferson County, Kansas

By Liam Bevitt

I have a deep love for history, and learning more about it. I grew up surrounded by history, my parents both being deeply involved in it. I suppose I became interested in it just by exposure to it. I always find time to try to learn more about history. I have been to many battlefields and museums in my life and have revisited some more than once. I have been involved in the Boy Scouts of America since I was in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. To achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, you have to earn 21 merit badges, including 13 required badges and complete a Project that benefits the community. Two years ago, it was time to start planning on what my Eagle project would be, and I chose to research the forgotten settlements in Jefferson County.

The goal was to research as many of the settlements as I could, create a map showing all of the places I focused on for my project and a temporary display to be put in the Old Jefferson Town museum. I also created a pamphlet with the stories of 20 of the towns, as well as a copy of the map showing the general location of them. Rising Sun was the town that originally piqued my interest. I discovered it while driving on Lecompton Road on the way into Douglas County. When I saw the name of the river access on the Kansas river was titled “Lecompton/Rising Sun” I grew curious and started to research why it was named that.

It turned out that **Rising Sun** was one of the first towns formed in Jefferson County. It was located on the north bank of the Kansas river, somewhere near where the river access is today. Some sources state that it was formed in 1856, however, most say it was created in 1857. It was laid out as a town by **Joseph Haddix**, who was a pro-slavery man from Missouri.

At the end of 1857, it had two steam sawmills, which sawed anywhere from three to four thousand feet of lumber a day, and two ferries, one that crossed the Kansas and one that went across the Delaware (or Grasshopper) river. A church was being constructed as well. By March, they had “A large and fine hotel in the process of construction.” It also had a population of nearly one hundred people. It was even said that the Union Pacific Railroad would run through the town, which would boost the population immensely. The town received its first post office in November of 1858. Sadly, the town wasn’t meant to be. In early 1861, Kansas became a free state. This made Lecompton (the pro-slavery capital), obsolete. During this time, **Joseph Haddix**, who created the town, fled back to Missouri. As the territorial capital shrank, Rising Sun went with it because of all the businesses leaving the area. In the mid 1860s, the Union Pacific missed the town by nearly two miles. By 1866, nearly ten years after it began, Rising Sun was torn down and moved to form the rail town of Medina.

Another one of my favorite forgotten towns was **Boyle**. There was nothing extremely special about it, but a couple of the store buildings have survived the trials of time and are still standing in fair condition today. Boyle (or Boyle Station) sits along what was the Leavenworth, Kansas and Western Railroad between the communities of Winchester and Valley Falls. The railroad was built through this area in 1871. Boyle Station was named for **John Boyle**, who gave this parcel of land to be used by the railroad. John was a farmer in Ohio until he and his family felt the call of the west and moved to northeast Kansas in the spring of 1860. He went to fight in the American Civil War by joining the Kansas State Militia in 1863.

This small town in the eastern portion of Jefferson Township had many different business establishments, including but not limited to a cheese factory, a store/post office, a mill, and a creamery. The railroad also had a stockyard at the station. The post office ran from October of 1872 until January of 1882 but was re-established in the spring of 1884 and was discontinued on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1945. The town’s decline was probably due to the discontinuation of the railway in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.



1867 Alexander Gardner view of the Lecompton ferry taken facing Rising Sun. Editor's note: Gardner worked for New York photographer Matthew Brady, photographing Civil War battles, including images of the dead of Antietam. In 1867, Gardner was appointed the official photographer of the Union Pacific Railroad, documenting the building of the railroad in Kansas.



This project has honed my skills as a researcher, and has given me great skills that I will definitely use in the future. I plan to continue my research on Jefferson County settlements, and try to learn as much as I can about them, maybe even compiling it all in a book. I also plan on researching dead towns from many other counties around the state and writing about them and telling their stories for the public to hear. Learning about history can help us to not repeat the same mistakes of our forefathers. It is my passion, and I have no plan on deserting it anytime soon.

*[Editor's note: **Liam Bevitt's** display, "Ghost Towns of Jefferson County, Kansas," was featured at the Old Jefferson Town Museum in May 2021. It included information, photos and maps illustrating the 20 towns Bevitt researched. The earliest towns, like Rising Sun, began as part of Kansas Territorial settlement. Other towns, including Boyle, sprang up later, with the arrival of the railroads. Following are excerpts from Bevitt's exhibition booklet.]*



1857 sectional map of Kansas Territory by Wiggin

**Buck Creek, Rural Twp., 1865-1952.** The community of Buck Creek sprang up as a station along the Kansas Pacific Railroad. By the fall of 1865, the Buck Creek bridge for the railroad was nearly completed. Stations for the Kansas Pacific, including one at Buck Creek, were planned in 1867 along the southern border of the county. The Buck Creek area has had strong community ties since its early days, including social groups like the Buck Creek Farmers Club of the 1870s. The Buck Creek school was built ca. 1878. Classes were held at the school until 1952. The school was turned into a community center when classes were discontinued and later to a meeting hall for the Valley Ridge Extension Homemakers Unit. The community also included a store, a railroad depot, and nearby sawmill.

**Centerville, Kentucky Twp., 1865-pre-1900.** With the insertion of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, a station called Centerville was placed halfway between Perry and Medina in the southwest part of the county and named for its proximity to the two towns. The station consisted of a two-story rock structure built by **John Collins** and called "Collins Hall." Collins Hall hosted a variety of businesses during its existence. After Centerville dissolved, Collins Hall was moved to Perry.

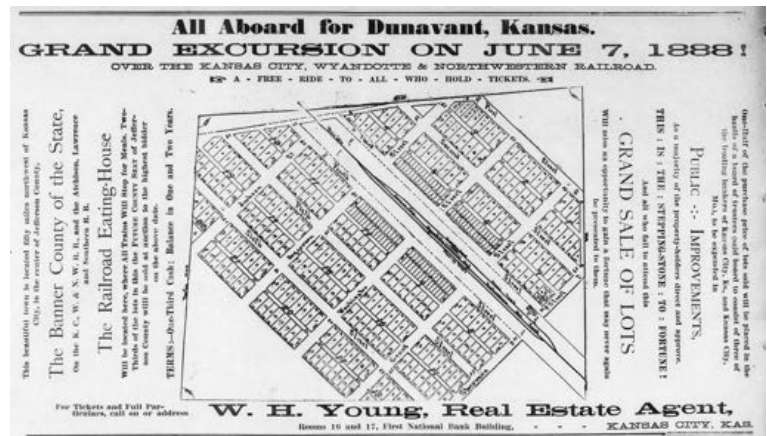
**Chester, Sarcxie Twp., 1874-1901.** The town of Chester was located on what was the Delaware Indian Reserve. Because of this location the land was disputed for many years. Eventually the government granted this land to the Kansas Pacific Railroad Company. **J.W. Byram** was the first to be able to buy land from the railroad company. Along with Byram came settlers, **Williams, Wellman, Cannovan** with others. The first school district in Sarcxie Township was Dist. No. 48.

**John Large** built a log house that was also used as a dwelling house; also the first Free Will Baptist Church met here. The post office for the town of Chester was established in the fall of 1870. **J.H. Roberts** was made postmaster. The Chester Cemetery is located at 1784 Republic Road, Williamstown, Jefferson County, Kansas, close to the Chester School.

**Cook's Ford (Fork), Rock Creek Twp., 1865-1872.** The Cook's Ford (or Fork) area was named for **Aaron Cook** who was one of the first settlers in 1855. The community was located along the overland stage route and at the Rock Creek crossing of the Mount Florence and Grasshopper Falls road. It was a "thickly settled neighborhood" boasting a post office, and multiple nearby churches. The post office would eventually move to Rock Creek.

**Dean, Rural Twp., 1892-1901.** Dean maintained a post office for nearly a decade and was associated with a school and church. At one time a blacksmith established his shop there. When free rural route delivery gained momentum in Kansas after the turn of the century, Dean lost its post office.

**Dunavant, Jefferson Twp., 1888-1932.** Dunavant was on the Kansas City, Wyandotte and Northwestern Railway, which ran from Kansas City, Missouri, to Beatrice, Nebraska. Some people thought the town should be named Hickory Point. However, **Colonel W.P. Dunavant**, president of the railway, said he would build a church there if it were named for him. Lots for the town were first sold at a “grand sale” June 7, 1888. It was advertised as the “future county seat” of Jefferson County. A train, full of prospective buyers, was brought to the site of the future town, leaving from the Kansas City area.



*From the Oskaloosa Independent, June 2, 1888*

Lunch was served and the lots were auctioned off. 105 lots were sold at the initial sale, averaging \$35.25 per lot. The Dunavant Northwestern Depot was built by 1887. A Methodist Episcopal Church was proposed in August 1889. It was dedicated February 2, 1890. In February 1893 the town included a post office, two general stores, a hardware store, lumber yard, blacksmith shop and a carpenter shop. Artist **John Steuart Curry** was born on a farm in Dunavant. He is best known for the murals he painted in the Kansas State Capitol Building, in Topeka. The Curry home was moved to Old Jefferson Town, Oskaloosa, and features Curry’s life and artwork. As the years went by the railway stopped its route and the businesses faded away. Now just a few of the homes and farms denote where the town of Dunavant was.

**Fairfield, Fairview Twp., Est. 1858.** In 1858 the Kansas legislature authorized a Jefferson County seat election and the community of Fairfield received 10 of those votes. Fairfield was located between Hickory Point and Osawkee on the military road. It had hopes for the railroad from Kansas City to come through, with a depot and post office to be built. The school district, Number 33, was organized in 1863. A 400-pound bell was placed on the schoolhouse in 1877. The school became a hub for all kinds of community gatherings. Spelling Schools, Singing Schools, concerts, Lyceums, a Literary Society, a “Temperance Union” and The Bachelors Club were some of the gatherings held at the school. The Rev. Pardee Butler preached at the schoolhouse in 1876. An article in the Valley Falls *New Era* newspaper, 1881: “Fairfield, as a city, was once full of hope and promise. But alas! a great, seething, foaming wave of enterprise and prosperity struck it, and — settled in Osawkee.” Thus the settlement of Fairfield went into memory.

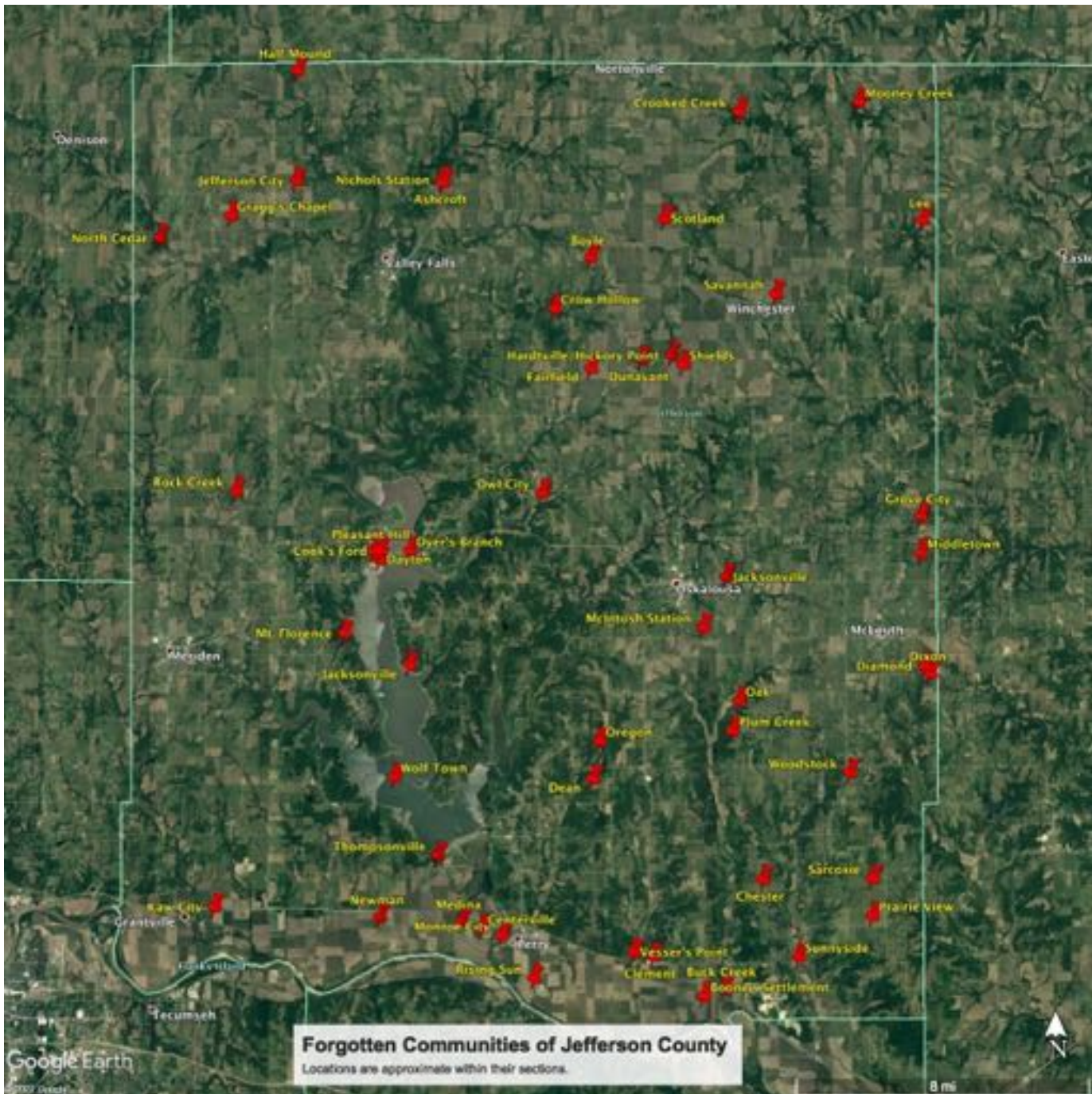
**Grove City, Union Twp., Est. 1857.** Grove City was a small settlement formed in 1857, located in the eastern part of Jefferson County. It had a post office; **Isaac H. Fowler** was an early postmaster. The Kansas Central Railroad was the closest shipping point, shipping wheat and pork. Grove City also contained a Baptist Church and a district school.

**Half Mound, Delaware Twp., 1898-1914.** Half Mound was first settled by German and German speaking Swiss immigrants who made their way south to this area coming from Illinois and Wisconsin. The small town was originally a stopping place for trains on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. Half Mound got its name from a large mound in the vicinity which rose about 200’ above the level of the prairie. The town started to come to life in the 1850s and 1860s. One of the larger businesses was a flour mill built on the river in 1871 by **Hoesley & Co.** before it changed hands several times over the next 12 years. A post office was in place in Half Mound from 1898-1914. The town had its own school district (46) until the end of the 1949-1950 school year. Half Mound started its decline once the Kansas Central Railroad was absorbed by Union Pacific and left the community in 1935. **Viola Reichart**, who taught at the Half Mound school for six years, wrote a book that is solely on the history of the town complete with many photographs.

**Jefferson City, Delaware Twp., 1855-1865.** Jefferson City was created in 1855 by pro-slavery advocates intent on making Kansas a slave state. This community was a mile north of Cedar Falls approximately three miles from the free-state settlement of Grasshopper Falls (modern-day Valley Falls). Home to a rough clientele, Jefferson City consisted of a store (grog shop) and tavern. As the free-state movement gained momentum and Kansas entered the Union as a free state, Jefferson City faded into history and ceased to have a post office by 1865. Some of the Southerners that chose to stay became a part of the Grasshopper Falls community.

**Kaw City, Kentucky Twp., 1855-1866.** The area surrounding Kaw City was first settled as early as 1855 by pro-slavery individuals. Kaw City was located on the Kaw Half Breed lands, one-square-mile tracts of land along the Kansas River set aside for the Metis members of the Kansa tribe. By 1855 there were ten settlers, but no improvements on the land. The following year, however, **James “Jimmy” Townsend** arrived and built a log cabin and started a mercantile. The town was mapped on a 640-acre tract and eventually included a hotel and house. The community ceased to have a post office by 1866.





*Map courtesy of Liam Bevitt*

**Medina (Medina Station), Kentucky Twp., Est. 1858.** The idea for the town of Medina was conceived in 1858 with a House bill (#282) submitted to the territorial legislature. The town was formally laid out in 1865 along the rail lines for the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Businesses were moved from the former town of Rising Sun to this location. The town was named by **John Speer** for his former home of Medina, Ohio. Medina consisted of two dry goods stores, two grocery stores, one drug store, wagon shop, blacksmith shop, saddle shop, hotel, boarding house, printing office, three doctors, three saloons, grist mill, public hall, five carpenters. The post office was established in 1866 and was periodically active until 1901. A ferry run by **Jerome Kunkle** and **Wales (Wells) Saunders** called "Saunders Ferry" was established at Medina in 1869.

**Mooney Creek, Jefferson Twp., Est. 1854.** The Mooney Creek community was first settled in 1854 by a man named **Mooney** for whom the settlement and the creek were named. Mooney died in 1856 and was buried on the banks of the creek under a fieldstone bearing his name. The Mooney Creek community was home to a flourishing German community. A Catholic church was built in 1908 and named Corpus Christi. A school was built about a decade later.

**Mount Florence, Rock Creek Twp., 1854-1872.** Mount Florence began after settlers started moving into the area after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. The first settler was **Henry Chubb**. It was located along the Fort Leavenworth to Fort Riley military freight road. Mount Florence gained a post office in 1857. The town included a blacksmith shop, stage station, post office, hotel, grocery store, and several residences. Growth was stunted until the land was officially opened for settlement in 1869. When its post office was shifted to the nearby community of Meriden in 1872, the businesses and population shifted to Meriden.

**Owl City, Ozawkie Twp., 1880s-1918.** The neighborhood of Owl City was created along the Leavenworth, Topeka and Southwestern (later Leavenworth and Topeka) Railroad. Its creation took place in the early 1880s after the establishment of that rail line. Owl City was located near "Bridge 41" of the railroad. The use of this rail line was discontinued after 1918.

**Pleasant Hill, Rock Creek Twp., Est. 1855.** Pleasant Hill was located approximately one mile west of Ozawkie (old) and was on the Fort Riley to Fort Leavenworth military trail. It was established by free-state men on the farm of **Jacob U. Brown**. The town hosted a territorial free-state convention in the fall of 1855. At its peak, it boasted four buildings.

**Thompsonville (Indian Mill, Miller's Rest), Kentucky Twp., 1846-1922.**

The community of what would be Thompsonville began as early as 1846 as an attempt at establishing a parcel of land within the Delaware Reservation for the New York Indians (six nations) and in it creating a Mormon mission in Kansas Territory by **Alpheus Cutler** and his followers. Assisting in the establishment of the mission was **Solomon Everett** (also Averett, Avrett, Evrett) a Delaware tribe member. The mission site, located on fifteen to twenty acres of land in a "beautiful country for farming [and] plenty of good timber," consisted of three or four cabins, farms with gardens, and a gristmill. The mill on the Delaware River was commissioned in 1846 by the U.S. government and built by **Michael Rice**, a millwright. A few of the Mormon families were there for extended periods of time, while others were more temporary. Cutler planned to gain government contracts for building and operating the needed mills and schools and provide assistance to the tribes while preaching the Gospel to them. He also prepared for the possibility of organizing the tribes into an armed resistance in case the U.S. Army were sent to remove them. The mission project was abandoned in 1851 or '52. Cutler and the others were excommunicated from the Mormon church causing them to withdraw from the area, thwarted by previous conversions of the surrounding tribes to other Christian faiths and the inability to secure the title to the property and therefore make improvements. Three women died of cholera at the Mormon mission; a cemetery was created nearby with stones of native sandstone to mark their graves. After the Mormons left the area, **Solomon Everett** assumed ownership of the property. The mill and dam were destroyed, and he proceeded to rebuild the dam and make improvements to the mill. Everett's dam was constructed of earth and log. Everett suffered a fatal injury and was buried to the east of the mill/dam site (at the location of the modern-day Lake Perry dam). The mill/dam site was unattended for a number of years until occupied by **Charles L. Thompson** in 1874.

Thompson constructed a stone dam and made improvements to the mill.

Thompson's mill processed flour and feed and was known as Miller's Rest. The Thompson mill operated until 1895. The population of Thompsonville at its peak was 70 individuals. The town consisted of the mill (which was accompanied by a saw), store, a church and a post office. The post office was active until 1901 and a new church was dedicated in 1922.

**Wolf Town (Olive Branch), Fairview Twp., Destroyed 1965.** The neighborhood of Olive Branch/Wolf Town sprang up along the overland stage route from Atchison to Topeka, near the junction of Rock Creek and the Delaware River. The principal business was a trading post conducted by **L.L. Wolfe**. The neighborhood also consisted of the Olive Branch school and cemetery. In preparation for the Perry dam and lake in the 1960s, the land was purchased by the U.S. Corps of Engineers. The location was destroyed in preparation for the lake project.

### PROGRAM

of the 4th of July celebration to be held at Thompsonville:

Song by the chorus,  
Address of welcome, J. P. Newell,  
Music by the Glee Club,  
Recitation, Georgia Hoffman,  
Address by Hon. D. L. Stanley of Oskaloosa,  
Music by Glee Club,  
Recitation.  
Address by Hon. H. B. Schaeffer of Oskaloosa.  
Song by the Glee Club,  
Address by Hon. J. W. Newell of Topeka.

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**For Sale.**

One good work mule.  
See Mort Davis. 50-2t.

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**HEAR! HEAR!**

**SEE! SEE!**

Hear the good music and speakers and see the fine display of fireworks at Thompsonville July 4.

*From the Perry Mirror, June 30, 1904*



## Floods of 1951

### June

On Friday morning June 22, in Perry, Kansas, the telephones began to ring as Chief Telephone Operator **Oma Marrs** broadcast a flash flood warning: waters from the swollen Delaware River and Wild Horse Creek were sweeping through town. The water raced down the north-south streets, pouring into cellars and submerging floors. Homeowners rushed to move furniture to upper levels and to rescue belongings from their basements.

Eighty-year-old **Charles Tabbert** hurried down to salvage his canned fruit, with the help of a friend, **Marlene Abel**. Before he finished, a basement wall collapsed, pinning him beneath dirt and debris. Abel, uninjured, called for help. Several men responded as the water rushed in. The basement quickly filled, and Tabbert drowned before rescuers could free him.

Business owners watched as their stores were inundated. The all-important telephone switchboard was raised on cement blocks so that **Mrs. Marrs** and her operators could continue fielding frantic calls.

The *Perry Mirror* reported rescuers sailing the city streets: “A little before noon, motor boats appeared, the drivers keeping a wary eye out for anyone who might need assistance and transportation.” The Delaware River crested Friday afternoon, reaching 27 feet.

Train and bus services to Perry from Topeka and Kansas City were canceled, and a section of the Lecompton bridge collapsed, endangering Perry’s natural gas line. The *Mirror* reported, “The bridge across the Kaw at Lecompton was built in 1900 and was the only one across the river between Lawrence and Topeka. By this bridge going out, those who did their trading in Perry will be cut off from the south.”

Union Pacific railroad tracks near Perry were undermined, some forced ten feet to the south. Section crews began repairs on Saturday, using seven bulldozers to pull the tracks back into temporary position. By Monday morning, trains had begun to get through. Mail service resumed.

**Mildred Weltmer**, associate publisher of the *Perry Mirror*, wrote of her reaction to the flood: “I’ve had several nightmares in my lifetime but never experienced one quite like the one that I thought I had Friday. I never wakened from this one like I always did with the others and found things as they should be. Instead, this nightmare went on for several days, time seemed to stand still and people seemed to be every place, dirty, smelly water was everywhere you looked.”

Perry suffered from the effects of flooding in neighboring areas as well. The June 28 *Oskaloosa Independent* reported, “Highway traffic was severely curtailed on U.S. 24, which normally carries the heaviest traffic west from Kansas City, being blocked on both sides of Perry. Direct traffic from Leavenworth was halted by an overflow of Big Stranger at Easton. Traffic from Lawrence was hindered by overflow of the Kaw in North Lawrence; some of the traffic has come through by taking a rocky road east of Midland which joins ‘old Forty’ east of the Indian Tepees.”

Recovery work got under way quickly in Perry. Electric service was restored. The State Highway Commission and the Highway Patrol volunteered eight portable truck-mounted pumps to drain basements. The Red Cross set up a local unit in the lobby of the Bank of Perry. The town’s water supply remained safe. But the rivers had not finished their rampage.

In early April 1951, precipitation in Kansas was slightly below normal. However, a prolonged period of above-normal rainfall began on April 20 and continued into July. Totals were about twice average levels. In May and June, the major streams rose, and high continuous runoff occurred from May through July.

An exceptionally severe storm began on July 9 and 10 and lasted through July 13. Flooding started on the Big Blue River above Manhattan. The waters swept through the basins of the Kansas, Marais des Cygnes, Verdigris and Neosho rivers in Kansas and the Missouri and Osage rivers in Missouri. Manhattan, Topeka, Lawrence and Kansas City all reported extensive flood damage.

An October 1951 U.S. Geological Survey report said, “For several days during the flood it was impossible to cross the Kansas River anywhere by train or automobile between Junction City and Kansas City, Kans. All roads and railroads running up the Kansas Valley were closed equally long or longer.”

The Kansas Historical Society’s Kansapedia website reported that the floods affected 116 cities and towns, damaging or demolishing 22,000 homes and destroying 336 businesses. About 10,000 farms also suffered damage. “The flood claimed 28 lives as more than 1 million acres were flooded. Total losses in the Kansas River Basin and in Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, exceeded \$725,000,000.”

The U.S. Geological Survey reported damage to 17 major bridges, “some of them weighted with locomotives in an attempt to hold them.”

In Jefferson County on June 21-22, after a five- to six-inch rain upstream, the Delaware River overflowed its banks in Valley Falls, Ozawie and Perry. Twelve or thirteen houses in Valley Falls were flooded to floor levels or above. The **Ratz** implement house and restaurant suffered water damage.

Losses in Ozawie were primarily agricultural. The *Oskaloosa Independent* reported on June 28, “It was anticipated early this week that patches of wheat could be harvested, that some of the corn would survive. Some replanting of corn would be attempted provided the rainy season lets up promptly, (which it has no appearance of doing.)”

The *Independent* reported, “At Perry the flood came so rapidly and so much worse than the people could conceive might happen, that the town was totally unprepared for the event.”

## Aerial View of Perry Business Section at Flood Crest



THE BUSINESS SECTION OF PERRY, when the flood waters were at crest in the flood of June 22, 1951. The standpipe of the city water supply is at the extreme right-center, with the American Legion Building just beyond. The Union Pacific station is at front-center. Three men may be seen standing in the water at the corner of the Perry Drug Store, corner of Front and Elm Streets. Elm Street, with 27 inches of water in the middle, extends to the north. The "Tree of Knowledge" hides the Dale Stark Store and the Golden Belt Cafe. To

the left may be seen the Post Office, Lee Hardware (tall building), Peterson Barber Shop, Cain Insurance office, Bank of Perry and the Perry Lumber Company. The Corpstein Elevator is at the extreme left. The Perry Rural high school building and Fieldhouse at the upper left, with the athletic field, a temporary lake, behind. The Delaware River main bed runs just in front of the line of trees behind the high school building.

(Photo: Courtesy, Topeka Daily Capital)

*From the Perry Mirror, June 28, 1951*

### July

Under threatening skies, Perry continued to clean up, "keeping a weather eye out for the expected rise in the Delaware River," according to the *Perry Mirror*, July 12, 1951. The paper's "work was rushed in order that the readers would have their paper on time, and preparations were made to prevent further loss in the shop."

The July 19 *Mirror* ran a full-page headline: "All Flood Records Broken at Perry." A second flood had drowned the town just three weeks after the first one. During twelve hours of rain on July 11-12, the Kansas River burst its banks, and the flood waters returned. Perry lost its natural gas service Wednesday night when the north span of the Lecompton bridge fell, severing the gas line.

Thursday morning, the electric power went out. Many residents had taken steps to secure their valuables. Some had left town. Others were picked up by boat and ferried east over U.S. highway 24 to higher ground. Volunteers assisted in the evacuation, driving cars, boats, trucks and even a school bus. Evacuees found shelter in homes all over the county.

Three families, **Mr. and Mrs. C.J. Wright**, **Mrs. Eloise Magnusen** and two children and **Mr. and Mrs. Neil Hupe** and two children, escaped the flood by driving down the railroad tracks to Williamstown in the Wrights' Plymouth. The three-mile journey took three hours.

*From the Perry Mirror, June 28, 1951*

### OUR THANKS

To the Journal-World, Lawrence, we wish to express our appreciation for the use of their machines in assisting in our bringing the Mirror out under the adverse circumstances arising from the flood. Also to **Gene Floree**, owner of the Cash Stationery Co., Lawrence, for his assistance and to the Valley Falls Vindicator for the offer of the use of their plant and equipment.





From the *Perry Mirror*,  
July 5, 1951

Laundry, six escaped pullets in **Heck & Seyler Farm Supply**, Perry's fire engine sitting in water up to its headlights, floating merchandise in **Dale Stark's** store, and a nine-inch "water dog" salamander "making its temporary home in the front window of the bank."

**Knouse** reported, "The front office of the Mirror Press gave the impression that a political brawl had taken place and the whole front office was full of papers and other equipment floating on top of the water — none of it fit for use in the publication of a newspaper. The water reached a depth of 51 inches in the front office and covered all the presses in the back shop." The *Mirror* moved to Oskaloosa, using the *Independent's* machinery until the paper was able to return to its own shop by August 9.

When the power lines from Lawrence failed, the town had no way to pump water into its water tower. Army units from Fort Leavenworth connected a mobile electric power system when the flood receded.

Perry physician **Dr. C.J. Bliss** said that he believed the town's water was safe, although he urged residents to receive typhoid immunizations. By July 26, about 700 people had received at least one of the three required shots, and more than 200 had completed all three shots.

The Red Cross set up a dining room for evacuees in the American Legion building in Oskaloosa and provided sandwiches and coffee for clean-up crews in Perry. Every town in the county provided meals on a rotating schedule.

**Henry and Mildred Weltmer**, publishers of the *Perry Mirror*, and staff member **Charles Knouse** watched the rising waters from the Weltmers' front porch. Weltmer wrote, "We were certain when we were taken away by boat at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday afternoon, our residence would take a terrific beating from the vicious waters which were flowing down upon us."

Unlike the June flood, July's waters did not flow downstream. The *Oskaloosa Independent* said, "The Delaware was unable to deliver its water to the Kaw. Muddy Creek, which normally runs due south on the east side of Grantville was for awhile flowing due north with a visible current. Swiftness of the currents in overflow areas was responsible for much of the flood's vicious destructiveness."

The *Perry Mirror* reported, "The crest of the water [in town] was reached about noon, Friday, July 13, and stood at about seven feet in the street at the junction of Front and Elm streets, near the 'Tree of Knowledge.'" The water didn't begin to subside until Monday.

**Tessie and Helen Trant**, whose home west of the Delaware was near the site of the earlier Union Pacific track wash-out, suffered a boating mishap during a July rescue attempt. There were no serious injuries. The *Mirror* made light of the incident. Along with **Georgia Stark**, the Trant sisters "were being taken by boat to the water's edge east of the city. **George Killinger** (the Admiral) and **Jim Lester** (Galley) and mate '**Red**' **Reynolds**, were manning the craft when it capsized. A naval investigation has not yet revealed whether it was an accident caused by too much training in seacraft or an act of sabotage."

After Oskaloosa attorney **Jim Lester** helped to clean the **Trants'** home on Tuesday, he claimed to have caught a catfish in their icebox.

Damage was extensive. *Mirror* staffer **Charles Knouse** described layers of mud in the **Reynolds**

#### Perry's Tree of Knowledge

By Elmer E. Bates, from "The Story of Perry, Kansas, One Hundred Years of Progress from 1854 to 1954"

Today [in 1954] Perry is a thriving little town with well-paved streets, good modern schools, active churches and well-organized business establishments, and a park. Perhaps the smallest park in the state of Kansas, with the distinction of having only one tree, several times larger than the park. It is a beautiful, symmetrical, wide-spreading elm and for many years was decorated at Christmas time with many colored lights, and could be seen and admired by motorists coming up the highway. In the heat of summer it provides a shady spot for loafers passing the time of day, much about nothing. A place for tired businessmen, campaigning politicians, truckers stopping for the noon hour. A judge's court is known to have been held beneath it. In fact so many happenings during its 60 some years of existence that like the wise owl that sees all and knows all, it has become known locally as the "Tree of Knowledge."

Back in 1895 it was a mere sapling about 3 feet high when the circus came to town, and the elephant drank out of the water tank and spoiled the water, and scared the living daylights out of the horses along the rack, and there was torn harness, and kicked single-trees and broken shafts and locked wagon wheels and running and cussing men and a general all around hullabaloo. Then there was the time the first little red automobile chugged into town and created nearly as much commotion as the elephant and a lot more curiosity among the grown-ups. Now it has grown to tremendous proportions, and like the small boy "bursting his breeches" it has outgrown the Christmas lights.



From the *Perry Mirror*, Aug. 2, 1951

### Have You Found a Pew?

During the second flood a number of pews and other church furnishings were washed away as they had been set out in the church lawn. If these are on your property, please notify the pastor and hold them until we can send a truck for them. **J.W. Bolton**, pastor.

Nortonville's **Weishaar** Brothers installed 40-50 butane tanks in Perry homes and businesses. Valley Falls provided a loaner fire truck. **John Crawford** of Valley Falls loaned out several washing machines. Almost 200 people from Perry, Newman and Grantville took shelter in Oskaloosa. Many more dispersed to towns and farms throughout the county.

Upstream on the Kaw from Perry, the town of Grantville also went under water. **Ursula Zinn** reported to the *Perry Mirror*,

"There has long been a legend here, handed down by the Indians, that waters of the Kaw once spread from bluff to bluff. This . . . will never be questioned again . . . Water from bluff to bluff as far as the eye could see, was the sight that met the eye on Friday, July 13. By 4 p.m. the water was nearing Front Street and everyone was leaving."

Neighbors in the hills took in the Grantville residents. Medicine was air-lifted in after a message went out, written in cornmeal on a paved spot on the bluff. A helicopter set down an emergency transmitter for radio station WREN. But after seeing the damage to other towns and cities, **Mrs. Zinn** wrote, "Here in the village we feel we should not even murmur."

The Lawrence underpass had just been pumped out after the June flood, when the July inundation filled it again. Washouts east and west of Lawrence and the flooding Kaw to the north cut off traffic to the city. Railroad service at Ottawa was disrupted by flooding on the Marais des Cygnes River, completing Lawrence's isolation. The mail carrier from Lawrence was unable to reach Jefferson County for four days.

Evacuation of North Topeka was ordered as a precaution on July 11. On July 19, the *Oskaloosa Independent* reported on former Jefferson County residents and relatives in Topeka. The July flood made 10,000 to 15,000 Topekans homeless. Thirty Topeka churches were damaged. Jefferson Countians pitched in to help: "**Herb Mize** turned boatman for fifteen long hours last Thursday when he took an assignment to evacuate people from North Topeka homes. He began at 6 a.m. and quit at 9 p.m. He was too tired to go back Friday, anyhow his 12½ HP motor was regarded too small to risk the strong currents, and the Government was bringing in bigger boats, amphib planes and helicopters for rescue work."

The *Independent* expressed hope and confidence in a July 19 editorial, "**Watch Kansas Rise Again.**"

"Kansas has suffered the greatest disaster of its history. The people of its rich valleys have been the chief sufferers but the effects of the flood are felt throughout the state. From a dust bowl of fifteen years ago the Kansas scene has become a series of elongated lakes with turbulent rushing waters. The story of these past seven days has been repeated by press and radio and television and carried by word of mouth until it is known all over the nation.

"Out of these inundated Kansas valleys one may expect to see arise a humbled and thankful but a more determined population, people with faces set to the tasks of rehabilitation and rebuilding on a better pattern than heretofore."

### Can the 1951 Flood Happen Again?

*The answer is yes. The occurrence of the 1951 flood helped initiate the construction of numerous flood-control reservoirs and levees that have helped to reduce the inundation by subsequent floods in Kansas. Thus, although a flow of a magnitude comparable to the 1951 flood is certainly possible, the associated flooding would likely be less due to storage of flood waters in the reservoirs. . . . Given the right combination of circumstances and conditions, a flow of equal or greater magnitude is possible. . . . Major floods occur occasionally, and the risk of an extraordinary flood like those of 1844 and 1951 will always be with us.*

From *The 1951 Floods in Kansas Revisited*, Juracek, Perry and Putnam, U.S. Geological Survey, 2001

### VALLEY LEADERS MOVE FAST FOR PROTECTION (From the *Oskaloosa Independent*, July 19, 1951)

Leaders, both official and unofficial, in cities all along the Kansas and Missouri valleys, are moving rapidly to see that something big and adequate is done and promptly, to protect against such a debacle as just occurred.

A hearing at Washington, planned after the June flood, by mayors of a dozen cities occurred on the very day that July flood struck down the Kaw valley, and the vast object lesson was sufficient to arouse Congress to action.

Millions for immediate relief will come from the Government and it appears likely that Congress will take some definite step toward the forwarding of the Pick-Sloan plan [1944 Flood Control Act plan for dams in the Missouri basin] in this area.

Former **Senator [Arthur] Capper** has reluctantly, he editorializes, come to the opinion that big dams will be required, although he has heretofore favored a method which would hold federal control to a minimum. He thinks Kansans had better take the Pick-Sloan to head off an MVA.

"If I could have my way," he states, "the big dams and reservoirs would be constructed for flood control but not coupled up with grandiose schemes for recreation navigation, irrigation and federally controlled electric power projects. But the plans that have been drawn in the past few years all seem to call for multiple-purpose dams and reservoirs. Only for such can federal funds be obtained. Without funds it is extremely doubtful that adequate flood control projects will be constructed."

## “Rain Makers” and “Anti-Dammers”

### Perry Reservoir Controversies

As the 1951 flood waters receded, the debate over flood prevention methods grew. Discussions, and sometimes quarrels, centered on the issues of federal funding versus local control. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers promoted building large dams on major waterways. The Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture favored smaller, upstream dams. Urban areas that desired water for industrial purposes supported large dams. Rural residents preferred to see the land enriched rather than inundated.

River basins in the Great Plains have a history of flooding. Some of the earliest recorded flooding was in 1826, when floods struck the area in both spring and fall. On the Neosho River, log buildings, fields and fences were swept away in one night. Severe flooding occurred again in 1844, ten years before Kansas was opened for U.S. settlement. Historian **David Dary** reported that the water where North Topeka now stands was twenty feet deep, and the **Papan** brothers' ferry was demolished in the flood.

**Dary** wrote, “**Sarcoxie**, an old Delaware Indian chief, recalled many years later how the valley of the Kansas River flooded from west of modern Manhattan, Kansas, east to where the river flows into the Missouri at present-day Kansas City. Near what is now Lawrence, **Sarcoxie** told how the river had stretched from the bluffs in Jefferson County south to what is called Blue Mound, which is southeast of modern Lawrence in Douglas County. At that point the Kansas River was nearly ten miles wide until the flood waters receded.”

The Delaware River flooded in Osawkee in 1872. In 1898 and again in 1903, the mill at Thompsonville was inundated. Heavy flooding in 1903 collapsed a portion of the Kansas River bridge at Lawrence. In 1908, the Kaw overflowed its banks for a month. **Ozawkie** organized a Delaware drainage district in 1908. In 1914, a drainage ditch was dug to divert the Delaware from **Ozawkie**, but the river flooded again the next year, and once more in 1925. By the late 1930s, the federal government had begun to consider building a major dam on the Delaware River.

With the 1944 Pick-Sloan Flood Control Act, construction of large reservoirs began, starting with the Kanopolis Dam on the Smoky Hill River. The proposed Perry Reservoir would dam the Delaware River and inundate almost 12,000 acres of farmland and timber as well as drowning the town of **Ozawkie**.

After the first of the 1951 floods in June, Perry's city council considered surrounding the town with a three- to four-foot dike. The road leading north to the cemetery would need to be raised. A gap would be left on highway 24 at the Delaware bridge, which “could be easily sandbagged in event of flood threat to the town.” The next flood, in July, made it clear that such a dike would be useless against the might of the Kaw.

On July 5, 1951, **Henry Weltmer**, publisher of the *Perry Mirror*, strongly advocated rapid construction of the proposed dam: “As I, and many others see it, there is only one way to stop the flood danger that has existed in this area for years. That method is by building the reservoir suggested and proposed by the U.S. Army Engineers Corps . . . It is a certainty now that small dams, conservation practices and the like will never do the job.”

Those who lived and farmed in the Delaware valley saw it differently. In February 1948, **Ozawkie** citizens met to organize opposition to the proposed dam. They selected **Claude Brey**, a local farmer and Grange leader, to represent them at a hearing in Washington, D.C. **Brey**, **Glen Lehman**, **Casey Dick** and **Paul Cawley** appeared before a committee of the War Department's Engineering Division of Rivers and Harbors to present their objections and alternatives to the dam. Responses were not encouraging. **Brey** later reported, “I felt like a little bitty fish in a bowl of big fishes.”

**Claude Brey**, **Raymond Wegner** and **Glen Lehman** toured the Washita conservation projects in Oklahoma in 1950. **Elmer Peterson**, editor of the *Daily Oklahoman*, opposed the large dams in his state, pointing out that the advantages fell to downstream residents. He favored the local approach: “This flood control takes each little watershed and treats it by soil conservation practices so the water is held at or near where it falls. The real job . . . is done by terracing, regressing, contouring and other practices. The relatively small detention dams are the extra precaution — the safety margin.”

### Ye Editor's Corner

From the *Oskaloosa Independent*, July 26, 1951

It seems to be [a] moot question whether the floods were caused by “rain makers” or the “anti-dammers.” The rain makers are so sore about the matter they threatened suit for libel. The anti-dammers, on the other hand, are not belligerent. **Ray Wegner**, president of the Kansas Flood and Soil Conservation, gave the following interview to United Press: “I doubt that any kind of dam could have controlled the tons of water that fell on Kansas last week to bring the worst floods in the state's history.

“We want to be fair tho,” **Wegner** said. “The answer to the question of dams should come from complete study by the Corps of Engineers and the Soil Conservation Department.

“We say now start at the sources of Kansas rivers and study them thru to their mouths,” he said. “Then if the study shows dams are the only way to control rivers we will go along with that.”

**Wegner** said Kanopolis Dam on the Smoky Hill River apparently didn't help control floods on that stream except when the flooding was negligible.



Map of the Delaware River Watershed. From the Oskaloosa Independent, July 12, 1951  
 For a clearer version of this map, visit <https://www.oldjeffersontown.com/basic-01-1>



About a month before the 1951 flooding began, the Delaware River Basin Citizens Association expanded to include all the counties of the Delaware valley and its tributaries: Jefferson, Jackson, Atchison, Brown and Nemaha. Renamed the **Delaware River Watershed Association**, the organization included residents of the entire watershed and others with personal and business interests in the area.

The Delaware River Watershed Association divided the area into watershed districts based on tributary creeks:

1. Wild Horse Creek
2. Rock Creek
3. Big Slough Creek
4. Little Slough and Brush Creeks
5. Coal and Walnut Creeks
6. Cedar Creek
7. Elk Creek
8. Straight Creek
9. Grasshopper Creek
10. Little Delaware
11. Muddy Creek
12. Craig, Plum and Delaware Creeks

#### Ye Editor's Corner

From the *Oskaloosa Independent*, Aug. 2, 1951

The letter "n" seems to be in danger of getting into the dam talk going on in the neighborhood press (outside Jefferson county). Brother **Peyton** of Overbrook resents the fact there was no opportunity for the "democratic process" at the big Pick-Sloan meet in Kansas City last week. He has logic on his side. However, — The growing American habit is to let matters slide along without action until a situation becomes intolerable — then jump. Kansas stands to get three or four reservoirs while Congress is looking our way.

Whether we'll ever get an adequate watershed control of the type being promoted along the Delaware may have to await some other great emergency.

The association's plan called for individual farmers and landowners to adopt its program voluntarily. All land was to be used for the purposes for which it was best suited. Certain areas were to be reseeded to grass. Contour or strip farming, terracing and seeded waterways, and gully control were encouraged. The goal was to retard water runoff, replenish groundwater and reactivate springs. This would provide increased moisture for crop production, particularly during dry seasons. Farmers were also encouraged to build detention reservoirs to hold flood water temporarily, releasing it gradually without damage to pasture grasses.

These measures were intended to avoid the wholesale inundation of agricultural land that would result from constructing a large dam and lake.

The Kansas Power and Light Company and the Kansas State College Extension Service prepared an exhibit of miniature farms, comparing various types of land uses and farm management practices. Housed in a truck, the exhibit toured the watershed area for a series of meetings in support of the Delaware River Watershed Association's plan.

Delaware valley citizens had support and encouragement from other areas facing permanent flooding. The Blue River Watershed Association urged smaller dams upstream instead of the large Tuttle Creek Dam. In 1957, the Missouri Basin Survey Commission, established in 1952 by President Truman, delivered a negative report on plans for several large dams, including Perry.



*Perry Dam and Reservoir. Photo courtesy of JCHS.*

On July 13, 1951, Perry Mayor **Norman Hamm** appeared before a Senate appropriations committee in Washington, D.C. While a second flood swirled through his town, Hamm promoted the Perry dam. **Raymond Wegner** of Ozawie argued the opposite position, with skeptical responses from the committee. Hamm came away with promises of federal aid for Perry and plans to organize a new Perry Flood Control Committee.

In an editorial in the *Oskaloosa Independent*, July 26, 1951, **Senator Frank Carlson** advocated for the big dams: "Fifteen years ago the Federal Government accepted as a national duty the protection of its citizens from floods. It embarked on a program of construction which has caused many structures, dams and walls to be built across the country.

"The best engineering talent of the world was consulted and used to put in concrete form a proposal which would put in operation structures that would forever remove the fear of flood. The Kaw will be made tame by means of three dams and ten local protection projects to be built by the Corps of Engineers.

"It is imperative that we have action and have it now. The floods have not neglected their opportunity and today Kansas is the recipient of sympathy from across the Nation. Congress has passed emergency legislation. Foreign governments have expressed their sorrow to our President. These well-meaning gestures will never bring back the lost lives nor the soil nor the homes or factories. Nor will they prevent the same thing happening again."

Congress authorized construction of Perry Dam in 1954. Ozawkie citizens launched a 10-year campaign to change the name to Ozawkie Dam and Reservoir. The March 20, 1958, *Oskaloosa Independent* asked, “Why Not Ozawkie Lake and Dam? It is the people of Ozawkie who will pay the greatest price in loss of homes and farmland and their businesses.”

In 1964, the Jefferson County Pomona Grange petitioned **Representatives Robert Ellsworth** and **William Avery** and **Senator James Pearson** for the name change, but their proposal was tabled and never brought to a vote.

Failing to prevent inundation, the people of Ozawkie turned to relocation. Local historian **Erma Steffey** wrote, “Since Ozawkie was an unincorporated village the Government would not relocate the town. If it was relocated it would have to be done by the people.” The people chose a new site for Ozawkie, northwest of the old town, and hired attorney **William C. Leech** to help them incorporate. Leech and Ozawkie Board of Directors President **W.A. Kramer** negotiated with the Corps of Engineers, which had set the property aside for recreation. The townspeople formed a corporation and bought the land, near the site of an early rival town, Pleasant Hill.

**Erma Steffey** described complaints by landowners in the future reservoir area: “The Corps was marching up the valley from the dam site . . . taking property and homes far below the replacement cost of comparable property in other locations.” Court cases were filed, and Ozawkie farmer **Gary Parker** took the complaints to Washington, D.C., “stating that everyone was not being treated equally as this is a forced sale.”

**Judith Taggart** quoted Delaware valley cattle rancher **Mrs. Tom Noll** in the *Kansas City Star*, June 30, 1963, “Even when we do buy a new place, we’ll lose three years in moving — the silos won’t be full, we won’t be able to plant wheat this fall, and we’ll need one dry and one wet season to get to know the ground.”



*The new town of Ozawkie on Perry Lake. Photo courtesy of Jefferson County Historical Society.*

Construction of the rolled earth fill dam began in 1964. The complex undertaking encompassed clearing trees and grubbing stumps, excavating for the embankment, constructing the outlet works and control gates, plus building roads and bridges to serve the area.

A 1965 Corps of Engineers pamphlet said, “To build earth dams the engineer uses materials that Mother Nature has left close at hand. The core is made from clay, which when compacted with heavy rollers becomes practically water tight. On the downstream side of the water-tight core, the engineer adds a drain, made of sands that will readily pass water. Through this drain flows the small quantity of water that may pass through the core. Riprap, which consists of medium to large pieces of rock, is placed on the upstream slope of the dam to prevent erosion resulting from wave action.”

On June 1964, the *Oskaloosa Independent* reported that **Robert Hudson**, a Spring Hill construction worker, was killed at the Perry Dam project when a 2,000- to 3,000-pound piece of corrugated steel culvert material fell on him.

In July 1965, digging crews from the Kansas Historical Society found an early Native earth lodge 700 to 800 years old south of Ozawkie. When the graves of five white settlers were also found, digging stopped. These graves had been dug through the earth lodge site. Anthropologists from the University of Kansas later excavated the site along Big Slough and Evans creeks. The settlers’ graves were not moved. According to local memory, one of the burials was that of two-and-a-half-year-old **Nettye Busbee**, who was burned to death in a grass fire. In 1983, **Mabel Mills Shereman**, Nettie’s niece, told Nettie’s story to **Fern Vanderpool**, who contributed it to *Yesteryears* in April 1989. (The full story is reprinted in this issue, see page 24.)

Two cemeteries were relocated because of the reservoir. Fairview Cemetery, 10 miles northwest of Perry (not to be confused with the current Fairview Cemetery, near the old site of Dunavant north of Oskaloosa), held about 160 graves, dating from 1868 to 1954. Most Fairview burials were moved to Rose Hill Cemetery near Perry. Five **Limeburner** family burials (circa 1873) and three **Crone** family burials were also moved to Rose Hill.

In June 1967, the Delaware flooded again, giving residents of the new Ozawkie a preview of the lake. Ozawkie was incorporated in its renewed form September 15, 1967. **W.A. Kramer** was elected its first mayor.

Dam construction finished at the end of 1968, and the two 32-ton control gates were closed in 1969. Perry Reservoir officially opened in August 1970. The dedication featured a sailboat regatta and a U.S. Army Golden Knights parachute show. In its first year, the area attracted some 1.6 million visitors. Vehicle traffic was so heavy that the Jefferson County Commission asked U.S. **Senators James Pearson** and **Bob Dole** to introduce legislation authorizing the Corps of Engineers to pave the most traveled access roads.

Opposition to the reservoir did not vanish overnight. **Martin Vanderpool** of the Ozawkie board of directors told skeptics, “Some of us fought the reservoir for 20 years. We decided to stop fighting and start working. I have confidence that the development around the lake is going to be tremendous.”

By Jane Hoskinson, with thanks to Ardie Grimes and Deb Case for research and technical support

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## Early Days in Topeka and Oskaloosa: Reminiscences of Margaret Rebecca Porter Conwell

*Contributed by Robin Atkins*

March 11, 1933

**Mrs. Margaret R. Conwell** who makes her home with her son, **Frank R. Conwell**, 1029 North Quincy Street, will celebrate her ninetieth birthday anniversary Saturday, March 11. Mrs. Conwell is hale and hearty and takes an interest in current affairs and is an interesting talker, especially in telling of the early days in Topeka. She has remarkably good eyesight and reads without glasses. She has been a member of the First Baptist Church all her life and has been a Rebekah for more than fifty years. She has been a member of Beulah chapter, O.E.S. [Order of the Eastern Star] since March 7, 1889, and of the Ancient Toltec Rite since April 29, 1910.

In telling of early days, **Mrs. Conwell** said, "I was born in Finley [Findlay], Ohio, March 11, 1843. I came to Kansas with my father's family in August 1857, when 14 years old. We went first to St. Louis and then by boat to Kansas City, then overland to Kansas. My father took up a claim at Clinton, Kansas, near Lawrence, and ran a hotel there for a year, then we moved to Oskaloosa in 1859 where my father, **Hugh R. Porter**, and his brother, enlisted for service in **Captain Jack Curtis'** company. Captain Curtis was the father of **Charles Curtis**, former Vice President of the United States.

"It was here I met for the first time **James S. Conwell**, who with others had enlisted in Company G, Second Regiment, Kansas Volunteer Infantry. These men were leaving for Leavenworth to join their company and regiment under **Gen. Nathaniel Lyon**. After the battle of Wilson Creek, in which General Lyon was killed, Mr. Conwell was one of the men who helped remove the general from the battlefield. The men then returned to Leavenworth and were discharged. I again met Mr. Conwell and we were married March 11, 1862, and in April came to Topeka. My father ran a store for about a month between sixth and seventh streets. He then sold it and we moved to Fourth and Kansas Avenue, later the location of the Shawnee County Court House, now the Reed Hotel. Then there were two small houses on this

corner and we occupied one and the **Bryon Jewell** and **Louis Wirth** families were our neighbors. **Mr. and Mrs. Cope Gorden** kept the Gorden Hotel nearby.

"In July of 1862, we left Topeka for Lone Tree, Neb., to take charge of an overland relay stage station where the horses were changed. We lived in a two room log house with sod roof. Our nearest neighbor was ten miles away at Liberty Farm. We gave breakfast to passengers on the stage and I had the pleasure of meeting **Brigham Young**, who was on his way to Atchison. The Indians were getting pretty troublesome, so we came back to Topeka after six months. We at that time lived across from the City Park in a small stone house, the property of the **Laurent** family. During the **Price** raid we lived at Second and Quincy St. **Mr. Conwell** helped to bring the bodies of the men killed in the raid to Topeka, and they are buried in the Topeka cemetery in the circular lot marked by the Gage Monument.

"We then built a home on lots we owned at 626 Tyler street and lived there ten years. Two sons, **Frank R. Conwell** and **E.B. Conwell**, were born there. Our oldest son, **Nathaniel Lyon Conwell**, named for **General Lyon**, was born at Oskaloosa on our return from Nebraska. In August 1881, we bought our home at 509 Topeka Blvd., and I lived there for forty-seven years, and still own the property. I am the only one that lived in the block in those years who is still here now. Among them were the Pastor of the Methodist Church, **Mr. Ewerts, R.G. Hugh, E.B. Guild and Mother** and the **Rev. Mr. Dornblaser**, pastor of the Lutheran Church, and one other forgotten name. Other friends and neighbors during those early days were **C.K. Holiday, John R. and Joab Mulvane, James Parker**, and the **Hon. Tom Ryan, J.W. Farnsworth, K[i]llough, Robert Luce, Bates, the Curtis family** and others. I have often trotted **Charlie Curtis** and **Libbie Curtis**, [now] **Mrs. Jerome Colvin**, on my knee.

"I have seen Topeka grow from 500 population to thousands and thousands. I have been thru drouth, floods, earthquakes and grasshoppers, and have lived thru many hardships with others who, like myself, thought there was no place like Kansas. I am still here — for how long I know not."

**Mrs. Conwell** has a brother, **Christian Porter**, of Los Angeles, Calif., who is 88 years old.

## Lost Train

From the *Oskaloosa Independent*, Aug. 1, 1885

When the freight train pulled in, Wednesday morning, at the Southwestern depot, it was discovered that a portion of the cars was missing. The engineer looked a little bit sold as he ran back down the track in search of the missing part. A mile or so back he found two freight cars and the coach, which were brought in a-flying, much to the relief of the passengers, who had begun to feel lonesome and forsaken.

## “What Became of the Chicken?”

From the Valley Falls *New Era*, Jan. 6, 1905

By A Senior

Probably the most exciting event of the Christmas vacation and also of the school took place on New Year's eve upon the streets, in the alleys, back yards, and in fact all over the north end of town.

The senior class had long before hand planned to have a party to watch the old year out and the new year in and also to have a bounteous feast of the chicken which had been presented to them early in its earthly career, but (was) now in full maturity, by the senior class of 1904.

Following our example the ex-seniors and sophomores each planned a class party, the former at the **McCammon** home and the latter at that of **A.D. Kendall**.

Our class was enjoying the evening to the fullest extent, when suddenly a rap at the door was followed by the entering of the class of '04. They were cordially received by our members as yet unsuspecting that any plot had been formed against them by the other two classes. Suddenly, almost as unexpectedly as they had come, they took their departure.

Soon afterward it was discovered by our hostess that the chicken, which had been pressed and was in waiting for lunch, had also mysteriously disappeared. “Our chicken's gone! Those ex-seniors! Catch 'em! Skin 'em alive!” came simultaneously from our members. It was unanimously agreed that we pursue them and recover, if possible, the chicken, which was the all important feature of our party.

The first thing we saw was a band which we at first took for our prey, but upon making a vicious dash at them discovered that it was only a band of sophomores whom we then thought — and luckily for them — to be innocent, but who were implicated in the foul play.

The following two hours were spent in chasing, dodging, hiding and sneaking from place to place by all members of both parties with various results, however our chicken had not yet been located.

Probably the most exciting moment of the evening was when a sophomore who for some reason had become separated from his comrades was detected and chased by a senior. Well, the way that boy ran was a caution to snakes, and we believe had Dan Patch been in the race he would have been put to shame and lost his record. But in spite of his remarkable speed he was able to yell so that he was easily heard in the other end of town screaming, “Help! Help!” But on account of his wonderful speed he reached the house in safety where he almost fainted because of his great fright. He secured the services of a prominent business man of our city as a body guard and thus was enabled to reach his own home unhurt, but badly scared.

Whether on account of fright or their kindheartedness we know not, but at any rate a little before twelve the chicken was returned unharmed to our back porch.

Shortly after this, our members again succeeded in collecting themselves at the former place of meeting where our hostess served a most delicious repast, consisting of three courses.

We do not know where our opponents ate their supper, or whether they had any, but we defy anyone to scare up anything more tasty or dainty than was that of which the seniors partook shortly after the entering in of the New Year.

The fact is, as we afterwards found out, that while we were innocently entertaining the ex-seniors, the sophomores were in the kitchen stealing our beloved chicken.

But upon the whole we consider it a good trick, well planned and executed and we as seniors give the two classes full credit for their shrewdness. — A Senior



From the Oskaloosa Sickle, June 5, 1885

## Civil War Veteran Robert Bland

**Robert Bland** was born about 1840 in Monroe County, Kentucky, near the Tennessee border. He relocated to Arkansas, where he may have married **Mariah Freling**, who later claimed to be the mother of his oldest son, Robert. He and Mariah may have had a “slave” marriage. Such unions were often not recognized officially. In August 1862, Bland was among the first volunteers for the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry being recruited as a State unit at Fort Scott, Kansas, from formerly enslaved Black men and a few free Black men. Bland served in Company A.

The primary recruiter for the First Kansas Colored was **Captain William Matthews**, a free Black man, a businessman and a station master on the Underground Railroad. Officially, Kansas’s first U.S. **Senator James H. Lane** began the recruiting for the regiment, although without federal consent. Both the First and Second Kansas Colored Infantry were recruited from Fort Scott, making Kansas the first Union state to begin training Black troops.

The First Kansas Colored fought with distinction at the Battle of Island Mound in Missouri on October 29, 1862. About 225 Black troops drove off 500 Confederate guerillas. Ten Kansas men were killed and 12 wounded.

**Adjutant Richard Hinton** (later a biographer of **John Brown**) wrote of the skirmish, “The men fought like tigers, each and every one of them, and the main difficulty was to hold them all well in hand.” **Lane** publicized the victory to show that Black troops could and would fight with intelligence and courage.

When the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863, the First Kansas Colored officially joined the Union army. Its two Black officers, **Captain William Matthews** and **Lieutenant Patrick Minor**, lost their commissions. Matthews later was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the federal artillery.

Between 1862 and 1864, the First Kansas Colored Infantry fought at Island Mound, Sherwood, Cabin Creek, Honey Springs, Prairie D’Ane, Poison Springs, Flat Rock Creek and Timber Hills. **Robert Bland** was wounded at the Battle of Poison Springs, near Camden, Arkansas, April 18, 1864.

At Poison Springs, the First Kansas Colored were sent to forage and to escort grain wagons, having already marched 24 days without rest. They were ambushed by Confederates, including the 29<sup>th</sup> Texas and Second Choctaw brigades they had previously defeated at Honey Springs in Indian Territory. They held the center against three Confederate assaults before giving way to superior numbers. The First were driven into a swamp, where Confederates massacred every soldier they found, giving no quarter. Of 438 men, 117 were killed and 65 were missing for a total of 182 casualties.

**Colonel James Williams** described the savageness of the fight, “Many wounded men belonging to the First Kansas Colored Volunteers fell into the hands of the enemy and . . . were murdered on the spot.” For Black soldiers in the west, “Remember Poison Springs!” was a battle cry for the rest of the war.

On December 18, 1864, the First Kansas Colored Infantry was reorganized as the 79<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT), and the Second Kansas Colored Infantry was reorganized as the 83<sup>rd</sup> USCT. In October 1865, **Robert Bland** was honorably discharged with the rank of Corporal.

By 1870, **Bland** owned 120 acres of land valued at \$1,000 in Jefferson County, Kansas, southwest of Oskaloosa. He owned horses, cattle and swine worth \$400 and raised 500 bushels of corn. The 1870 U.S. census lists **Bland**, his son, **Robert Bland**, 5, and a girl (possibly his daughter or niece), **Lucinda Bland**, 11, living in his household. The 1875 Kansas census lists **Bland** and his wife, **Mary J. Bland**, 20, their daughter, **Catherine**, 2, and a 12-year-old girl, **S.E. Ward**, possibly Mary’s sister or cousin.

By 1880, **Bland**’s widowed mother, **Maria Merriman**, was living in the household, along with **Mary** and her children, **Catherine**, **John**, **Isabel (Della)** and **Havanah**. By 1885, the family also included sons **Henry** and **Elkhana**\*. A daughter, **Essie**, and a son, **Robert Sylvester**, were born between 1885 and 1890.

\*The Captain of Company A, Kansas First Colored Infantry, was **Elkhana Huddleston**.



*Battle Flag of the First Kansas Colored Infantry*



In April 1877, the *Oskaloosa Independent* reported that a prairie fire had destroyed a fence on the Bland farm. The loss was so severe that his neighbors gathered to build a stone fence in a day, “costing only their dinners and suppers, about \$8.” Bland offered public thanks in the newspaper.

In December 1877, the *Independent* reported that Bland had “shot a wild goose a distance of 235 steps with a common rifle. Who can beat it?”

**Robert Bland** died January 26, 1890, of pneumonia. His obituary appeared in the *Oskaloosa Independent*, Feb. 1, 1890:

“**Robert Bland**, a well-known colored man who lived about four miles southwest of town, died last Sunday and was buried at Pleasant View cemetery on Monday, **Elder Price** officiating. He had had the influenza and had nearly recovered when he went hunting, took cold and died from pneumonia. Bland was a well-to-do colored man, and achieved notoriety years ago by marrying a white woman. The woman was a widow with a daughter nearly grown at the time, and neither had a particle of negro blood in them, and yet they took up their abode in perfect content with the blacks, and seemed to enjoy the situation.”

**Mary Bland** applied for her husband’s back pay and military pension for herself and her children in 1891. From the *Oskaloosa Independent*, Dec. 5, 1891:

“**Mrs. Robt. Bland** has received a pension — \$337.33 back pay, and \$22 per month until next spring, when the latter amount will be reduced to \$20 by one of her children reaching 16 years of age, which is the pension limit, \$2 of the above monthly allowance being granted to each of her seven children.” [Ed. note: *The oldest daughter, Catherine Bland, married Thomas Sims in September 1889; she died in August 1891. John Bland, born in 1876, turned 16 in 1892.*]

Later news reports followed a lawsuit by **Mariah Freling Davis** for a share in the property. The suit was eventually settled in **Mary Bland’s** favor, dividing the inheritance among Mary and her children.

Four years after **Robert Bland’s** death, Mary remarried **Rev. D.D. Cole**. She divorced him in 1904 and later married **G.T. Wooten** of Bonner Springs, Kansas.

— By Jane Hoskinson, with research assistance from Tom Grose and Liz Leech

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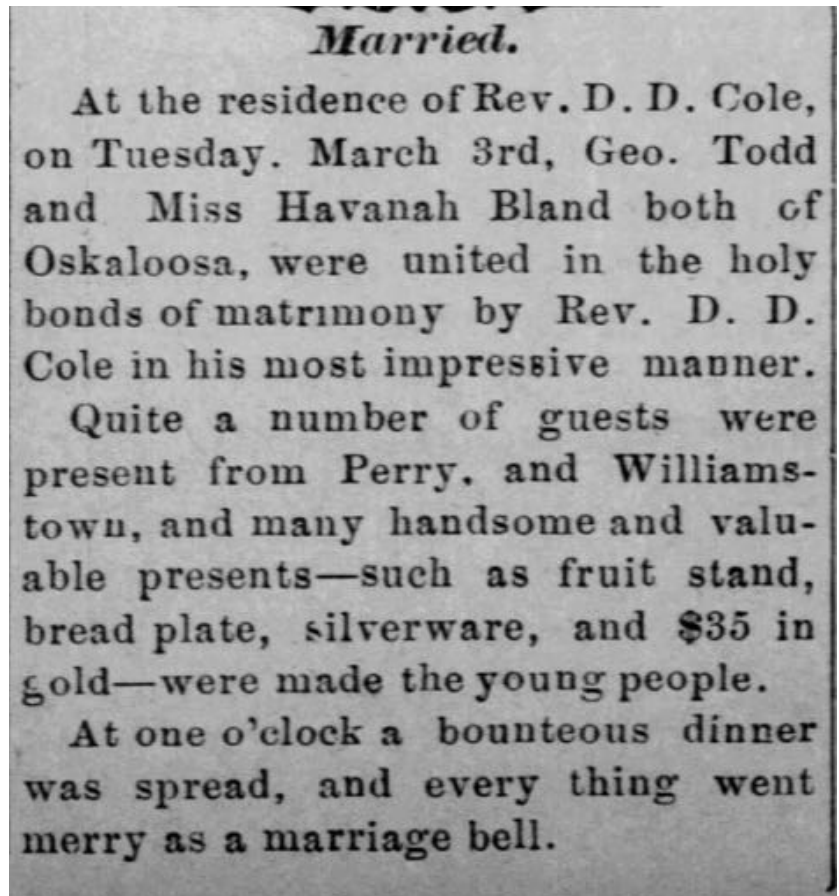
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*Robert and Mary Bland’s daughter Havanah married George Todd in Oskaloosa, March 3, 1896.*

*From the Oskaloosa Independent, March 6, 1896*

## Violent Chapter in History of Ozawkie Lives Again in Story Told by Returned ‘White Cap’

By **Joe Western** (State Journal Staff Writer), *Topeka Journal*, Aug. 1, 1953

*[Editor’s note: The “White Caps,” a Ku Klux Klan-like vigilante group, prided themselves on attacking “immorality,” which they identified by standards of their own choosing. Joe Swing was born in 1872. This incident may have taken place in 1888 or 1889. No evidence links it to the household of Robert and Mary Bland. The details as recounted by Swing include several differences and discrepancies. Thanks to Tom Grose for background information.]*

Nearly 81 now, **Joe Swing** of Ozawkie sat on his front porch, unlit pipe clenched in his teeth, and spun a tale of the bad old days. It’s a story the town residents have talked about for decades.

Of hooded men, of tar and feathers, of a mob, of a whipping, of tearing down a house.

Of an enraged Negro stalking Ozawkie streets shouting hate in broad daylight.

Thus a 66-year-old Ozawkie legend-like incident was returned Saturday to the realm of history as Swing, who believes he is the last surviving participant in an incident of mob violence, finally consented to tell his story.

Swing is not particularly proud of his role as one of the mob, but he is far from repentant.

“I was just a kid then, somewhere between 16 and 17, living out east of town a ways. Ozawkie had 800 to 900 population then.

“It was just about this time of year, just after the harvest. The trouble was about this house where all the roughs in the area spent a lot of time. It was just south of the present high school and was inhabited by a Negro and a white woman, the white woman’s son, and a mulatto niece of the Negro. Drinking, gambling and worse went on in there.

“Relatives of all these folks still live in this part of the state, and I don’t want to cause them any embarrassment, so I’ll not give names.

“As I say, it was a hot summer day, and I had just come to town. Soon after I got there, I was notified I was wanted in the office of one of the town’s three doctors. His office was on the second floor of the old Moser building — it’s gone now.

“If there was any meanness going on, I wanted in on it. I was right proud when I found out 20 to 25 grown men wanted me to help them run this man, the woman, and the rest out of town that night.

“We had white hoods that we pulled down over our heads. Holes were cut so we could see. We called ourselves White Caps.

“Another man, now dead, and I were appointed to grab the woman and her son. She was a slim, hatchet-faced woman about 35, and her son was tall, about my age. Others were assigned to get the rest of the folks.

“We had sent two fellows on ahead to play cards with them to make sure they were home. Then we knocked down the front door.

“The woman and her son jumped right into our arms, but the other two ran out a hidden door we didn’t know about and escaped by hiding in a corn field.

“We took the woman and her son down to the stockyards of the ‘old jerky’ railroad (branch line of the Santa Fe long since pulled up), stripped them down and tarred and feathered them.

“Then we carefully stacked all the furniture in the shack outside on the ground and then tore the shack down completely (*sic*). We didn’t burn anything. I don’t remember what became of the furniture.

“We tied the woman and her son back to back and sent them down the road south. We told them never to come back. Next morning a farmer in that direction found the two trying to wash off the tar and feathers in the creek. They had slept in his wheat field. In response to their pleas for help, the farmer came to town and got them some clothes.

“Early that next morning, the man showed up in town and was he mad. He roamed up and down the main drag there just a-foamin’ until my cousin, a constable, arrested him and held him in a livery stable.

“It was all planned that way so we’d know where he was that night. Soon after it was dark, this other man and I went to the stable, pulled guns on the constables, and took the man from him.

“We started for Croser hill 1½ miles away with the whole bunch along. My partner and I led the way, telling strangers to get off the road. We didn’t want outsiders around.

“At the top of the hill, one of the mob got out a rawhide buggy whip.

“Finally, although he was tied, he ran away in the bushes and got help later from his friends. None of them ever came back to Ozawkie until many years later.”

## The Art of Making Molasses

From the *Topeka Daily Capital*, Dec. 9, 1951

By **Dale Fields** of The Daily Capital Staff

The art of making old fashioned sorghum molasses has almost been lost to the present generation. But **Kelly Keeton**, a farmer living northeast of Ozawkie, continues to press his own sorghum, brew the juice in his own fashion, and produce a product that makes baked beans, gingerbread, and hot biscuits taste like the most expensive ambrosia.

To do all this **Keeton**, his wife, and his daughter, **Bonnie**, get up at 5 a.m., and work the entire day squeezing, boiling, and straining. They say the final product is well worth all the effort involved. Late at night, after the day's work is over, the family gathers around an old stone jar to taste the day's efforts. Seldom do they find it anything but a light flavored, thick mahogany colored syrup.

### Keeton is Perfectionist

Keeton is a perfectionist from the time when the first seed is planted to the final taste test. He says the best seed is Silver Tip cane as sorghum molasses made from its stalks has the mildest flavor. Some other varieties make lighter molasses, but he thinks Silver Tip is the best in the long run.

To make the best molasses Keeton strips sorghum leaves off before frost while the plants are still standing in the fields. He uses a wooden paddle to knock off the leaves. Then the cane is cut and piled on poles in the yard near the press. Stalks are never allowed to touch the ground during any part of the operations.

Keeton admits that he is a bit particular, "but it pays in better molasses," he says. A few years ago a hired man quit when Keeton told him not to let stalks touch the ground. But the man later asked to be rehired when he understood that Keeton wanted only a quality product.

On "squeezing" days the Keeton family keeps particularly busy. **Bonnie**, who is a sophomore at Ozawkie High School, stays home and helps her parents. The old dappled horse, Mike, is pressed into service to help press the juice from the sorghum stalks.

Mike pulls a 15-foot boom which rotates four cylinders that squeeze the canes of their juice when they are fed into the machine. As Mike goes 'round and 'round with the boom, juice drips thru a cloth strainer and down into a pipe that runs 20 feet to the evaporator set over a fire box.

Two-hundred gallons of juice were filtered thru the pipe in a recent nine-day run. After the juice is run into the evaporator, it takes about seven hours to boil 25 gallons. Once started with the task Keeton doesn't even stop for lunch.

The evaporator consists of metal trays separated by ridges which allow the juice to run a course over the top of the evaporator while it is being cooked. A fire box below is kept blazing with hickory and hedge logs while the juice simmers. On cold mornings a cloud of steam rises from the apparatus and emits the pleasant odor of cooking molasses.

In Keeton's 45 years of molasses making experience the year of 1951 will live in his memory as one of the worst. He says the wet weather "knocked good sorghum into a cocked hat," but he's looking forward to next year's crop with hopeful anticipation.

"We made only a small amount this year because we don't want to reduce quality," Keeton said. "Next year we may have a good crop and good molasses, too. If we do we'll be able to handle more customers. This year we had only enough to take care of the old regular customers."

Keeton has tried several times to quit the molasses business that he handles on his Jefferson County hillside farm. But he says he seems to be drawn back into it when he runs out of his own personal brand of syrup.

He has two presses, one of which he has owned three different times. Each time he sold the press he vowed he would discontinue molasses making.

"That's why I've owned that press three times and have it now," Keeton said. "I just can't eat molasses containing leaves, dirt, and stuff. And I know what we make is all right."

## Harvest Home, Winchester, 1887

From the *Winchester Argus*, Aug. 4, 1887

We attended the joint Farmer's Club Harvest Home Picnic, last Thursday, and were well entertained. The literary program was a feast of good things for the mind. The social part of the business was well carried out, each one trying his best to make every other person happy. The base ball boys — Winchester and Crooked Creek clubs — had a very interesting game, of course, however, the Winchester boys carried off the pennant. **W.I. McCrea** makes a good presiding officer, and **Stiers**, as a secretary is all right of course. These Harvest Home picnics are a good thing. A gentleman was present working up the interests of the *Kansas Farmer*; he made a speech, told the dear people that he was raised a farmer and they ought to subscribe for his paper. This reminded us of a similar occasion when a public man addressed a crowd of farmers, told them he was raised between two rows of corn, and a wag in the audience yelled out, "squash, by gosh!"



## The Fate of Little Nettie Busbee

As told by **Mabel Shereman**, Cherokee Lodge, Oskaloosa, to **Fern Vanderpool** in 1983 (reprinted from *Yesteryears*, April 1989)

Nestled in a valley in Jefferson County, Kansas, stood the little village of Ozawkie. It was settled in the year 1854. It was located not far from where Little Slough Creek emptied into the Delaware River.

Near this fork stood a little log cabin in which **Balaam Busbee** and his wife **Catherine** lived during the 1850s and 1860s. They had one son and four daughters. Their youngest child was two and a half years of age, named **Nettie Busbee**.

It was Sunday afternoon and not much entertainment for young folks, so they had to make their own entertainment. It was customary in those days for several families of young folks to meet at somebody's home on Sunday afternoons to play games, such as Blackman, Dare Base, Horseshoe pitching and Hide-and-Seek, etc.

This Sunday afternoon was the day to meet at the Busbee home. The game of hide-and-seek was decided upon. This was a great place to hide because the valley was covered with tall native prairie grass and tall slough grass. This time of the year the grass was tall and dry.

Two boys were chosen to be "It" so they had to hide their eyes while all others ran and hid. This tall grass was a perfect place for hiding, so all ran up the valley a short distance, scattered apart, and hid.

Little Nettie saw others running and hiding and squatting down in the grass. She was at the "tag-along" stage, yet not big enough to be noticed or wanted by older children at a time like this. She followed the larger young folks a little ways, then squatted down like the others, but was alone.

The grass was so high, and the hidden folks spread apart, so it was hard to find them. After seeking a long time the two boys "gave up." One boy took a match from his pocket, lighted it, and threw it into the dry grass and remarked, "This will bring 'em out!"

The wind most always blows from the southwest to the northeast, which made a draft up the valley. This fanned the blaze which caused the flame to be like a "fiery furnace." The big folks saw the fire coming, so were able to save themselves by running from it.

Soon all the young folks collected again back at the cabin. Somebody asked, "Where is Nettie?"

One adult said, "I saw her following the young folks, but none of the young folks saw her!"

Everybody decided she must be up the valley, but couldn't be very far. Nettie's father, **Mr. Busbee**, and a neighbor man, **Mr. Dix**, got on horses to look for her. They found her little body squatted down and burned to death. They took little Nettie to the house while Mr. Busbee and Mr. Dix went to the stable and made a coffin for her. They took her on horseback to the closest burial ground which was on a little knoll east of the Delaware River close to Ozawkie. Some Indians were buried here long ago. Some pioneers who were traveling west and died from cholera were buried here also. Mr. Busbee and Mr. Dix dug her little grave among people they did not know, but all are resting peacefully together.

*Little Nettie Busbee died very young, but she will always be remembered in the hearts of persons who hear, or read, the story of "The Fate of Little Nettie Busbee," as told by her niece Mrs. Mabel Shereman.*

## Meriden Items, 1876

From the Valley Falls *New Era*, Mar. 25, 1876  
Snow.

Is thawing.

Mud will soon reign supreme.

And the spring time is coming forth, Annie.

Wheat around Meriden looks exceedingly well.

Send us a No. 1 blacksmith.

A neighbor subscribed for the New Era the other day.  
Result — next day a boy. Weight 9 lbs.

Moral — If you want to receive boys take the New Era.  
It is a never failing remedy.

**A. Richards** ships 3 cars of cattle this evening.

At last Meriden has a tiptop pair of stock scales. Agent **Morris**, weighmaster.

**Peterson** has bought over 400 cords of wood since December.

School commences in District 24 the first Monday in April.

Our neighbor, **N. Girt**, has hung out his sign as a surgeon. He performed a delicate but successful operation on Miss S. Pigg a few weeks ago.

And now the boys mourn the untimely decease of Mr. **W.J. Taylor** who departed the life of Bachelorhood a few days ago; the successful lady was Miss **Alice Seal**.

**Jeremiah Howland Bennet's column**, published July 6, 1878, in the Oskaloosa *Independent* covers the earliest of Jefferson County's public, or "common," schools. Although private schools paid for by patrons had been operating in the county, Kansas Territory in 1858 was building its school system free to the public and supported by taxes.

### **Original Sketch**

[Written for the *Independent*.]

## **EARLY RECOLLECTIONS OF KANSAS**

By J.H. Bennet.

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### **SCHOOLS**

It is not my purpose to give any history of the educational matters of Jefferson County, but only my early recollections of the school districts, school houses, and school meetings, when the enterprise was public, and for and by a whole community. The names of the first teachers of private schools, the location and description of their school rooms, and the number and names of their scholars, will be the subject of an as-yet unwritten chapter in the History of Jefferson County, which will be interesting and useful. No pains or expense on my part will be spared to obtain the material for such a chapter, within a very near future.

As early as the year 1858 I gave the subject of common schools some little attention, but the oppression of the hard times was too great for the public to become in any way interested, and it was the following February before the first attempt was made to form a school district under the law. My name was remembered by a few persons in the Townships of Jefferson and Grasshopper Falls at the October election, and I received an official notice of my election; but I did not qualify, for the reason that the public seemed to take so little interest in the matter. In January, 1859, I received a half dozen applications for the formation of school districts, and I applied for and received the appointment of "County Superintendent of Public Instruction," from the County Board. This appointment is lost, and I have searched in vain through the County record for any minute thereof. I find a bond, though, and oath of office; the securities are **Thos. A. Blake, Philip Allen**, and **John W. Holding**; and the amount ten thousand dollars. The Superintendent seems then to have had the control of all the school money. The law of A.D. 1858 was evidently the groundwork of our present law, but was very crude in many of its provisions, and in some wholly inapplicable.

The initiation of public schools in this County is due to one **Jesse B. Taylor**. Let his name be remembered. He then lived in a cabin on the N.W. quarter of (sections) 12, 8, 18 near the Methodist camp meeting ground, at Hart's Grove. He had one scholar, a little girl of the age of five years. He was importunate in his urging that I should get this appointment; nearly driving me to it; he marked and discussed boundaries, till you couldn't rest, came many times to Grasshopper Falls, where I then lived, and finally brought in triumph a plat of his proposed district, the number and location of the dwellings of the scholars, the location of the new school house, and a petition numerously signed. These papers are before me now, and are wonders of literature and art. No mere description in words, can do justice to that plot. The petition is very worthy of being printed, and is invaluable for its autographs, if for nothing else. It is as follows:

### **Rothchilds District**

"We the undersigned sitisons of Rothchilds District do pray the honerable county school commissioner of Jefferson County and Territory of Kansas, to grant a school district as follows commenc at the N.E. corner of the N.E. qr of Sec No 5 of Township No 8 of Range No 19 thence West on the Township line to the North West corner of the N.E. qr of section No two of Township No 8 of range No 18 thence South on the line to the South west corner of the S.E. qr of section No 4 of Township No 8 of Range No 18 thence East to the S.E. corner of the S.W. qr of Section 17 of Township No 8 of Range No 19 thence to the place of Beginning. Feb. 16<sup>th</sup> AD 1859."

**J.B. Taylor, John W. Welch, Hiram Webb, Josephus Goble, D. Webb, M.N. Hart, B. Freeze, F.P. Hart, M. Schiffbauer, Mary A. Goddard, Mrs. Rhoda Akers.**

How vividly these readings bring back to me the appearance of that country as it then was. The "upper" **Hart**, the "middle" **Hart**, the "lower" **Hart**, **Jesse Taylor**, and **Michael Schiffbauer**, and I guess **George Layton**, ----- had only the poorest of poor log cabins. **Hiram Webb** had a small unfinished frame house, without a tree in miles of him; he lived, too, just on the frontier of civilization; to the West and North and Northeast of him there was literally nothing for the eye to rest on except the sere and blackened prairie; they all had small fields; some had small outhouses. How few of them remain now in the neighborhood or in the county. **Mrs. Goddard** is not far off. The **Harts** are still there, wealthy men, and in the centre of a wealthy settlement. **Hiram Webb** is still there, happy in a glorious old homestead, with every convenience of fruit, timber, orchards, fencing, barns, out buildings, — yes, even an artificial fish pond.

That was School District No. 1 then and it is School District No. 1, now. The "Rothchilds" part of it soon dropped out. It had 17 scholars then; it has 53 now. It was established Feb. 21, A.D. 1859; it now expends five hundred dollars per year for school purposes. **Miss E.A. Webb**, "a qualified teacher," taught in that District for three months during that summer, at ten dollars per month and closed before August 31; and I venture to say that she received the first certificate ever issued in this county, taught the first public school, and handled the first public money ever expended. Jefferson Township as a municipal corporation, paid to Dist. No. 1, that year the sum of (\$53) fifty-three dollars, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of Aug. A.D. 1858, as shown by the Annual Report of the District Clerk now on file in the office of the Co. Supt.

No. 1 has probably been as prosperous a district as any in the State. It has never been without a school. It has always had a little money ahead. It has always paid its teachers. It has never issued any bonds. It has never been in debt. It has always had a School House. It may not have had any ephemeral newspaper name of "View," or "Mound," or "Grove," or "Ridge," but its scholars have grown into teachers whose names will be remembered lovingly for years and years. Witness in the last few years the names of **Mary Webb**, **S.C. Hart**, **Nellie Kern**, **Emma Mahan** and **Luella Hart**.

The first meeting in this District was held at the house of **M.N. Hart**, on Wednesday, March 9, A.D. 1859. This meeting was held in the evening. I suppose I was not there, as I never charged anything for going. I drew the notices for the meeting, saw to their posting and to the preservation of the proof of their posting, and drew the entry to be made by the School District clerk; and in fact made it my business to know the record was correct. The officers elected were **M.N. Hart, Director**; **J.B. Taylor, Treasurer**; and **Hiram Webb, Clerk**. And I felt then and still feel rather proud of the part I had in the organization, and an interest in those young teachers of later years, that I should not otherwise feel.

District No. 2, the next one by me organized, is now District No. 11. The application is not as queer as the other one; but is certainly worthy of notice as a relic. The leading man is **Jesse Ball**; and I would like to say here, that upon the occasion of the murder of **Berry Price** I wrote a history of Jesse Ball's doings in Jefferson County, which I will some day publish; and while his connection with this school is of importance, the part he took in the Berry Price murder is rather thrilling.

The petition for the establishment of District No. 2, now Dist. No. 11, is as follows:

"February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1859. To the County School Superintendent of Jefferson County. We the undersigned Electors of Jefferson Township residing within the Contemplated District Below Described do Petition the County Superintendent of Said County to Establish for the undersigned Petitioners A School District Bounded as herein described to wit Embracing Sections 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, Town Eight, Range 19, of the Delaware Trust Lands K.T."

**Jesse Ball, Isaac Carver, B.F. Lillie, T.W. Marshall, Cary Hinchman, Simeon Hull, Richard Hull, A Shaw, Alpha Simmons, Lewis Brandshaw, William H. Haskell, Enoc Stukesberry, D.M. Beasore, David Gentry, Levi D. Smith, John Bradshaw, F.S. Penny, Simpson Connor, F.A. Crobarger.**



Upon the back of the application was the following note.

**“Mr. Bennet** Dear Sir—Please to attend to our Petition at the Earliest practicable Period and you will much oblige your petitioner. **Jesse Ball.**”

This petition was filed March 1, 1859, and is yet in the Superintendent’s office. It is a valuable paper for the historian of Jefferson County and for its autographs. It is nearly twenty years old, but every mark on it is as plain and bright as when first written. It is nearly certain that every name is a genuine signature. Most of them are familiar to me.

The signers are scattered somewhat, though perhaps not as much as those in No. 1. **Jesse Ball** moved out of the State early. **Haskell, Beasore, Tom Marshall, Gentry, Sim Hull, Simmons** and **Berry Crobarger** live there still. Old **Enoch Stukesberry, Frank Lillie, Dick Hull** and **Lewis Bradshaw** have gone to their long home. **Carver, Smith, Penny,** and **Connor** have somehow dropped out of my remembrance. **Hinchman** lives in Winchester and has homesteaded the office of Justice of the Peace. **John Bradshaw** was Supt. Of Public Instruction in Leavenworth Co., the last I knew of him. **Shaw** lives on a little farm near Fort Scott.

The first school meeting held in this District was at **Frank Lillies’** house, on Monday, Mar. 21, 1859. I was there, and know that it was harmonious. I took the same care that the record should be properly made that I did in No. 1. The officers elected were **Lewis Bradshaw, Director; Thos. W Marshall, Treasurer;** and **Jesse Ball, Clerk.** They filed their written acceptance of their offices “March 22d Common Era, 1859.” Their school house was commenced almost immediately, but I don’t know which was finished first, this one, or the one over by Hart’s grove.

Things did not “gee” pleasantly in this District. They got into a lawsuit with the contractor who built their house. **Jesse Ball** was sure he knew more law than I did, and he set his head to beat me. In the end the house was burned; supposed to be done by an incendiary. It was situated on the center of 11, 8, 9; one-half of the ground was donated by **Tom Marshall,** and the other half by **Frank Lillie.** In the meantime there was some by-play that is worthy of notice. June 5, 1859, **Jesse Ball** informed me that the change I had made in their district boundaries did not meet with the approbation of the Dist. Officers; and furthermore that they would not consent to *any* change in “their Deestrick.” This row cost me much study and much anxiety, but I eventually settled it without any law suit.

Their annual report filed Sept. 1, 1859, made a splendid showing. They had 66 scholars. They had three months school that summer, taught by **Dr. D.L. Griffin,** at 37 dollars a month. They received from the township \$233.31 to pay teachers. They expended \$480.00 on their school house, and had on hand \$122.00 and had coming to them \$133.00, and owed \$172.00. They have never been much better off since, than they were that first year.

I established ten more districts that year. My entire bill paid by the County was \$113.40, and I sold the scrip to **John Beland** of Grasshopper at 40 cts. on the dollar.

Let the teachers and students of Jefferson County take up this history of school districts and school houses, where I have left it, or from the beginning, and see if they can obtain the “early recollections” necessary for its continuance.