

# Some Ghost Towns of Kansas

by

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Conditions in the early days in Kansas were conducive to the establishment of many trading centers, each with a post office. Kansas is a prairie state. It was homesteaded on the quarter-section basis. Except for railroad land it was difficult for anyone to acquire more than a quarter-section of land. This meant that homes were far apart. Life on the Kansas prairies was a lonesome one, especially for women.

Although the French and Spanish were the first white men in the territory which is now Kansas, both failed utterly to establish colonies. French and Spanish women would not endure the lonesomeness of living outside a town or village, and there was nothing to support towns or even small trading centers until there were people on surrounding farms. But when the area became a part of the United States and was opened for settlement in 1854, people of English descent, and a few Germans, came to these prairies. Wherever the English man or the German goes, his wife goes also, and there she helps him establish a home.

However, the lot of a pioneer woman in Kansas was one of lonesomeness and hard work—and plenty of both. Students of pioneer life in Kansas are agreed that the greatest of all hardships was lonesomeness. The only contact with families and friends in the East was by mail. There was an insistent demand for post offices within the reach of all. This meant that there had to be a post office within six or seven miles of each homestead, since the only means of transportation was by farm wagon or horseback. The federal government did a good job of meeting this need. For example, an old map of Lyon County shows nineteen trading centers, each with a United States post office. The same map shows that in Elk County there were twelve such centers. And both of these are relatively small counties.

Many of these towns or trading centers were established to meet actual needs. Others were established as economic ventures. There are more than 700 such centers which have completely disappeared or of which only a few ruins remain as reminders. These centers ranged in size from very small towns where there was a blacksmith shop, a general store, a post office, and a few homes up to towns with populations of 1800 to 3500 people. A few of these ghost towns had such modern conveniences as water works, sewers, and paved streets.

For more than a quarter of a century it has been a hobby of the writer to visit the sites of these ghost towns, to search for information about them, and to dig in the ruins for articles left by former inhabitants. As a person visits these places he is reminded that here were the places where men brought their families, established homes and invested their money. It was in these places they hoped to attain business or professional success which would enable them to provide for their families. Without this hope no frontier in America would ever have been conquered. It was on these sites that after years of labor they were forced to face the fact that their labor and their investments were fruitless. They were compelled to move to some other place and begin anew. It is stimulating in this era when the chief concern of many is security, to recall that these people had so little of security but so much of self-reliance, courage and spirit of adventure.

Since it would serve no particular purpose to enumerate all these old ghost towns by name and location, the writer has attempted to divide them into six rather broad groups. One typical town from each group has then been selected for more detailed discussion. The groupings, based on the cause for growth and then decline, are as follows:

- (1) Towns which had no sound economic basis for existence,
- (2) Towns which failed to become the seat of county government,
- (3) Towns which the railroad missed,
- (4) Towns which were founded to exploit the gullible,
- (5) Towns forced out of existence by heavy bonded indebtedness.



**Manor house, barn, and cheese factory at Silkville in the 1880's. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)**

## SILKVILLE

### THE TOWN WHICH HAD NO SOUND ECONOMIC BASIS

On the Santa Fe Railroad a few miles southwest of Williamsburg, there is a flag station known as Silkville. This station is at the border of a community that was really never a town as midwestern people usually think of a town. Actually it was more like a medieval manor. But it is typical of several Kansas towns founded upon unsound economic bases.

A Frenchman by the name of Ernest V. Boissiere was the founder of this village. Mr. Boissiere was a wealthy man who seems to have had a sincere but somewhat misdirected desire to help those economically less fortunate. He acquired a modicum of information about Kansas and concluded that it was similar enough to that of the silk-producing section of France to render that industry profitable in Kansas. He seemed to have acquired information about the temperature of Kansas, but nothing regarding rainfall, markets, transportation, or other equivalent matters.



**Original manor house at Silkville, before it was remodeled. This structure was designed to accommodate 100 people. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)**

In the late 1860's, Mr. Boissiere purchased about 4000 acres of land in Franklin County. He erected a manor house large enough to accommodate one hundred people who ate at a common table. He brought to this place a library of 2500 volumes — one of the best libraries in Kansas in that day. He purchased livestock and machinery in order to carry on ex-

tensive farming activities. He planted orchards, vineyards, and berry patches. He and his associates built miles of stone fences (barb wire and woven wire fencing materials were not available then). An ice-house was erected so that ice could be cut and stored in the winter for use in the summer months. A wine press and equipment for making cheese were installed. It was Mr. Boissiere's aim to make this small community as nearly self-sustaining as possible. Most of the farm products were consumed right there; the commercial enterprise was that of silk production.

Seventy acres of Russian mulberry trees were planted to feed the silkworms. Boissiere learned later, however, that Osage orange leaves were better food for silkworms than were mulberry leaves. The first silk cocoons were produced by worms from eggs imported from California. Later, eggs were imported from China, Japan, France, and other silk-producing countries until this farm had the best grade of silk worms in existence.

The first silk was manufactured in 1870. By 1872, the looms in use had a capacity of 224 yards of silk ribbon a day. The following year machinery was installed for the manufacture of silk cloth and silk lace. The quality of all these products was excellent. Both raw silk and manufactured products from Silkville, Kansas, were exhibited at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876 and were awarded first place in competition with similar products from the whole world.



**School at Silkville, 1884. This building can still be seen from U. S. Highway 50, about four miles south from Williamsburg. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)**

Interest in silk production spread in Kansas. Legislators became so interested that they appropriated money for improvement of the industry. Out of money from these appropriations a stone building was erected at Peabody, Kansas, for experimentations in improving the quality of silk worms. Forty-six counties in Kansas had silk producing projects, and all the silk produced in the state was processed at Silkville.

In spite of its auspicious start this project failed. Undoubtedly many causes contributed but some were more important than others. The project was communistic; communism is a philosophy for the frustrated, and cannot compete with free enterprise where there are other opportunities. Land in Kansas could be obtained under the homestead law. Employment could be had in Topeka. Mr. Boissiere could not keep people (even those families that had been brought here from France) on his manor for long.

Then too, competition from the Orient was becoming stronger. The first silk was manufactured at Silkville just sixteen years after Perry sailed into the port of Tokyo and laid the foundations for trade with the Orient. The quantity of silk products brought into America increased. The transportation situation was such that it cost less to bring silk across the ocean to all major cities of America than it did to bring such products from Silkville, Kansas.



**Ruins of Boissiere's house, which had been destroyed by fire. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)**

Mr. Boissiere saw the hopelessness of the project. He deeded his project to the Odd Fellows Lodge and returned to France. When the silk in-

dustry folded up at Silkville, silk production in Kansas ceased. The manor house was partially destroyed by fire in 1916. Enough of it was saved for it to be remodeled into a substantial farm home. Some of the other buildings were converted to serve farming purposes and some have been razed.

## RAVANNA

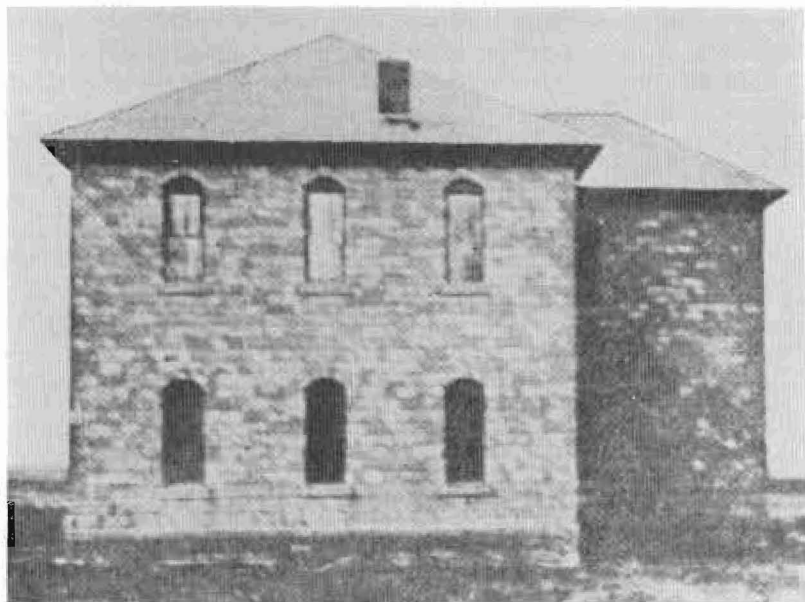
### THE TOWN THAT FAILED TO BECOME A COUNTY SEAT

County seat contests occurred in every county in Kansas. Many times the fight was bitter, and bloodshed was not uncommon. In many cases the rival towns were not far apart. The people believed that the town which won the county seat contest would survive and grow while the one which lost would decline and perhaps completely disappear. For the most part, they were right in this belief. Scores of towns did disappear after losing county seat contests. Only two towns (Richfield and Russell Springs) which have continued to be county seats have approached the ghost town status.

Ravanna may be taken as typical of towns whose decline was due to failure to become a county seat. The chief way that it differs from scores of others is that while most towns boomed for county seats had only cheap frame buildings, Ravanna had several substantial stone buildings which remained well preserved for many years. The old Eagle Hotel became a farm house. The two-story stone schoolhouse was used as a one-teacher rural school for half a century after the town was officially disorganized. The ruins of the stone courthouse may still be seen.

The town had various names in its early history but there were several residents who had come from Ohio, and they wanted it named for Ravenna, Ohio. When the town was incorporated, that name was officially adopted. However, the man who was serving as city clerk was a poor speller and he spelled the name *Ravanna* on the form that was sent to the United States Post Office Department. Hence the town remained *Ravanna* during its existence.

Eminence and Ravanna entered into competition for the county seat of Garfield County. The towns were only a few miles apart and the fight was a bitter one. The election was held on October 18, 1887. Eminence arranged for "Bat" Masterson and some of his gunmen to come from Dodge City "to keep the peace." The election was a peaceful one and the returns showed a vote of 433 for Eminence, and 467 for Ravanna. This was a margin of thirty-four votes for Ravanna.



**Stone schoolhouse in Ravanna, used for a one teacher rural school for half a century after the town was disorganized in 1893. (Courtesy of Bliss Isely and W. M. Richards, THE STORY OF KANSAS)**

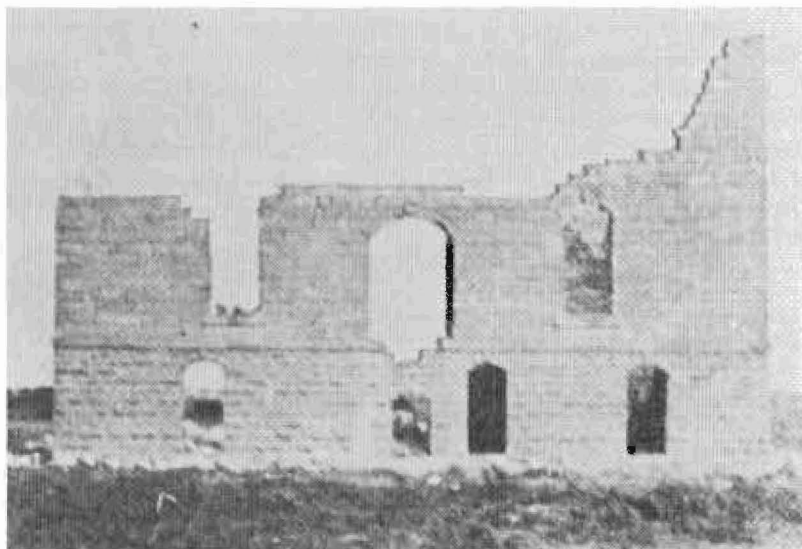
The town boomed for a while. Bonds were voted for a courthouse. Other buildings were erected with private capital. But the citizens of Eminence brought action to prove fraud in the election. After two years the court handed down its decision: forty-six fraudulent votes had been cast in favor of Ravanna. This changed a victory of thirty-four votes into a defeat of twelve votes for Ravanna. Eminence became the county seat.

However Ravanna had not given up the fight. Litigation was instituted to disorganize the count. The Kansas Constitution provided that a county could not be organized with less than 432 square miles. Garfield County was three townships wide and four long. This was twelve townships; with thirty-six square miles to the township, this would make exactly 432 square miles. But the state supreme court ordered a survey. Since township lines follow meridians which converge to the north so that there has to be a "correction line" or new base each six miles, the survey showed that Garfield County did not contain 432 square miles. Upon receiving the surveyor's report, the state supreme court ruled that "Garfield County is not and never has been a legally constituted county and the county officers of said county are not and never have been legal county officers."

The Kansas legislature annexed the territory which had been illegally organized to Finney County. Ravanna went through a losing contest with

Garden City for the county seat of Finney County. Ravanna declined rapidly after this election and was formally disorganized by action of legislature in 1893.

From the viewpoint of history and research it is fortunate that many of the ghost towns of Kansas had newspapers and that copies have been preserved by the newspaper department of the Kansas State Historical Society. The Ravanna newspaper gives a very accurate and detailed description of the severe blizzard which struck there just after midnight on January 1, 1886. This was the blizzard which precipitated the end of the open range in Kansas.



**Ruins of the courthouse at Ravanna, county seat of Garfield County.  
(Courtesy of Bliss Isely and W. M. Richards, THE STORY OF KANSAS)**

## SANTA FE

### THE TOWN THE RAILROAD MISSED

Before the days of railroad extension in Kansas each small town had its trade area. Goods were brought in by wagon and sold to the settlers within a radius of six to ten miles. Sometimes a settler would have to travel much farther to a mill to get his wheat or corn ground, but in most cases he could find a small town within a distance of ten miles.



When the westward extension of railroads began, and especially when branch lines were constructed, this situation changed rapidly. Towns which the railroad missed disappeared in great numbers. New towns were platted along the railroad. The Kansas farmer found a market for his products when they could be shipped out by rail. About forty years ago a son of a pioneer of the 1870's told of his memory of the rejoicing of the people when a railroad came into the community so that they could have a market for hogs. Prior to that time farmers had raised hogs for local use only. After the railroads came into the state, farmers would take their products to towns which were shipping points, and there they would purchase the goods which they needed.

Santa Fe, once the county seat of Haskell County, is typical of inland towns which disappeared when missed by the railroad. Haskell County was organized in 1887. On July 12 of that year Governor John Martin appointed a Board of County Commissioners and designated Santa Fe as the temporary county seat. This action precipitated a county seat contest with Ivanhoe. The election date was October 13, 1887. Santa Fe won the contest by a vote of 647 to 381 and was declared the permanent county seat.

This started a boom in Santa Fe. Soon there was a city of between 1500 and 1800 people. Some claim the town was even greater than these figures indicate. The charter for incorporation included a clause which read "population more than 350 persons and less than 2000." Whatever the actual number was, it was too great. There was nothing to support such a number of people.

By this time there were homesteaders or home owners on most quarter sections of the county. The good wheat crop of 1892 created quite a stir. Wheat in Haskell County in that year yielded as high as forty bushels to the acre on sod land. Farmers and investors went wild. Farmers went into debt for farm machinery and planted more acres to wheat. In this they were encouraged by the bankers of the town. Bonds were voted and sold to build a flour mill. The fuel for the mill was coal mined in Colorado or eastern Kansas and transported to Garden City by rail and from there to Santa Fe by horse drawn wagon.

Then came the shock. The good crop of 1892 rotted in stacks. It cost more to thresh it and haul it to market than it was worth at the market. Farmers owed so much to the bank that it went broke while \$12,000 of county money was on deposit. The county took over the bank building and thus obtained its first courthouse.

Farmers of Haskell County had demonstrated that they could raise wheat but could not afford to market it. They all felt that if they only had a railroad, this county would become a prosperous wheat producing county.

These sturdy pioneers tried in every way to get a branch railroad through Haskell County. Hopes ran high when the Dodge City and Trinidad railroad was begun. Haskell County citizens had voted bonds for this railroad. But gloom prevailed when the railroad reached Montezuma and further construction was abandoned. Soon the railroad which later became the Texas and Southwestern Railroad surveyed a line from Garden City through Santa Fe. Citizens of Haskell County again voted bonds for this project which never extended farther than the banks of the Arkansas River one mile south of Garden City. On August 15, 1907, the Garden City, Gulf and Northern Railroad Company called a meeting of the people of Haskell County for the purpose of considering railroad matters of interest to these citizens. Evidently they were impressed, for on February 24, 1910, the *Santa Fe Monitor* carried the news item that "Wednesday was a good day for Haskell County when the people decided by a magnificent vote to aid the Garden City, Gulf and Northern Railway to the extent of \$48,000 in bonds." But even this did not bring a railroad to Haskell County. One wonders how the people ever paid their bonds.



School at Santa Fe, 1904. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)

On July 12, 1912, the *Santa Fe Monitor* published the sad news that "Haskell County has a railroad -- the track extends over into Haskell County a thousand feet." This was sad news for Santa Fe because that railroad was the Santa Fe Railway Company branch from Dodge City to Elkhart, and was surveyed to pass seven miles south of the town of Santa Fe. This was a death blow to the town. Even before the first train passed over this track in October, people had begun to leave Santa Fe for Sublette and Satanta, towns which were on the railroad.

On October 30, 1920, Sublette was voted the county seat of Haskell County. In 1926, the county commissioners passed a resolution officially vacating the land where Santa Fe had stood. This was the end for the largest city that Haskell County has ever known.

Ten years after Santa Fe had been officially vacated, a brokerage firm in London, England, sent to a brokerage firm in New York for collection of some bonds which had been issued by the City of Santa Fe many years before. Since there was no longer a Santa Fe, there was no means of collecting. In this way the Western Kansas ghost town of Santa Fe made its history known in the great city of London.

## CAVE SPRINGS

### THE TOWN FOUNDED TO EXPLOIT THE GULLIBLE

On April 2, 1949, Governor Frank Carlson affixed his signature to an act of the legislature to "vacate the original Townsite of Cave Springs in Elk County, Kansas, and the streets and alleys of such townsite." This is probably the last chapter in the history of what was once a prosperous, small town founded to exploit the gullible. This town at one time had a post office, general store, grocery store, drug store, barber shop, doctor's office, and a newspaper office where a weekly paper was published, a livery stable with a pool room in the loft, a millinery store, and a hotel which boasted ten sleeping rooms and dining hall service.

This town was unusual in that it was not founded as a trade center, but as a health resort. Its name was derived from the fact that there is a large overhanging rock which formed a cave. From this cave flowed several springs. The flow of one of these springs seems to vary but little with the change of weather condition. Even during the extreme dry season of 1936 the flow of this spring was not diminished appreciably.

It was along in the late 1860's or early 1870's that a "Doctor" Long, who is remembered more for his promotional ability than for his skill as a physician and surgeon, conceived the idea of promoting a health resort at this place. Dr. Long acquired title to eighty acres of land including the cave and springs. A city plat consisting of a square of sixty-four blocks was



**(Left) The water pipe which the road workmen uncovered at the Cave Springs site still (1960) sticks out from the bank on the west side of the county road. This water pipe led from the springs to the hotel.  
(Right) Under the overhanging rock of the cave at Cave Springs, the water flows into the pool visible at lower right center (1960).**

laid out and lots were sold. Dr. Long kept blocks twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Block twenty-seven included the cave and springs; a hotel was erected on block twenty-eight.

The water from the springs was the basis for Dr. Long's promotional activities. Many claims were made for the health-giving and restorative powers of the water from these springs. Advertisements of this health resort appeared in eastern papers, and patients soon began to arrive. The hotel was filled to capacity much of the time. As the horse and carriage was the means of transportation between the town and the nearest railroad station, the livery stable did a thriving business.

When the hotel was built, construction of a water system from the springs into the hotel was included. Thus, water could be pumped from the springs to the hotel for the convenience of those who came to recover their health. The water pipe crossed under Broadway Street, which is now a part of the county highway between Fall River and Howard. About twenty years ago when the workmen were improving this road, they encountered the old water pipe extending across the road a few feet beneath the surface. At first there was some speculation as to what might have been the purpose of this pipe but the mystery was soon solved. There were people residing in this section who could tell the story of the early days of the town. This mute witness of boom days may still be seen protruding from the bank of the ditch at the side of the road.

As is so frequently true of boom projects, Cave Springs began to decline before its promoter departed. Dr. Long did not remain for any great length of time. Although there were some strong testimonials by persons who believed that their health had been greatly improved by drinking from the springs, many of the patients and a majority of the people in surrounding areas soon began to question the healing properties of the water and even the good faith of Dr. Long.

When Dr. Long realized that his bubble was about to burst, he traded his holding for three hundred acres of swamp land in Mississippi. Before he could close out all his interests, a man whose name is no longer remembered by old-timers became very ill while in the vicinity of Cave Springs. This man was driving a herd of livestock from the west to an eastern market. He was brought to Cave Springs. Dr. Long, always an opportunist, traded his Mississippi land for the herd of livestock. He disposed of his livestock, and Cave Springs saw him no more.

The town declined rapidly. The cave was used for a few years as a place for manufacture of cheese. The post office, one general store and the blacksmith remained for several years. The post office continued over into the twentieth century until rural free delivery of mail brought about its closing. The blacksmith shop continued to function until old age and finally death came to the blacksmith.



**Cave Springs' Broadway Street (now a county highway), with the old livery stable on the east side of the road. (1960).**

## ULYSSES

### A TOWN FORCED OUT OF EXISTENCE BY INDEBTEDNESS

When Ulysses, Kansas, was organized in 1885, there were two other small towns in the same vicinity. Ulysses was located and founded to become the county seat of Grant County. As soon as the town was incorporated bonds were voted for water works, a court house, and a school building. There are those who maintain that most of the money was used for

winning the county seat election. At least it does not seem plausible that the money could have been spent for the purposes for which bonds were voted. There was only one public well, a small frame court house and a very cheap frame school building to show for the bonds.

At any rate Ulysses did win the county seat election over Cincinnati. Most of the citizens of Cincinnati moved over to Ulysses. In some cases they moved not only their household goods but also their buildings as well. For a while Ulysses boomed. During the boom period the promoters disposed of their holdings and returned to Garden City.

After a short period of mushroom growth, the city began to decline. Soon there were less than forty persons residing on the townsite. There was no longer an incorporated city, so there were no city officials or city government. Moreover there was no one to sue for collection of the money due on the bonds when they became due in 1908. Neither interest nor principal was ever paid upon those bonds.

However, the bonds became due at a time when there was a revival of interest in Western Kansas. In little more than a year the population of Ulysses reached the one hundred mark. The town was again incorporated and city officials were duly elected. As soon as news of this action appeared in the newspapers, bond holders became interested in trying to collect both principal and interest on the old bonds.

The few old settlers had forgotten about the bonds and the newcomers knew nothing of them until E. F. Foote, an attorney from Hutchinson, came to Ulysses to begin action to collect. He had been serving as county attorney of Grant County, since the county had no attorney. When the mission of Foote and his associates became known, the citizens of Ulysses were irate indeed. Not only Foote and his associates but all other strangers who happened to be in town were taken prisoners and held until action could be decided upon.

A meeting of all citizens of the town was called. While no legal action had been instituted, the best advice that the citizens could get was that there was no way to prevent forcing the city council to make a levy to pay these bonds and back interest. For all practical purposes this meant bankruptcy. The citizens decided that the only solution was to take all moveable property outside of the city limits. Since all buildings were frame structures, this meant moving all the buildings except the school house and the court house.

That is exactly what was done. Homes, store buildings, a bank building, a hotel and a restaurant were moved approximately three miles across the prairie in two days time. Neither the general store nor the bank suspended business while the move was being made.

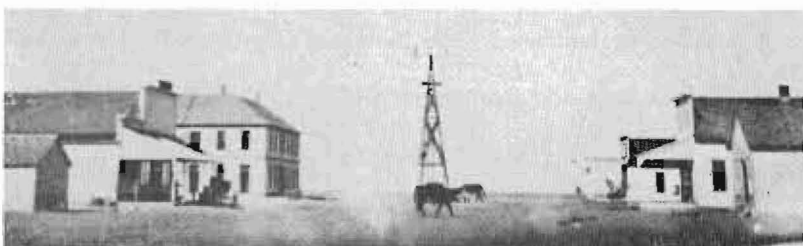
It was in this manner that Ulysses had its demise and New Ulysses its birth. Since New Ulysses could not be held for the debts of Ulysses, the new city was free from indebtedness.



**Moving the hotel building from Old Ulysses to the new site, 1908. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)**

A few months later notices were posted for a county seat election. New Ulysses won the election and became the county seat of Grant County. Within a short time the compound name was dropped; the city became known as Ulysses.

Ulysses is today one of the most prosperous towns in Kansas due to the discovery of oil and gas in that area. But just off the fine new highway in a wheat field, the foundations of the old schoolhouse and a few other remains of the original Ulysses may still be found. It is not difficult to imagine that at times the ghost of the original Ulysses rose to haunt citizens of the new city as they voted bonds for the many fine public buildings, pavements and waterworks to be found in this enterprising city.



**Main Street, New Ulysses, 1910. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)**

# GREENWOOD CITY

## BASED ON FRAUD AND MISSED BY THE RAILROAD

Greenwood City, which was located in Section 28, Township 25, Range 13 last in the Verdigris River Valley a few miles up the river from Toronto, Kansas, is a ghost city which falls into more than one category. It is a town that the railroad missed, but it was also founded upon a fraud that would have caused its disappearance or relocation even if the railroad had come through it.

It was in the late territorial days, probably in the year 1858, that John P. Mitchell appeared in this section of the country. He had a mania for possessing land. This was in the days of pre-emption and Mitchell would have had no difficulty in obtaining a clear title to 160 acres of good Verdigris Valley land. But he wanted more than that. He laid claim to several quarter sections of good river bottom land. In each case he cut four logs and laid them in position for a foundation for a cabin. He then tried to claim the land under territorial pre-emption laws. Litigation over his land claims cost Greenwood County approximately \$40,000, and resulted in his gaining title to two quarter sections of land.

It was John P. Mitchell who laid out the site and had lots platted for Greenwood City. He and his wife sold and gave deeds to 400 lots. The town grew rapidly and soon had 900 residents, which made it the second largest city in Greenwood County. It was incorporated in 1871. Mitchell was elected mayor, and this placed him in an advantageous position to promote his own interests.

One of his projects was that of bringing a railroad through Greenwood City, but this never materialized. The previous year, 1870, there had been much talk and some activity in connection with a proposed railroad known as the Fifth Standard Parallel Railroad. It was proposed that this railroad would serve at least the cities of Wichita, El Dorado, Eureka, Greenwood City, Humboldt, and Fort Scott. Nothing ever came of the railroad planning.

Twelve years later, the St. Louis, Ft. Scott and Wichita Railroad was built following practically the same route, but missing Greenwood City by four miles. This in itself would have ruined Greenwood City, but there was another cause for the town's decline which was felt before the railroad was built: The deeds were found to be worthless.

David Mitchell, a brother of John P., willed a quarter section of land to John P. Mitchell's infant son. David Mitchell died in 1868. It was this quarter that John P. platted for the town site of Greenwood City. He and his wife issued the deeds for lots on this site. Since the land had been willed to their son and there had been no action by the court to authorize the sale of any of the land, the deeds were worthless. It was several years be-



fore the facts were known. When someone took the case to court, it was ruled that all such deeds were null and void.

Here indeed was a situation to arouse passions. Not a person on the townsite could get a sound title to the land upon which his home or business was located. There was nothing the citizens could do about it but manhandle John P. Mitchell in typical pioneer fashion. It is a wonder that they did not lynch him! They rode him out of town and across the river on a rail, and forbade him to return. Mitchell was a hard man to get rid of however. He camped on the spot where the mob left him. Later he built a house there and claimed the land. After a few years of litigation over this new claim, he won his suit and got title to the land. He lived there the rest of his life.

Many interesting stories are told about happenings in this pioneer town. No doubt some of them are fiction, but some are really true. It is a well established fact that this place was the rendezvous for desperadoes of that period. Life was rough in those days. Among those coming to Greenwood City were a group of outlaws for whom the state of Texas was offering rewards. One of them, Kink West, had a price of \$10,000 on his head.

One day one of these outlaws approached a citizen of Greenwood City about organizing a Sunday school.

"Don't you shorthorns have what you call a Sunday school?"

"Yes . . . sometimes."

"Why don't you start one here?"

"You boys would try to break it up."

"Not much we wouldn't! I've talked it over with the bunch. They think it is too d--- bad there hain't no place to go on Sunday. You start it, and Kink West and I will come. We'll shoot the first man that misbehaves."

"But you must leave your six-shooters at home!"

"Can't do that! Some marshal or detective might get the drop on us."

"Well, tell the boys to come out next Sunday afternoon at three o'clock."

"No. Let's have it in the forenoon. The boys want to get drunk in the afternoon."

Well, the Sunday school was organized. The gang came. Their behavior was good. The Sunday school continued for many years after that.

The relationships of Wash Petty and the Clark family make an unusual human interest story. The Robert Clark family was the first white family to settle in the vicinity of what later became Greenwood City. They arrived in about 1858—Mr. and Mrs. Clark and their four small children. It was ten months after their arrival before Mrs. Clark saw another woman or child besides her own! She must have been a very strong, courageous woman.

The trouble between her husband and Wash Petty began at about the time of the beginning of the Civil War. A company of home guard was organized to protect this frontier community from Indians. Petty was captain and Clark a lieutenant of this company. Petty's sympathies lay with the South; Clark favored the cause of the Union. He publicly denounced Petty for conspiring with Missourians to turn the company over to the Confederacy. Their personal fight was suspended, however, when the men of the community enlisted in the army according to their individual choices. Clark enlisted in the Union Army and served for four years. Petty went to Texas.

After the Civil War was over Petty rode 800 miles on horseback to murder Robert Clark in his cabin at Greenwood City in the spring of 1866. Mrs. Clark made each of her sons promise not to try to avenge their father's murder. Each had to promise her that he would not kill Wash Petty.

John, her oldest son, searched for Petty for several years. Finally he located Petty in Texas, twelve years after the murder. John, true to his promise to his mother, did not kill Petty. He had the man arrested and brought back to Greenwood County to be tried for murder. Petty was convicted and sent to the penitentiary at Leavenworth in one of the most sensational murder trials of early Greenwood County.

Mrs. Clark learned that Petty had married in Texas and that he had left his wife and four small children in destitute circumstances because of his conviction. She circulated a petition asking that Petty be pardoned and be allowed to return to his family. This petition she presented to the Governor of Kansas. The pardon was granted, and Wash Petty was allowed to return to his family. Mrs. Clark's reason for this action was that she did not want to see another woman suffer.

## MINNEOLA

### A BOOM TOWN WHICH HAD NO SOUND BASIS FOR EXISTENCE

Minneola, a Franklin County boom town of territorial days, just barely missed becoming the permanent capital city of Kansas. When the Free State party came into control of the territorial legislature of Kansas in 1858, the capital was at Lecompton. The members of the Free State legislature did not like Lecompton, so they adjourned to Lawrence.

A scheme was evolved to build a permanent capital city in the midst of the virgin prairies. It seemed as though the plan could not fail for almost all Free State leaders, including the members of the legislature, were in on the plan. Nine quarter sections of land were purchased in what is

now Franklin County. The total cost of the land was \$3131. Only one section was laid out in town lots, and almost every member of the territorial legislature purchased one or more lots. A hotel costing \$8000 was erected, a large hall was built for the use of the legislature, and a mansion for the governor was constructed.

For a while lots sold at what were then phenomenal prices. Many buildings were built and the town had a population of several hundred persons.



(Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)

According to plans the legislature on February 10, 1858, passed a bill making Minneola the Capital of Kansas. The legislature provided for a Constitutional Convention to convene at Minneola in March of 1859. The legislature also voted to subsidize the building of railroads to make this the railroad center of Kansas. Maps of the period show railroad lines extending in all directions from Minneola, although there was not a mile of railroad in Kansas at that time. The future of Minneola seemed certain.

However, acting Governor Denver vetoed the action of the legislature making Minneola the capital. The legislature again passed the bill, this time over the governor's veto. Since Kansas was then a territory, appeal was made to the Attorney General of the United States. He ruled that the act making Minneola the capital was void, since it was a violation of the organic act under which Kansas became an organized territory. The

organic act carried a grant of money for building when a permanent capital should be selected. Lecompton had been selected as capital and the federal grant used for buildings at that place. The Attorney General's opinion was that this could not be changed by the territorial legislature.

The Constitutional Convention did convene in Minneola in March. It met in the large hall erected for the use of the legislature, with Jim Lane as chairman. Motion was made immediately to adjourn to Leavenworth. The debate lasted all day and all night—whether they should remain in Minneola or move to Leavenworth. At last the motion prevailed, and the fate of Minneola was sealed. It existed as a small center for a few years, even serving as county seat of Franklin County, but finally it was disorganized. It has become farming and grazing land.

## BUSBY

### A TOWN OF RECENT DEMISE

Somewhat unique among ghost towns of Kansas is Busby. This was never a boom town. Every building was built to serve an actual need. The people never aspired to make it a county seat. Since it was not incorporated, no bonds were voted to try to bring a railroad. It had no industries other than its blacksmith shops. At its peak there were only two general stores, two blacksmith shops, one hotel and restaurant, a post office, a church building, and a schoolhouse.

Perhaps the community area determined the character of this small town. It was located in a beautiful and fertile small valley surrounded by rather a rough country in the blackjack section of Kansas. The valley is unusual in that it has a few artesian wells, one of which is on the school grounds.

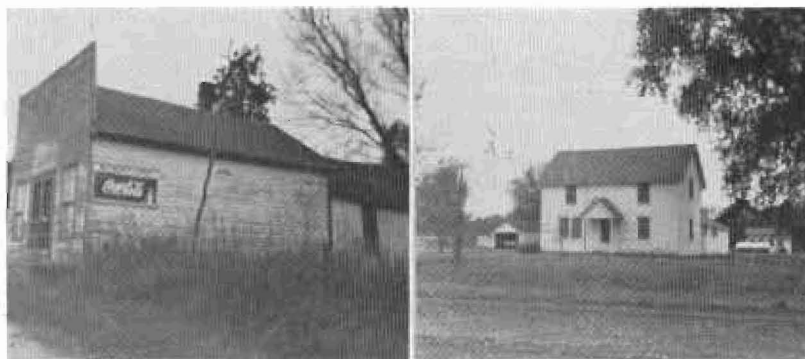
It is difficult to obtain information as to the date when the first business building was erected. The United States postal records show that a post office was established there under the name of Amy, Kansas, on March 3, 1884. The writer was unable to find the origin of this name. On January 12, 1885, the name was changed to Busby, according to records of the United States postal authorities. The origin of the name Busby is not so difficult to discover: One of the blacksmiths was named Ruben Busby, and the town was named for him.

Much of the business history of Busby is associated with the Sprague family. Perry Sprague came to this community in 1885. In 1886 he purchased one of the two general stores. In the next year he purchased the other store. This one he moved across the street and converted into a dwelling for the Sprague family.

Perry Sprague continued to operate the general store until his death. At that time his son, Warren Sprague, took over the business and carried on until September of 1959. Thus, father and son operated this business for just two years short of three quarters of a century. The rural free delivery of mail caused the closing of the post office on February 14, 1906. The post office had been in the general store, and the loss, of course, cut down the Spragues' income; however, they remained in business for fifty-three years afterward.

With the passing of Warren Sprague the business history of Busby came to an end. The store building which served for so many years now stands unused, and it is not likely that it will ever again be used for business purposes. The building looks much as it did half a century ago, with but few exceptions. A now dilapidated gasoline pump has been installed, a Coca Cola sign on the side of the building announces the addition of that drink to the stock of general merchandise, and a "hottle gas" tank indicates that at some time the method of heating has been changed. A peek through the window reveals that a change from kerosene lamps to modern lighting was made, and that the once full shelves are now empty.

The Hensley Hotel did not have as long a career as the general store. A person unfamiliar with pioneer conditions may wonder that a hotel ever existed in this place. Most small towns, however, had hotels in early days because they met a real need. Transportation by horse and buggy over unimproved roads was slow. When a traveler found himself twelve or fifteen miles from home or from a larger town, he had to have a place to get a meal or to spend the night. As roads were improved, the need for hotels in small towns decreased. The Hensley Hotel did not cease service when its commercial career ended, however. It now serves as a farm home.



(Left) General store at Busby, 1960.

(Right) The former Hensley Hotel at Busby, now remodeled into a modern farm home (1960).

The building with the longest term of continuous service at Busby is the little stone schoolhouse. In fact, it is hereby nominated for the honor of being the Kansas school building which has had the longest period of continuous usage for school and civic purposes. The school was established at an early date, but it is difficult to determine the exact year. Some say that there is a date on the front of the building, but it is covered by a more recent addition. The early school records were destroyed when the county court house at Howard was burned. Mr. Lawrence Moore, who now owns the Hensley farm, permitted the examination of the abstract of title to his farm. This document reveals that Mr. and Mrs. Hensley gave a quitclaim deed to one acre of land for school purposes. The quitclaim deed, dated 1877, reads "one acre of land on which the schoolhouse now stands." Evidently the tract of ground had been used for school purposes for several years before it was deeded to the school district.

The building has been in continuous use for school purposes. Although the outside is not unusually striking, the interior is. The room is cozy, clean, and attractive; the furniture and equipment are modern and are in excellent condition. The enrollment is not large (1960), but the pupils seem happy and industrious, and the teacher is a woman with a good personality and an excellent understanding of teaching. As one visits this classroom with seven or eight pupils, he is led to wonder if this is not a school environment superior to that found in some of the larger schools with thirty-five or more pupils in one room.

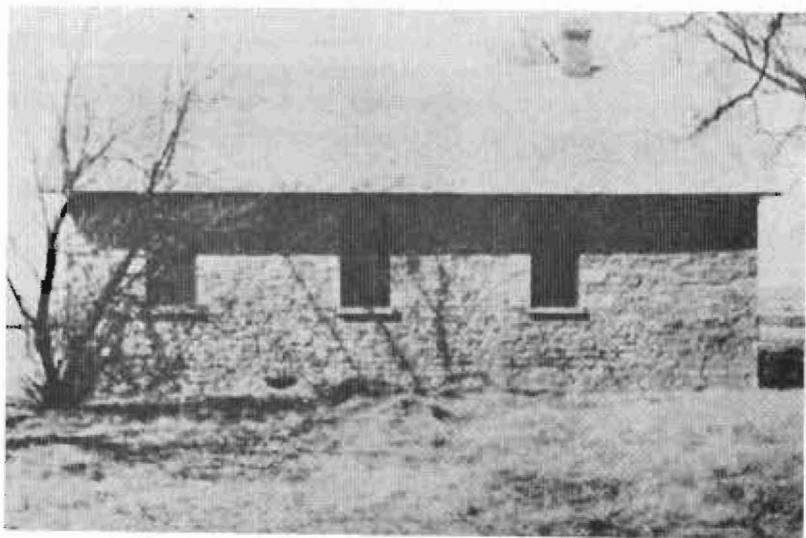
The schoolhouse has served for other activities besides formal schooling, too. At times it has been used as a meeting place for Sunday School and preaching services. It has always been used as a community center. It has served as a voting place for voters in Painterhood township from the time of U. S. Grant to John F. Kennedy. People have voted here for governors of Kansas from the times of James M. Harvey to John Anderson, Jr.

The town of Busby may no longer exist, but its school still lives on.

These are just a few of the ghost towns and their stories. There are hundreds of other such towns in Kansas. Each has an interesting history, for each tells of honest endeavor, hope, faith, of the struggle against odds, of frauds and intrigue. Each tells a story of financial losses, of blasted hopes, and for the most part, of undaunted courage.

When did all this begin and when will it end — this birth and death struggle? The first question is easier to answer than the second. The first is a matter of history, and records are still available to give us the answers. The answer to the second question is a matter of conjecture. There seems to be a universal law involved: That which serves tends to survive; that which fails to serve disappears. The institution of feudalism which dominated Europe for hundreds of years, the trade guilds of olden times, the order of nobility, the crown and coronet, the soothsayer, the medicine show — all these and more have disappeared or are rapidly going because

they lost their value of being beneficial to mankind. The stagecoach gave way to the railroad; the horse-drawn carriage to the automobile; the candle and kerosene lamp to electric lights. Even the horse, the faithful servant of man for centuries has been supplanted by new inventions. These passed not because they did not serve, but because some other could serve better. It may be that the small town has served its day. On the other hand it may be that the small town may find a way of serving better. Who knows?



**Busby schoolhouse as it looked in the 1930's. (Courtesy of Bliss Isely and W. M. Richards, THE STORY OF KANSAS)**

## Men and Hopes

*These are the stories of eight Kansas towns that no longer exist—representative of a hundred times that many. And for each of these towns there were at one time people . . . people with ambitions, with worries, with desires and dislikes, with honest intentions or dishonest. There were people who got red noses and ears in the winter cold and who sweated, complaining of the Kansas heat, and swatted flies and mosquitoes in the summer . . . people with ideals who worked hard to make them successful, and people with ideas who “worked the suckers” hard. They were all part of Kansas — temporarily then perhaps, but permanently now. The people, too, are representative of hundreds, just as their towns are representative of hundreds.*

*There was the founder of Silkville, for example. Ernest Valetou de Boissiere was quite a fellow. A wealthy aristocrat, a Frenchman by birth, Boissiere, when he was in Kansas, was described as a courtly old gentleman with a flowing beard, a fondness for music, good books, and underprivileged people, and a good head for business affairs.*

*In 1869, he initiated the experimental colony at Silkville. In 1872, he was able to make the following report to the Secretary of the Franklin County Agricultural Society, who had requested a statement of his operations:*

SILKVILLE, NEAR WILLIAMSBURG,  
FRANKLIN, CO., October 26, 1872

A. M. BLAIR, Esq.:

Dear Sir:—In compliance with your request, I report my experience in manufacturing and raising silk at this place.

I commenced the weaving of silk velvet ribbons in 1869, but with very inadequate accommodations. In the following year I erected a factory, 28 by 85 feet, one story high, with walls of stone, which gave me ample room. I have now two looms, constantly employed; one capable of turning out 112 yards of ribbon one half inch wide per day; the other, 72 yards, one inch wide. These looms employ two men and three women, and part



of the time, a young girl. I shall soon have a third loom completed and set up, for weaving ribbons 3 inches wide, which will be capable of turning out 40 yards per day.

Sales of my silk fabrics through commission men, have not met my expectations; they have contributed liberally, as I judge, to the profit of the agents, but very little to mine.

In the spring of 1870, I planted a quantity of White Mulberry seeds procured from France, for the sole purpose of rearing silk worms. They produced an abundance of trees. I have ten thousand, which have made a remarkable luxuriant growth. The past season I attempted to produce cocoons from silk worms eggs of different varieties, obtained from France, but my success was far from satisfactory. The violent thunder storms which occurred while they were growing, (in May and June) were unfavorable, but I suspect the intense heat of Kansas summers, so different from the more moderate summers of France, to be a more serious and permanent difficulty. I intend, however, to repeat the experiment next year, with eggs produced this year from these French worms, which may gradually improve as they become acclimated. I hope, also, to obtain some Japanese eggs, which I think likely to be better adapted to our Kansas climate.

Yours respectfully,  
E. V. BOISSIERE

*Within a year or two, a prospectus of the Silkville community (which was probably written by Boissiere) was circulated. In illustration of the practical nature of the old gentleman, a few points have been extracted:*

. . . The apprehension that our experiment might be greatly embarrassed by admitting the totally destitute to participate in it, compels us to say that such can not at present be received. The means applicable to our purpose, considerable as they are, might become inadequate if subjected to the burden of maintaining objects of charity; while but few could be thus relieved, even if all the means at command were devoted to that single object. Our system, if we do not misapprehend it, will, in its maturity, provide abundantly for all.

But though we insist that the first participators in our enterprise shall not be pecuniarily destitute, the amount insisted upon is not large. So much, however, as is required must be amply secured by the following cash advances:

First: rent of rooms and board paid two months in advance for each person admitted to reside on the domain . . . .

Second: each person so admitted will be required to deposit, as may be directed, the sum of one hundred dollars for himself, and an equal sum for every other person admitted with him at his request, on which interest will be allowed at the rate of six per cent. per annum. This deposit is expected to be kept unimpaired until the projectors think it may safely be dispensed with, but will be repaid, or so much thereof as is subject to no charges or offsets, whenever the person on whose account it was made withdraws from the enterprise and ceases to reside on the domain . . . .

This deposit, besides furnishing a guarantee against the destitution of the person making it, is recommended by another consideration not less important—it secures him, in case he wishes to retire from the enterprise, because he can find no satisfactory position in it, or for any other reason, against retiring empty-handed, or remaining longer than he wishes for want of means to go elsewhere.

In addition to these cash advances, each person admitted as an associate or candidate will be required to provide furniture for his room, and all other articles needed for his personal use, including, generally, the hand-tools with which he works . . . .

It is hoped and expected that the style of living, at least in the early stages of the experiment, will be frugal and inexpensive. Neatness and good taste, and even modest elegance, will be approved and encouraged; but the projectors disapprove of superfluous personal decorations, and of all expense incurred for mere show without utility, and in this sentiment they hope to be sustained by the associates. . . .

*Despite Boissiere's hopes for founding a successful communitarian colony and despite his sincere attempts to promote a new industry in this country, Silkville ran a life span of only twenty years and then died.*

*An interesting side light on the demise of Santa Fe appeared in The Sublette Monitor on December 17, 1936, under the headline "An Englishman Would Collect on Santa Fe's Bonds":*

Haskell County's former county seat, one of the Southwest's most famous ghost towns, cropped into the news again recently when an Associated Press dispatch from Topeka told of an inquiry from an Englishman concerning the status of two \$500 bonds he had held sixteen years against Santa Fe. The Englishman, W. Dobson of York, was informed the bonds were worthless. Santa Fe was officially abandoned in 1926 when the county commissioners passed an order vacating the land.

In reality the abandonment of Santa Fe, once an ambitious prairie capital of 1,800 residents, was started in 1913 when the Santa Fe built a line from Dodge City to Elkhart, missing Santa Fe by seven miles. Today there is nothing at Santa Fe as surety for the Englishman's bonds—and perhaps those of many others—excepting a few dim ruts in the wheat fields, the crumbling foundation of the old courthouse and bank building and a filling station which, like the wheat fields, is out of place in the picture of old Santa Fe.

#### Interest Paid in 1896

Dobson wrote to the state attorney general interest on the coupons of his bonds had been paid up to July 1, 1896. His bonds are 6 per cent refunding issues, dated August 23, 1890, and matured July 1, 1920. He was advised that even if Santa Fe still existed the bonds were worthless because the statute of limitations had run on them.

Santa Fe came into being in 1886 in the hopes it would become headquarters of a new county to be carved out of southern Finney County. After Haskell County was organized, Santa Fe and Ivanhoe waged a fight for the county seat, Santa Fe winning October 13, 1887, when it received 647 votes to Ivanhoe's 381.

#### Incorporated in 1888

January 2, 1888, Santa Fe was incorporated. It waxed prosperous while Ivanhoe did not long survive the disappointment of not getting the court house. Good crops and bad crops were raised, drouths attacked the prairies. The Oklahoma land openings attracted many homesteaders—and with every economic change the population of Santa Fe rose and fell. But it dreamed of that happy day when a railroad would be built through it and its future assured.

Everything depended upon a railroad. The main contact with the outside world was a treacherous, boggy road through the sandhills to Garden City. Plains was another convenient point of contact. Motor cars were rare and uncertain in Santa Fe's heyday, and the trips to Garden City and Plains were matters of days instead of hours.

#### Many Bonds Issued

As in the case of all promising, developing towns, many bonds were issued by Santa Fe. Western Kansas then was in the nation's speculative eye, and the bonds usually had ready markets in financial centers of the east and, it now develops, even found their way to England.

When a railroad finally came, in 1912, Santa Fe found itself worse off than before, because two new towns—Sublette and Satanta—sprang up on the railroad, and the first thing Santa Fe knew its buildings were being moved away to its competitors. [Santa Fe], having seen the Dodge City-Montezuma railroad go awry after the right-of-way had been graded,

placed its faith in a north-south railroad instead of an east-west line which materialized. Sublette was voted the county seat October 30, 1920. Santa Fe went the way of Ivanhoe.

### Many Other "Ghosts"

The Englishman's inquiry called up the many ghost towns of western Kansas—communities which once flourished with faith and loud talk and now have only holes that were cellars or even nothing to show they once had the makings of cities and, in some cases, sent armed boosters and hired gunmen out on the prairie trails to bring in the county records.

Practically every county has its ghosts, some with blood-splotched histories, others with calm, civic zeal that could not triumph over the dispensations of time—and the advent of railroads. There was Woodsdale in Stevens County, Veteran in Stanton, Appomatox in Grant, Cartbage and Meade Center in Meade, Springfield in Seward, Ravanna in Finney. Old Ulysses decided to move bodily for the expressed purpose of escaping a top-heavy bond issue.

*And speaking of Old Ulysses, the first column on the editorial page of the first newspaper published there certainly reveals the high hopes and high spirits of the publishers over the town and the county. From the Grant County Register ("Published Every Tuesday at Ulysses, Grant County, Kansas . . . \$1.50 Per Annum, In Advance") Tuesday, July 21, 1885:*

### OUR BOW

Here we are. For our appearance we have no apology to make. Ulysses wanted a paper, we wanted a location, and finding Grant with greater natural advantages than any un-organized county in the state, and sure to become one of the foremost, we have cast our lot here. We may be a few days or weeks, or even a few months ahead of the times—in advance of the settlement—but we are willing to wait.

The REGISTER will be neither a personal or a political organ, but devoted solely, wholly and entirely to Ulysses and Grant county. For the upbuilding and advancement of Ulysses and Grant county we offer our services, our labor, willing to cast our fortunes among a people and in a settlement that our judgment tells us will soon be one of the most prosperous, as it is now the most intelligent in the state.

Six weeks ago hardly a claim was taken in Grant county. Now there are over 500 actual settlers and they still come in swarms, and all who come locate. If the rush continues there will not be a vacant piece of land in the county.

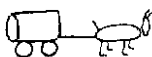
Come! Come! While there is yet time. Come and join us!

—C. D. Majors [Manager]

*As a last example of actions and reactions of people in relation to the old ghost towns, a short account of his search for Minneola by an "outsider" seems quite enlightening about the town and about people. A young man, John Conover, went on a bill-collecting trip for his employer in 1858, and reported his search for Minneola as follows:*

Even as late as '58 capitals were scattered promiscuously throughout the state. I started horseback from Leavenworth in '58 while clerking for Reisinger & Fenlon, who had a hardware store on Main street, between Shawnee and Delaware, to find the capital of Kansas. I had a note for \$97.50 for a set of chafing dishes and table appurtenances for the eating department of the new capitol, which was located on the first floor of the capitol building. The note was made and signed by Dr. J. B. Davis, Cyrus Fitz Currier, of Leavenworth; O. A. Bassett and Joel K. Goodlin, of Lawrence; E. C. K. Garvey and a lawyer by the name of Blackwell, of Topeka, but none of them had means enough to pay, at least that is what they said. The capital I was looking for was Minneola, Kan. I stopped at Lawrence over night and the next day started south. I met a farmer and his wife in a wagon at the crossing of the Wakarusa, and inquired where Minneola was. They said they had never heard of it. I rode about three miles further, met another couple in a wagon, and they stated they did not know of any town of that name. Riding three or four miles further, I met a man coming up horseback, who said he had heard some talk about the capital but did not know where it was. About three miles further on I met a carpenter riding an old mare, bareback, with blind bridle. I inquired if he knew where the new capital of Kansas was. He said: "Yes, siree." He had been working on the capitol building. "You go one and one-half miles further and you can see it about a mile off to the right." I found it. The legislature had met there one morning about a week before and adjourned that afternoon to meet at some future time at Leavenworth. I was on a collecting tour, so I rode to Topeka and then to Manhattan, and then back to Leavenworth.

*These are only a few of the many "stories" attached to each of the Kansas ghost towns. The feelings of the people, the success or failure of our Kansas towns, all have contributed to the state as it is today.*



## REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mrs. Oliver Ware, daughter of Ruben Busby, and to Mrs. George Dame, daughter of Warren Sprague, for some of the information about Busby; to Mr. Lawrence Moore for the privilege of examining the abstract of title to his land.

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