



## Solomon Valley History

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### **Parts 1 > 3 – Noble Prentis, 1878 Return To The Solomon Valley**

#### **The Weekly Commonwealth (Topeka), August 15, 1878.**

##### THE SOLOMON REVISITED

It was in the merry month of March, 1870, that a party might have been seen leaving Topeka by the Kansas Pacific Railway, their objective point being the Solomon Valley, and their object when the objective point was reached, the promotion of the building of the Solomon Valley & Republican River Railroad, a road which was to start from Solomon City, traverse the Solomon Valley, thence up the headwaters of the Republican to a point on the Denver Pacific Railway, near the town of Evans, Colorado. A magnificent scheme, and one that it was hoped at the time Congress would take to its bounteous bosom and nourish with a subsidy.

The party consisted of the Hon. John Guthrie, who in those days would cheerfully visit any point between Greenland's icy mountains and India's coral strand, to advocate the building of a railroad; Dr. W. E. Webb, then of the National Land Company, and the Romulus and Remus both of Hays City; A. V. Auter, Esq., of Topeka; Mr. Leslie, an attache of the National Land Company; a young gentleman named Parsons, from Northern Ohio; W. H. Spooner, the celebrated correspondent and indefatigable solicitor of the COMMONWEALTH; and the writer, then attached to the Daily State Record, of blessed memory "Vere ish dot party now!" Like the figures at the foot of the election returns, they come under the head of "Scattering." Dr. Webb lives in Chicago; Spooner, instead of traversing the plains and bluffs of Kansas, where "the stormy winds do blow," is "practicing at the law" in the close and heated confines of Nassau street, New York; and so it goes. The only man on whom the eight years "last past" have made no apparent impression, is Mr. Auter. That kindly and sagacious countenance in all that time has never shown "one ray the more, one shade the less." The promoters of the great artery of commerce did the "wind work" faithfully. Solomon City, Lindsey, Glasco, Beloit, then town sites, rather than towns, were visited. The settlers gathered in and speeches were made and resolutions were adopted, till one could almost hear the rumble of the locomotive as it sped up the Solomon Valley, crossed to the headwaters of the Republican, and went on with a rush to make prompt connection with the Denver Pacific "at or near Evans, Colorado."

The letters written by Spooner and "your correspondent" to the Topeka morning papers spoke in glowing terms of the beauty of the landscape. Reading those letters one can almost feel on his cheek the balmy breath of June. But it wasn't June, it was March most detestable of months. The prospect was anything but charming. Where the bottom prairie had not been burned over the rank brown grass waved and rustled; where the fire had been, miles of dreary blackness stretched away, the scorched surface broken by the white bleaching bones of the buffalo. It was cold, very cold, and then the wind, great and mighty Boreas, how it did blow! Grass, rosin weed, buffalo bones, ashes, that was the prospect. As to houses, they were scarcely to be seen. Dugouts were the prevailing style of architecture, Lindsey was a county seat, and may have had thirty houses, probably less. Minneapolis was a water power and a little drug store ran by whisky power. Beloit consisted of one house, where Mr. Hersey's dam builders lived. Glasco was Capt. Potts' house. Cawker City was not

in existence, and all the world beyond was covered with the buffalo grass primeval and waiting the approach of the Solomon Valley and Republican River Railroad.

The great trouble of the country was Indians. The red whelps had murdered settlers and carried off women not many months before. The settlers who came to the railroad meetings, a fine, resolute body of men, all carried revolvers; at Beloit the party was joined by Lieut. Borden with a corporal and eight men to act as escort. At the forks of Solomon a company of the Seventh Cavalry was stationed, commanded by an Italian, Lieut. DeRudio, a man with a history. Such was the Solomon Valley eight years ago.

The author of this narrative was the official reporter; he wrote up the "survey," and was to receive for his services a bond of the denomination of \$1,000, when the S. V. & R. R. R. had reached a point at or near Evans, Colorado. He has never received the bond, and until the present week has never revisited the scene of his railroad building labors in the Solomon Valley.

As this is not intended as a personal narrative, the events of last Sunday night will be touched on lightly; how the writer in company with Mr. Hillman, the efficient county superintendent of Ottawa county, journeyed by buggy, how it got darker and darker, and blacker and blacker, how it came on to rain, how it thundered and how it lightened; how the road was lost; how it was resolved to trust the sagacity of the black mare to find her way to Minneapolis; how the mare left the road altogether, and journeyed over several "breakings," to find a former residence of hers; how a light was discovered at Lindsey, was lost, was found again; how the mare was urged in a direct line for the light, and how the horse and buggy were suddenly swallowed up in a mass of sunflowers, and then piled into a hole in the ground. The historian of the railroad expedition of 1870 had reached an "objective point," he had got "home;" he was reposing in the cellar of the former "court house" at Lindsey, where once John Guthrie had made the rafters shake with his appeal for a railroad to pour into the lap of Europe the products of the finest valley that God's sunlight had ever shown upon, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to Mr. Potter and his lantern, the buggy was fished out, and at sunrise the remainder of the journey from Lindsey to Minneapolis accomplished by sunrise.

The day was spent in noting the difference between 1870 and 1878. Here in place of a few shambling houses was a nice town; the river was spanned by a high bridge; the swift Solomon had been set to work grinding grain; here was a railroad at last, and an elevator, and newspaper offices, and a big white school house; and a Normal Institute in session. The bearded pioneer with his revolvers was nowhere about. He was now a flourishing farmer coming into town on a load of wheat; and at night when the young ladies and gentlemen of the Normal Institute, and the townspeople gathered at the new little church, it was hard to believe that they or their fathers and mothers had ever lived in dugouts, on buffalo meat. A more refined and cultured looking audience, more patient and attentive, was never gathered even in Kansas.

On the afternoon of Monday, through the kindness of Mr. Olney, the writer was enabled to visit that great curiosity "The City of Rocks," about three miles from Minneapolis, on the opposite side of the river.

The slope of the bluffs which bound the Solomon Valley, at this point is very gradual and rock crops out only at or very near the summit. It seemed strange then, to notice a long line of scattered boulders lying half way up the long slope at a considerable distance from the regular rock formation. On near approach there are seen to be three groups of independent rocks, the whole length of the line being perhaps, forty rods; all around them, above and below is the green untouched sod of the prairie. The attempt of nature appears to have been to make out of the huge masses a number of spheres, but many of them have been spoiled in the making. One huge mass is as round as a billiard ball, and so that is its name. It is at least fifteen feet in diameter and looks as if a vigorous push would send it rolling down the slope. Each mass rests on a pedestal, or rather in a shallow cup

of common soft sandstone. The masses themselves are of gray rock that sparkles where fractured like rock salt. They are checked and split in every direction, and some of them looked like petrified cable tiers, the creases and windings of the hemp being preserved. Many have been split in two, and the fragments lie about. The most remarkable rocks have been photographed, and named. One is the "Billiard Ball," another the "Sarcophagus," one we think Mr. Olney called the "Duchess," and so on. The place is a favorite resort, and distinguished people have visited it, at least we saw cut in the sandstone in proud letters the name, "Jones."

Leaving the "City of Rocks," and going to the top of the bluff—and a carriage can be driven almost to the very crest—and one may behold something that he will not forget; no, not if he goes where "Alpine solitudes ascend."

The long green slope, as smooth as any lawn, stretches to the Solomon, the doublings of that stream, which repeatedly turns back on its track, bring into view successive belts of timber with bright green spaces between, and the trees and the meadow bring to view the windings of the Thames, as seen from Windsor Castle, when one looks toward Runnymede where the barons extorted Magna Charta from King John. In the middle distance shine the white houses of Minneapolis and then comes again the prairie, rising gradually till the line of bluffs is seen in the blue distance. Looking to the northeast, the line of vision is unobstructed for twenty miles. One beholds what seems a green and placid, voiceless, waveless sea, while skirting it one beholds one beyond another, high bluffs projecting like purple headlands.

Notwithstanding the immense emigration, this country has hardly been touched as yet. The farms, numerous as they are, are but dots in the immense prospect.

The beauty one beholds now is that of nature, and a beauty that rude cultivation will destroy rather than enhance. But when this is a finished country; when the hedges are trimmed; when the rank weeds are kept down; when the snowy apple orchards (and the apple bloom is the "flower of civilization") whiten the slopes; when great elms line and shadow the highway; Kansas will be the loveliest land on earth.

But to resume. The train took us away in the morning from Minneapolis to Solomon City, and afforded us a sunlight view of the Valley of the Solomon. The railroad follows the course of the river over a plain as level as a floor. The river cuts down twenty feet into the soil, and at that depth no rock, gravel, or hard clay is visible. It is like a garden bed at that depth at least. The country looks like an old settled region. More has been done in the Solomon Valley in eight years than was done in Illinois in thirty years after its settlement. And the end is not yet.

Of the friends new and old we met and made at Minneapolis a long paragraph might be made; but it is unnecessary. That they live where they do is the highest compliment to their sense; the best guarantee of the prosperous future that we devoutly wish them.

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**NOTE:**

A few weeks later Prentis traveled the Solomon Valley again, covering "Congressional Canvass in the First District," with Republican candidate for Congress John A. Anderson. Since Prentis provides no information about Anderson, a short biography will be helpful. John Alexander Anderson, 1834-1892, was a native of Pennsylvania. He attended Miami University in Ohio, where his father served as president, and his roommate was future president Benjamin Harrison. Anderson became a Presbyterian minister and served as an army chaplain during the Civil War. He came to Junction City KS in 1868 as minister of the Presbyterian Church. In 1873 he was appointed president of Kansas State Agricultural College at Manhattan, a position he held at the time of his campaign for office in 1878. He was elected to Congress and resigned as president of Kansas State in 1879.

Anderson served six terms in Congress, 1879-1891, after which he was appointed U.S. Consul General in Cairo, Egypt, by his old roommate, President Harrison. Anderson became ill in Egypt and died on his return to the U.S. in 1892. Anderson Hall at Kansas State University was named to honor him.

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**The Daily Commonwealth (Topeka), September 25, 1878, p. 2.**

Beloit, Sept. 21, 1878.

To the Editor of the Commonwealth:

Some weeks ago, under the head of "The Solomon Revisited," your correspondent had the pleasure of chatting with the readers of the COMMONWEALTH regarding the changes wrought in eight years in the lower Solomon valley from Solomon City to Minneapolis. On the 19th inst., the writer started on a mission connected with the salvation of this blessed country, and of the First Congressional District in particular, which has brought him into the Upper Solomon valley as far as this point. The trip from Solomon City to Minneapolis was undertaken this time by rail which proved an immense advance over land transit by buggy, with a descent into a cellar by way of variety. The weather was dark and rainy, but snug and dry the trip was pleasantly accomplished. Enlivened by the company of Dr. McHenry, of Minneapolis, who "fit into the rebellion" in the old 22nd Illinois Volunteers, and so was an acquaintance of that curious old warrior, Capt. Harvey Neville, concerning whom Hanback tells heart-breaking stories. And, speaking of old soldier stories, now that so many "old boys" are dropping out of ranks here, and going into camp beyond the river, there is a tendency among the survivors to draw closer together and speak oftener of the old war times.

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[At this point he is at Minneapolis.]

**The Daily Commonwealth (Topeka), September 25, 1878, p. 2.**

Beloit, Sept. 21, 1878.

To the Editor of the Commonwealth:

Dr. McHenry not only helped out with the talk, but when Minneapolis was reached in the midst of pitchy midnight darkness, kindly piloted the party to the shelter of the Colver House. Speaking of the Colver House, if our information is correct, the name of this hotel was a tardy compliment to a very large class of hotel patrons. In every cattle town there is a "Drover's Cottage," but until the days of the Colver House, nobody seems to have remembered the "commercial travelers." The Colver House was named at the meeting of the fraternity in honor of Mr. Colver, of Cochran, Bittman & Taylor, one of the veterans of the ancient order of "traveling men."

Minneapolis, since your correspondent last visit has steadily advanced, and many new houses were found in various stages of progress.

From Minneapolis on to Beloit the party followed the old trail of the expedition of 1870, heretofore spoken of, who proposed to build a railroad in that remote age from Solomon City to "a point at or near Evans, Colorado." As far as Delphos we had the company of Mr. George W. Strickler, who knew the country by heart. Nothing looked natural except the windings of the Solomon and an ancient prairie dog town, where, in 1870, the writer, for the first time, saw that interesting little beast which seems to have no object in life except to make gestures with his apology for a tail, make a noise like the twisting of a wet cork in the neck of a bottle, and bounce into a hole in the ground. Delphos had grown into quite a town, and would have kept on growing but for the unexpected stoppage of the railroad at Minneapolis. A circus had pitched its tents in the town and the roads

were full of people coming to the show. One could not help noticing the well-clad, comfortable looking people who filled the wagons, and the slick, well-fed horses that drew them. Looking at these apparently prosperous people going to have a good time at the circus, it seemed hard to believe Mr. Kearney and those less political Jeremiahs who tell us that the country has gone to the dogs, that we are all ruined, squelched, flattened, prostrated; that we are hardly men at all, but a lot of poor, miserable, ragged, hungry slaves over whom a horde of bloated tyrants are driving a new, enlarged and improved car of juggernaut. Remembering as your correspondent did, when he found the Solomon Valley settled almost exclusively by poor men, living in dug outs, dressed in old clothes, wearing revolvers to protect themselves against prowling savages, and marking the change in their condition, it occurred to him that pluck, energy, and well applied muscle are what raise men from poverty to comfort, and not the nostrums of bawling political liniment men.

But to get back from politics to history and geography. Glasco, which in 1870 was but a name, was found to have grown into a village with several stores. Inquiries revealed the fact that Capt. Potts, whose hospitable cabin sheltered the "railroaders" of 1870, was still living in the vicinity. Mr. Feasley, a Georgian and one of the first settlers in the country, who gave the writer an account of that singular eminence, Stone Mountain, in Georgia, died some years since, though his sons still live near. Capt. Snyder, another old settler, who tried a move to Arizona, we think it was, returned to his first love, and is living near Glasco.

The surprise of the season was, after all, the town of Beloit. Here the pilgrims of 1870 made a halt, held a meeting, and were joined by Lieutenant Border and a party of soldiers from Fort Harker. The writer remembers that Beloit consisted mostly of one cabin, in which Mr. Hersey's hands boarded, and in this cabin the meeting was held at night, the presiding officer being Mr. Charles Welsh, who still lives in the County. After the future greatness of the country under the magic impulses of the coming railroad, had been portrayed in glowing colors, and the meeting had adjourned in a high state of mental exaltation, your correspondent remembers stepping out of the cabin under the stars, and hearing a coyote on a neighboring hill, pouring out his tuneful soul in the pure, high tenor voice, peculiar to his musical family, and, hearing that sound, your correspondent felt it in his heart of hearts, that, in spite of the speeches, there wouldn't be a railroad in the neighborhood for seventy-five thousand years.

But the railroad here is not our old road, but the Central Branch [the Central Branch of the Union Pacific was built from Nebraska to Beloit; later the Solomon Valley Railroad also reached Beloit and the lines were consolidated to build up both forks of the Solomon River], and a very fine town beside. There is an opera house, to begin with, and that reminds us that the opera business is sometimes, in connection with Kansas towns, a delusion and a snare. As soon as the sunflowers have been cut down on the town site, the city papers begin to note the progress of the opera house, thereby filling the mind of the approaching visitor with visions of a great commercial metropolis, but when the "future great" is reached, it seems to consist pretty much of opera house, there being no other houses to speak of. This is not the case with Beloit; everything is on a similar and corresponding style. Five blocks of buildings, built of the beautiful easily cut white limestone of the country, showy residences, big hotels are the rule here. There are no shanties. In company with Mr. Kelley, of the Record, the writer tried to find the site of the old cabin, but nothing was recognizable. Everything had gone, even the coyote who warbled on the hill. Among the hotels we settled on the Custer House, for old time's sake. Here holds forth, son of the "Old Majoh," of the Tefft House and O. J. Hopkins, known to all the boundless West. Hopkins shielded the wants of the public years ago, when he was "a father to the fatherless, a mother to the motherless and a widow to the widowless," as steamboat clerk on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Both McMeekin and Hopkins take naturally to the hotel business.

POLITICS

Was the “object of the meeting” at Beloit, and here Hon. John A. Anderson, Republican nominee for Congress, made his “maiden speech.” The audience which assembled in Jordan’s Hall, was, in spite of the “mixedness” which always follows a change in the date of a meeting, a good one in numbers and character. Mr. Anderson was introduced by Mr. I. D. Young, without any preliminary flourishes, and gave in about an hour his views on the political issues of the day, his hopes, wishes and purposes in connection with the office of Congressman. He defined money, not as a “creation of law” but as an instrument of exchange, growing not out of laws, but the necessities of mankind. He spoke of the best money, in regard to convenience, reliability, and cheapness, and gave it as his opinion that experience had demonstrated that the greenback, with the promise of the United States behind it, was the best money for us. No “absolute money,” no “fiat scrip,” but the United States note redeemable in coin at the call of the holder, issued in sufficient quantity, but never to the extent of depreciation, was his idea of money for the people. The national banks had done their work; the old “wild cat” system was not to be tolerated, and but one kind of paper currency and that issued by the Government of the United States, should exist in this country.

Mr. Anderson referred to the attitude of the Republican party in regard to the Southern claims and Southern domination. He spoke of the conduct of the Northern people in regard to the yellow fever sufferers as showing there was no ill feeling towards the Southern people. The North had given generously and would continue to give until the end; but never would we yield the point, that in this country a black man, like a white man, should vote as he pleased; never could we consent to the “constitution as it was,” but would live or die by the “constitution as it is;” never should the South dominate as a section again; never should even the “shadow of a dollar” be paid on the Southern rebel war claims. To all this he stood pledged regardless of consequences. Mr. Anderson spoke feelingly of Col. Phillips [William Addison Phillips for whom Phillipsburg was named], his eminent services to the state, his distinguished career as a legislator, and the difference he, Mr. Anderson, felt in appearing before the people of the First District as Col. Phillip’s successor, with the implied obligation to fill his place.

Mr. Anderson’s address though delivered before an audience composed of strangers, with no labored effort of preparation, produced an excellent effect. He was warmly greeted by the staunch Republicans of Beloit, and after the adjournment of the meeting, many gentlemen met him at his rooms in the Custer House, where a pleasant interchange of opinions took place.

The newspaper men of Beloit did the handsome thing as newspaper men are apt to. To Anderson, of the Gazette, and to Kelley, of the Record, your correspondent was placed under obligations. We also had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Chapman, late of Iowa City, who proposes to issue here soon a Democratic newspaper. We think Kansas newspaper men will like Chapman and take him into full fellowship.

*From here Mr. Anderson goes to Cawker City, where he speaks tonight and thence to points west.*

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***The Daily Commonwealth (Topeka), September 29, 1878, p. 2:***

FIRST DISTRICT

Cawker City, Sept. 23, 1878

To the Editor of the Commonwealth:

Before our party left Beloit, the “show” [circus] we passed at Delphos had arrived. The “Grand Aggregation” costing “over \$1,500,000” was “cavalcading” through the streets, crowds of people blissfully unconscious of the fact that they were being trodden in the dust by “lecherous bondholders” and other “imps of hell” were filing through the streets; every place of business was

full, especially the music stores, for in the seven-year old town of Beloit and county of Mitchell, State of Kansas, the people must have pianos. It would not look well to be without. Restaurants in grand numbers had apparently sprung up in a night, and the young people were seated around the tables, as gay as Parisians. And while the elephant went round and round, the band played, and the clown, bless his spotted soul, got ready to amuse the people; a greater benefactor, he, descendant of the old time jesters, than all the long jawed campaign orators who are weeping their shirts wet, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was a happy sight and indicated that one corner of the world at least had some currency to spare.

Leaving town we passed first, the nice farm of Judge Holt, of this judicial district, and then an almost uninterrupted of such. One could see the steps of progress all along. There in the side of the hill was the fallen roof of the old dug-out, where the pioneer had first sheltered his family, and, standing near was the substantial stone house, as neatly built as any edifice on Kansas Avenue. The advance had been made in at most seven years, and by men who are not near relatives of the Vanderbilt or Astor families either.

In 1870 there was a peculiarly dreary stretch of country between Beloit and the forks of Solomon. Traveling along under a low hung sky, over the blackened prairie covered with bleached buffalo bones, with the wind blowing a hurricane, our progress was slow and melancholy. The country was full of stories about Indians and we passed near the lonely grave of an old man who had been killed by them. Now there was a continued succession of fields and farms, and one town, at least, Glen Elder, had sprung up on the line. This little town built around a square, made one think of a military post.

Cawker City was nearly as great a surprise as Beloit. Your correspondent had in some way got the impression that Cawker City was a "wild and woolly" settlement, and its inhabitants the "untaught children of nature." Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is not the least of the "gouge-eye gulch" flavor about Cawker. The Whitney House where our party stopped is a hotel any city in Kansas, or in the United States for that matter, might be proud of. Everything neat and comfortable, and with a landlord of the old time pattern, who not only knows how to keep a hotel, but enjoys and takes pride in it.

The glory of Cawker City architecture as of that of all this region, is the matchless white limestone, perfectly free from grit, cutting like cheese, and capable of any amount of adornment. There is a store front on the main street of Cawker City, belonging to Mr. Parker, that is a beautiful piece of work. . . .

The speaking was held on Saturday night at the Methodist Church. Mr. Anderson was introduced by Clark A. Smith, Esq., in a neat speech, referring gracefully to Mr. Anderson's record as a soldier, citizen, and educator.

Mr. Anderson spoke at somewhat greater length than at Beloit, making his argument on the currency questions clearer and stronger, and in addition making a clear statement on the real nature of the Federal Government as a nation instead of a dissolvable confederation.

Sunday, in Cawker, would satisfy the most rigid Sabbatarian in New England, or Scotland, for that matter. The congregations were full and attentive, and the preaching was pronounced by the member of the party best able to judge, an excellent article.

The writer found Mr. Tolman, of the firm of Cribbs & Tolman, recently established in Cawker, a friend of twenty years standing, and in his company visited the now famous "Great Spirit Spring," which may be found described in the files of the old Topeka State Record for April, 1870. Since that date a company has put up a steam engine at the Spring, and we believe, endeavored to make salt from

the water. The top of the mound has been leveled down sufficiently to make a carriage road around the spring. It is said that the pumping engine was only able to lower the level of the water four feet, then it came up from the fathomless depths faster than it could be pumped out. What the future of this curiosity is to be we do not know. We heard stories of a future big hotel, and the use of the water as a "big" medicine. We presume the water is medicinal. It tastes bad enough; being somewhat similar to the lola mineral water.

But we must not linger longer at Cawker City, but hurry on to Osborne City.

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***The Daily Commonwealth (Topeka)***

October 2, 1878, p. 2:

Turning west at Cawker City to go to Osborne City we were on new ground, your correspondent's route in 1870 going up the North Fork of Solomon instead of the south.

The drive was accomplished quickly in the pleasant company of Mr. R. R. Hays, of Osborne City, and Judge Holt, who was on his way to hold a term of the District Court "in and for" the county of Osborne. The town we found flourishing.

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At Cawker City we found no newspaper office, the Echo having ceased to reverberate some weeks since. This was an affliction. To be in a town with no newspaper office to lounge into is a deprivation which a Kansas man may imagine, but cannot describe. At Osborne the vacancy did not exist, and the Osborne County Farmer office afforded a rallying point. We found Brother Barnhart prosperous, ready to move into a new and commodious office, and blessed with a pleasant home, all the result of four years labor in Osborne County. If Mr. Barnhart treats his county as well as he did us, he will deserve a vigorous support until he retires from labor through the infirmities of age, when he should receive a pension.

These towns like Osborne seem like intrusions on the grand wilderness. The new is so new, and the improvements, great as they are, seem so slight in a country the vastness of which figures are unable to convey. You stop in the prairie and your compassion tells you that you can count twenty new houses from that spot, and yet twenty houses are like twenty sloops or schooners scattered over the limitless expanse of ocean. Then the vegetation; the high, rank blue-joint, which is taking the place of the buffalo grass, looks wilder than its predecessor, and then the everlasting sunflower, acres on acres of it. This weed in its disposition to spring up and flourish on the slightest provocation, its hardiness, the cheeky look of its big yellow flowers, always facing the sun, as if keeping a watchful eye on that luminary to see that it, sunflower, got its full share of appropriations of light and heat, always makes me think of the "average Kansan." And then who does not know "happy as a big sunflower?" It ought to be adopted as an emblem of our State. [In 1903 the state legislature designated the sunflower as the official state flower of Kansas, since known as the "Sunflower State."]

**(to be continued)**