

History of Meriden, Kansas and Surrounding Areas

An outline of the people and events leading to the founding of Meriden, Rock Creek, and surrounding areas.

Information gathered, researched, and compiled by Gary Bowen, local historian.

The Jefferson County Historical Society would like to thank Mr. Bowen for sharing his work to be included on the JCHS website.

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1. Indian Territory before Meriden

Kansas Historical Society Topeka, Ks.

In 1829, the Delawares were the first Indians to sign a treaty giving them land in what was to become Kansas. After 1830, nearly 30 tribes were given land in the areas. Among these tribes were the Cherokee, Chippewa, Delaware, Iowa, Iroquois, Kaskaskia, Kickapoo, Munsee, Ottawa, Peoria, Piankashaw, Potawatomi, Quapaw, Sac and Fox, Shawnee, Stockbridge, Wea, and Wyandot. Although these emigrant tribes were assured by the federal government that they would not be moved again, Kansas Territory opened for settlement in 1854 and once again forced the removal of native peoples. Many settlers moved into Kansas Territory after the Civil War, accelerating the movement of Indians off the land.

2. California Trail Goes Through Meriden

Ft Leavenworth to California Trail

In May 1846 Governor Edwards of Missouri requested Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan mark a trail from Liberty, Mo. to California.

The Meriden Ledger, Jan. 16, 1897

In 1846 Doniphan marched from Ft. Leavenworth to Santa Fe and on to California, making a trail which became permanent and much traveled by gold seekers a few years later. It ran west from Leavenworth through the later towns of Easton, Osawkie, and Meriden, striking the river bottom near Topeka, thence west to Ft. Riley and on to Denver and Santa Fe.

Long lines of wagons moved continuously with supplies for the west. On the "Old Military Road," as it was commonly known in this section, there was seldom a time when from any point of view a train was not in sight; and a wagon train then was as much an object of interest as a railway train is today. The Rock Creek crossing was long a favorite camping place. The bottom north of the creek now the fields of Lonnerberg (now Bob Bowser) and Chacey (now Bill Bickel), afforded rich pasture for the herd and the other requisites of a camp, wood and water, were at hand.

The first settler near the ford was Wm. Wade who came to Kansas in 1854 and took up three quarters of land, the Taylor quarter and those adjoining it on the east and north. He built a log house just below the grove opposite the Boydston place and fenced the bottom in a field extending from the creek to the road, which came down the hill by Chacey's house. During the border warfare, Mr. Wade kept his valuable goods secreted in the woods, and for his vegetable and supplies constructed a cave the existence of which was unknown to all save his own family.

During the fifties cholera was abroad in the west. Cholera, Indians, desperadoes, and the wild, bounding, joyful life of the west made funerals frequent. Before the over-land trails were abandoned they became long lines of graves. When a man died he was wrapped in a blanket and hastily buried in a shallow grave beside the way, and the train went on. There is hardly a mile of trails from Westport to Santa Fe, from Leavenworth to Denver, and from Council Bluffs to Laramie that has not its grave. In the bottom northwest of the Rock Creek Ford eight were buried. A few yards east of the present road, in the bank of the ravine south of the Taylor house two were buried, and it is said that afterwards rains washed away the earth so that the bones of their feet stuck out of the bank.

The old road came through what is now Meriden, and seventeen soldiers were buried just east of where Joe Rodgers built his house. For years a sunken spot marked their sepulchre. A number of others are supposed to have been buried in the south part of the townsite.

In 1857, Wade built a new house near where the present Taylor house stands. It was one of those picturesque double log houses with an open porch between the two parts, a house of the olden time, still seen the South but no longer here. The same year Wm. Dix with a large family came out from Indiana and bought out Wade.

In 1859 a line of stages was started over the road and the Taylor place became a stage station. To accommodate the stage stock he built a large barn which is yet standing. Stages continued to run and the Taylor station continued a lively place until the Santa Fe Railroad was finished in 1872. The freighter's wagon, the bull team, the Concord coach, and all the inconvenience and pleasure of overland travel were banished to more remote regions.

The old log house crumbled to ruins, an iron bridge left the rocky ford unused, the old settlers have all moved away or gone to another farther new country, and the farms have passed into other hands. In a tangle of brush and vines on a little bluff southeast of the old crossing lie a number of fallen grave stones, old fashioned, flat, weather stained with inscriptions almost illegible.

Note: (The Dix cemetery is located on the Meriden Threshers Association grounds.)

3. Meriden Land Sold At The Ozawkie Land Sale

Fifty Million Acres By Paul Wallace Gates

348,810 acres of the Delaware trust lands in the western portion of the reserve, were offered at Ozawkie on July 15, 1857.

There was a large crowd there at the land sales, more than could be accommodated in the houses, hence many had to resort to tents. A company of dragoons were stationed there to protect the money arising from the sales. A motley crew was present, consisting of the honest squatters, speculators, sharpers, traders, etc., who were there on legitimate business. Then there were a large number of horse thieves, who tried their hand quite extensively. There were not a few gamblers present, with their banks, sweat clothes, chuck-a-luck, and other games spread out to view. According to the Elwood Advertiser between 75 and 110 tents were set up to provide accommodations for the crowds that came to Ozawkie. They were occupied by the most illfavored gang of gamblers and horse thieves, on whom it was ever our fortune to look. Dr. Norman Eddy, commissioner to conduct the sales at Ozawkie, warned his superiors of the the various larcenies daily committed here, the Assemblage of Gamblers and other disreputable characters at this point... and expressed fear that the government receipts might be in danger. Eddy himself was accused of favoring Border Ruffians in cases where more than one person claimed the right to buy the same quarter-section.

At the Ozawkie sales, as at Leavenworth and Iowa Point, claim associations functioned to protect the squatters, money lenders, and speculators, and there was little competition.⁴

4. Rock Creek Township

William G. Cutler's History of the State of Kansas JEFFERSON COUNTY, Part 20

This township is situated in the western part of the county, and in agricultural resources is one of the wealthiest. The first settlement was made in the fall of 1854, Wm. Wade having selected a claim at that time. He did not locate permanently, however, until the next year.

In January, 1855, a party composed of Aaron Cook, Geo. Cook, A. Pearsall, and James Dempsey, of Black Hawk County, Iowa, arrived, and followed up the military road west of Osawkie to Rock Creek, where Wm. Wade had selected his claim. From there they went up the creek one mile, and here Dempsey located a claim. The others located claims in the neighborhood.

For the first few years the settlement of the township was rather slow, as compared with other parts of the county, and most of it was on Muddy and Rock Creeks. The first marriage in the township was that of Peter Stuart and Miss Dunn, in 1856.

The first business house, was a grocery and whisky store, by Shield & Chubb, at Mount Florence, in 1856. That place was a station on the old military freight road, and situated one and one-half miles southwest of the present town of Meriden, and was laid out as a town site. It never grew to be a village of more than a half-dozen houses, and the site was afterwards abandoned. The site of Mount Florence is now owned and occupied by Henry Chubb, as a farm. He was the original proprietor of the town site.

The first postoffice in the township was established on Mount Florence in 1857, and D. D. Shields was appointed Postmaster.

The first school district was formed in 1859, a schoolhouse erected, and a school taught, the same year, by Miss Elizabeth King, who was afterward Mrs. Turner, and since deceased.

5. Mount Florence

Early Settlers Move Mount Florence To Meriden, Rock Creek Township

History Of The State Of Kansas by A. T. Andreas 1883

The first business house, was a grocery and whiskey store, by Shields & Chubb, at Mount Florence, in 1856. That place was a station on the old military freight road, and situated one and one half miles southwest of the present town of Meriden, and was laid out as a town site. It never grew to be a village of more than a half dozen houses, and the site was afterwards abandoned. The site of Mount Florence is now owned and occupied by Henry Chubb, as a farm. He was the original proprietor of the town site.

The first post office in the township was established at Mount Florence in 1857, and C. D. Shields was appointed Postmaster. The first school district was formed in 1859, a school house erected, and a school taught, the same year, By Miss Elizabeth King, who was afterward Mrs. Turner, and since deceased.

Meriden Ledger, Pictorial and Historical Edition 1895

The first settlement in this locality was made one and a half miles southwest of the present location of Meriden and known as Mt. Florence by Henry Chubb, in 1854, and the site is now occupied by the farm residences of Mrs. J. R. Trimble and L. D. Ruty, that once was a station on the old military freight road between Ft. Leavenworth and Ft. Riley. The first business house established there was a grocery by C. D. Shields and Henry Chubb. Mr. Shields was appointed the first postmaster, the office being established in 1857.

W. F. Cunningham, a well known farmer, having lived here since he was eight years old, and who now resides one mile east of Meriden was a resident of Mt. Florence and boarded the road graders. He had the contract of carrying the mail from Mt. Florence to Rock Creek station and as soon as the road was completed in May, 1872, he built the first house just west of the track, into which he moved the Mt. Florence post office, having succeeded Dr. A. Dawson as postmaster. This is now the north portion of Uncle David Tripps residence. It is 12 x 14 feet and in it Mr. Cunningham lived with his family, kept the post office and a grocery store. The remaining inhabitants of Mt. Florence soon moved over to the new town on the railroad site, and Meriden began to grow into a city.

Meriden Tribune 11 and 18 May 1894

Mr. George Hensley was starting out to get his cultivator shovels brightened up a little to do some work, he had two horses hitched up, one was four or five years old, the other twenty-five, quite a difference in their ages. Mr. Hensleys place used to be known as Mt. Florence, being on the Government trail, and has been the place of some early day historic events.

The soldiers coming from the west and on their way to Fort Leavenworth, have camped there many a time and making a two weeks stay at several different times, waiting for orders. A tavern was kept there and after the soldiers would get gloriously full they would go out north of where Mr. Hensleys house is, where there was a race track and watch or bet on a horse race. At this time the country was very thinly settled.

Mt. Florence is a different place now, although a part of the old tavern is still standing; after a good many years of labor Mr. Hensley now has a fine home with most beautiful surroundings.

7. Cooks Ford: A ghost town in Rock Creek Township



Photo from Bob Cook collection, Meriden, Ks.

Aaron and Lydia Cook



Map of Kansas 1870 by Rufus Blanchard

Oskaloosa Independent, July 29, 1865

A new post office has been established in Rock Creek township, this County, named Cook's Ford, and H. G. Turner, Esq. appointed post master.

*Lesser Known or Extinct Towns of Kansas Vol. 4
Cas-Coo, Kansas State Historical Society,
Topeka, Ks.*

Cook's Ford, Jefferson County Location 18 m. from Perry, on Rock Creek.

Sect. 36 Twp. 9. R. 17.

P. O. 1865 H. G. Turner, P. M. Changed to Rock Creek, Dec. 1872.

Also called Cook's Fork. Named for Aaron Cook, settler on Rock Creek, January 1855.

(History Of The State Of Kansas by A. T. Andreas 1883)

This township is situated in the western part of Jefferson county and in agricultural re-sources is one of the wealthiest. The first settlement was made in the fall of 1854, Wm. Wade having selected a claim at that time. He did not locate permanently, however, until the next year. In January, 1855, a party composed of Aaron Cook, Geo. Cook, A. Pearsall, and James Dempsey, of Black Hawk County, Iowa, arrived, and followed up the military road west of Osawkie to Rock Creek, where Wm. Wade had selected his claim. From there they went up the creek one mile, and here Dempsey located a claim. The others located claims in the neighborhood.

Grasshopper Falls Jeffersonian, 19 August 1863

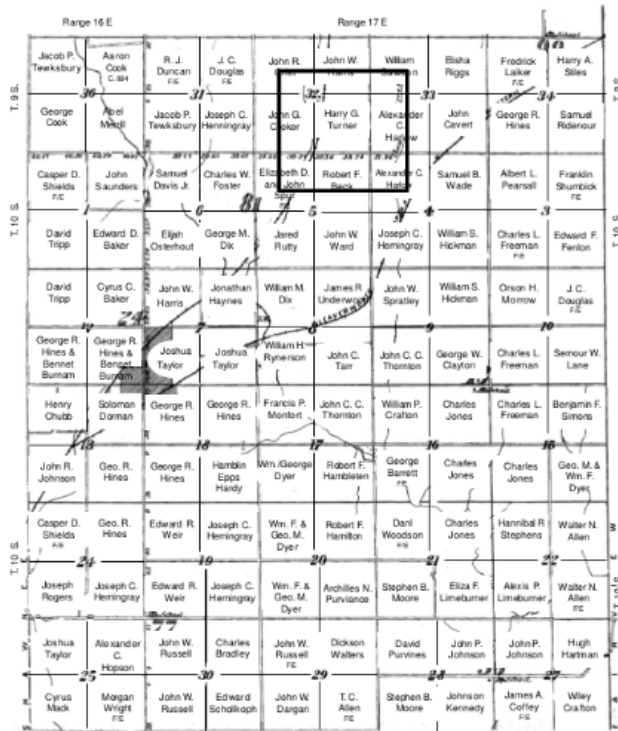
Mr. Editor: I had occasion a short time since to exchange with Bro. H., of Grasshopper Falls--started from Topeka Saturday afternoon; forded the Kansas river; stopped awhile at Rochester, four miles from Topeka. At Rochester there is a small congregational church organized. They have secured a lot, of six acres, beautifully situated for a parsonage, and expect to break and fence it this summer. This church has a Sab-bath School of about forty. The next place I came to, was Mount Florence, ten miles from Topeka. This place consists of a hotel, dwelling, grocery, and stable. The site is beautiful, however, and when Kansas develops, this will probably be a village. Three miles brought us to Rock Creek. Along this creek there is quite a settlement. There are two Congregational families, and this would be an interesting place to supply occasionally. One family, and sometimes both, go twelve miles to meeting, at Grasshopper Falls, that being the nearest place where regular services are held each Sabbath. Rock Creek is a clear stream and there is a good farming country along its banks. From Rock Creek to Grasshopper Falls, is a stretch of prairie, twelve miles long a beautiful ridge. For six or eight miles, you see no house and the only relief is the roll of the prairie and the sky above.

8. Turners Station: A Ghost Town in Rock Creek Township

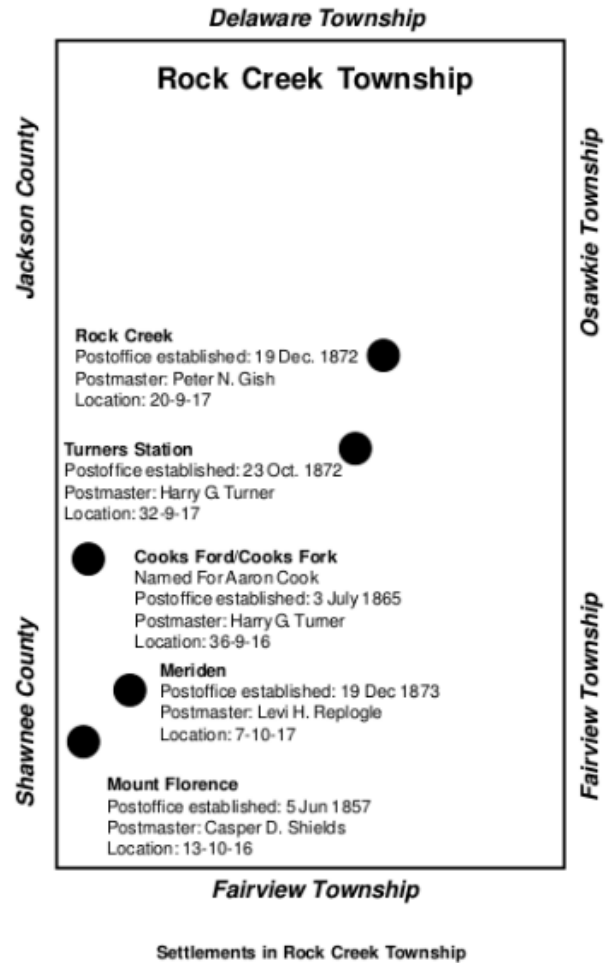
*Lesser Known or Extinct Towns of Kansas Vol. 18
Sum-Ura, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.*

P.O. Estab. about 1872. Harry G. Turner P.M.

P.O. Disc. week of April 19, 1873.



Rock Creek Township South Half
Patent (letters patent) Deed Owners. Deeds were purchased at the Osawkie Land



9. Meriden Resides in Rock Creek Township, Jefferson County

History of The State Of Kansas by A. T. Andreas 1883

Forming of Jefferson County

After Kansas was admitted as a State, in 1861, the first members of the legislature elected from Jefferson County were Paul. E. Havens. Azel W. Spaulding and J. M. Huber. At the time Jefferson County formed a part of the district. The first Legislature redistricted the State, making Jefferson County a single senatorial district, and divided it into three representative districts, known as the 19th, 20th, and 21st.

The 19th comprised Jefferson, Oskaloosa and Union townships; the 20th, Grasshopper Falls and Rock Creek townships, and 21st the remainder of the county. These districts remained unchanged until 1871, when the legislature changed their numbers to 16, 17th and 18th

10. Albert Owen Founder Of Meriden

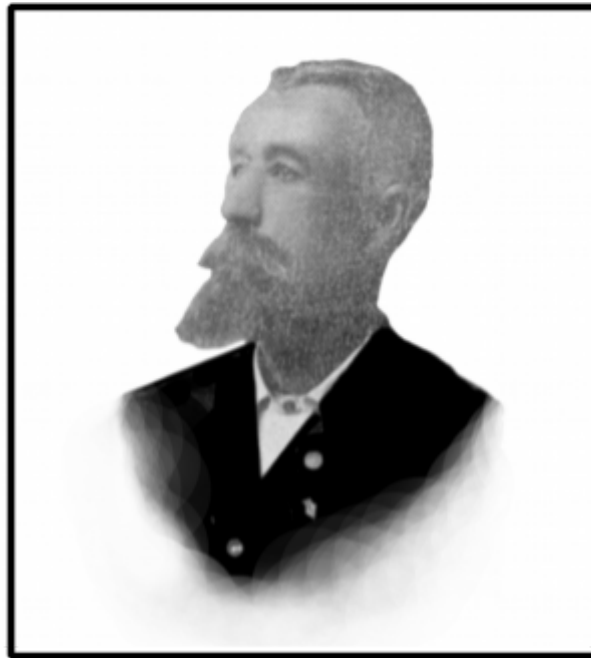


Photo and Article Taken From The Meriden Ledger 1895 Pictorial Edition

Albert Owen is a native of Jackson County, Indiana, where he was reared and educated. In September, 1861, he enlisted in Company B, 50th Indiana Volunteer Infantry and served with ability, being mustered out as captain of Company A. 52nd Indiana Volunteers. After the war he removed to Madison County, Iowa, residing there until 1868 when he came to Kansas, locating in Rock Creek Township. In 1872, he conceived the idea this would be an excellent location for a town, and assisted by N. Colby, he surveyed and platted the west half of his farm into town lots, selling the remaining eighty acres to the present owner, W.W. Peebler. Mr. Owen since located one mile south of town and has been extensively engaged in agricultural pursuits, and owns a fine farm worth \$7,000. The privilege of naming our town was granted to Mr. Colby, and in honor of his boyhood home he gave the new town the name of Meriden after Meriden, New Hampshire.

Meriden Ledger Dec. 17, 1908

Obituary

Albert Owen was born Nov. 19, 1841 in Jackson Co. Ind. and died at Oakland Kan. Dec. 8 1908, age 67 years 19 days. He was married to Nancy C. Scott August 16, 1866. He lived in Iowa one year emigrating from there to Kansas in 1868, making his home on the quarter section on which the town of Meriden is now located. The town of Meriden was platted and named in 1872. This community was his place of residence until May 1902. At the above date he located at Geroldine Texas during the last four years he has lived in Oklahoma and Kansas.

Brother Owen enlisted in C. B 52 infantry as a private later when the 50 & 52 regiments were consoli-dated he was made captain of company B. While a resident of this community he united with the G.A.R. Post 160. Comrade Owen was a soldier brave and true. He was a christian man, his active religious life dates from 1873 when he was united with the United Brethren Church. He was one of the trustees of and the largest contributor towards the building of the U. B. church in Meriden donating the three lots now owned by the church and making a larger cash contribution than any other single donor. Brother Owen was an honored citizen, an obliging neighbor, a kind father and a husband true and affectionate. He leaves the wife of his youth, the mother of his children. He leaves three sons and three daughters who will fondly cherish the memory of an indulgent father. During his last sickness he expressed a readi-ness to depart and be at rest.

Funeral services were held from the U.B. church here Thursday at 11 o'clock a.m. conducted by Rev. Hoffman of Topeka. Interment in the Meriden cemetery.

11. Oldest known photo of Meriden Main Street



photo from the LiLa Swafford Collection

Meriden Main Street looking Northwest at The Meriden State Bank located on the Northeast corner of Main and Saunders (Palmberg) St., lot #2. Writing on the building at the end of the street is "E.W. Metzger & Co." The tall man leaning against the wheel of the wagon is John McLucas implement dealer in Meriden and Rock Creek. The hay baler the two men are standing on is made of wood.

Meriden Weekly Tribune Mar 11, 1893

John McLucas is now the rushing implement man of the town, he buys grain and sells coal, he was for-merly proprietor of the hotel, but he is better suited for his present business.

Meriden Weekly Tribune March 4, 1893

John McLucas, of the Implement firm of M. West & Co. is one of the best known men in Jefferson and surrounding counties. For fifteen years he has been handling machinery and sold the first twine binder in this section of the country. Mr. McLucas was reared in Wayne County, where he was born in 1854. In 1868, he came to Kansas lived on a farm two and a half miles east of Meriden until the fall of 1890, when he took control of the American Hotel. After a year and four months in the hotel business he sold out to devote his time exclusively to his machinery trade. Mr. McLucas is a man of great energy and ability. His business increased to such an extent that last December he formed a partnership with M. West under the firm name of M. West & Company. They put in an immense stock of machinery, buggies, wagons, flour, feed, grain, and coal, and their business has amounted to \$1,000 a month. Mr. McLucas was married to Miss Delila Seal in May, 1885. They have a nice family of three children, two girls and a boy. He is member of the M. W. A.

Meriden Ledger, Nov. 14, 1896

A dancing club was organized last Saturday evening with John McLucas as president and twenty members enrolled. Shaffer's Hall has been secured for every other week during the winter. The dancing season begins next Monday night.

12. M. A. Gardner First Mayor Of Meriden

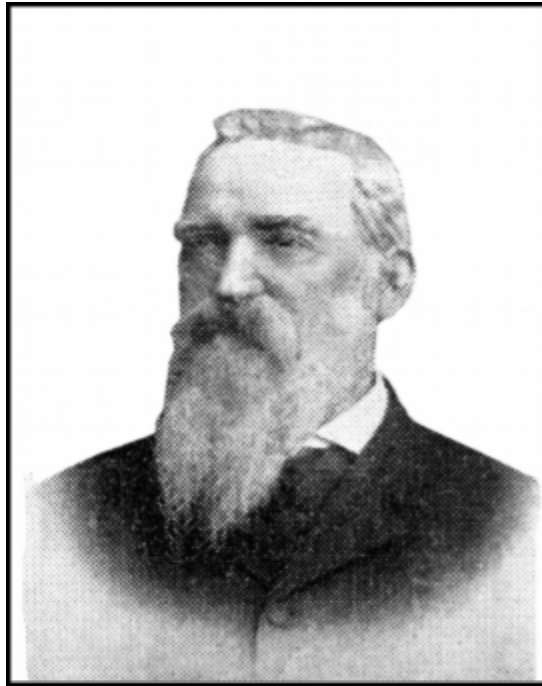


Photo and Article Taken From The Meriden Ledger 1895 Pictorial Edition

M. A. Gardner came from the Hoosier State with his wife and two sons settling on the prairies of Kansas April 6, 1878. Meriden had then a population of 76 souls, and was an open prairie country. Today it is all fenced and under fine cultivation.

On the 12th day of the same month he opened a general merchandise store and has continued in the business up to the present time. His younger son, W. A. is now associated with him and the business under judicious management increased and kept pace with the growth of the country.

Yorkshire, England, was the birth place of Mr. Gardner. He was born February 2, 1834. When about three years of age he came with his parents to the United States locating at Navarre, Ohio, where his father became engaged in the tannery business. Our pioneer merchant also learned the tanners trade and followed it for twenty five years in Ohio and Indiana. Engaging in the mercantile business when he came here his store still stands on the same corner, but the frame building has been substituted by a substantial brick and stone building, the second story being fitted and used as a public hall.

Mr. Gardner has always taken a lively interest, and manifested a public spirit in the upbuilding and prosperity of his adopted home. He has at all times contributed liberally to any charitable enterprise, and any movement that would promote the growth and welfare of our little city. He has expended more money in building and improvements than any other person in our community.

At one time he was elected justice of the peace; he served for five years as clerk of the township board, and was elected the first mayor of Meriden and re-elected for three successive terms

He superintended the laying out and planting of the Meriden Park, which will be a living, lasting, monument to his memory leaving footprints on the sand of time, that ages will not erase and coming generations will enjoy the fruits of his labor.

He is president of the board of directors of the Meriden Creamery and to his energy and untiring efforts is due the almost unparalleled and unprecedented success of the enterprise. Mr. Gardner has achieved a place in the public mind through his ability and energy that justly entitles him to full recognition in the front ranks.

13. Meriden: A Thriving Progressive Town In The Heart of The Garden State

Its History, Surroundings, and People

Meriden Report Feb. 19, 1887

Meriden contains a population of about nine hundred souls; is situated eleven miles by rail from Topeka, the capital city of the Garden State of America. Meriden has two Railroads being at the Junction of the main line of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, and the Leavenworth Topeka and Southwestern; and has a fair prospect of becoming the Eastern terminus of the great Northwestern road which is soon to be constructed by the Santa Fe Co.

The city is well laid out having streets of good width, running with the cardinal points of the compass. The surrounding country is a beautiful rolling prairie with enough timber for all practical purposes;