



~ Part 18 ~

Reflections on a Common Theme

**Tourist Courts
& Camp Grounds**

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CLOUD COUNTY

Glasco Tourist Court

by Joan Nothern

Glasco had a tourist court. It curled around a filling station and garage on the southwest corner of the block. It was on the main street through town, just a block east of the business district.

This block has a history that reflects the story of the town. A two-story frame elementary school stood there the first half of the 20th Century. It faced south, toward the street that linked Glasco to the state on the Red Line and the Midland Trail, on U. S. 40, and 40N, and U.S. 24. Main Street, Glasco, was on the Main Street of America.

It was natural to place a tourist court right there, in town, at the filling station. Travelers' needs could be met, autos restored while they rested. In 1957, when Highway 24 was improved, bypassing local streets, the tiny tourist court's time had passed.

In 1964, the block was again repurposed, with a nonprofit community nursing home built there, fronting on the north side of the block, now named Buffalo Street. The Nicol Home has served for fifty years, hosting graduates of the school, now tourists who rest, looking up from their meals in the south directed dining room, eyes following the Main Street of America.

MITCHELL COUNTY

Waconda Springs

by Joan Nothern

Perhaps the first photo of a camping ground in the Solomon Valley is an 1878 encampment of Omaha Indians near Waconda Springs. According to William E. Connelley, a former secretary of the Kansas Historical Society who studied Waconda history, this Mitchell County site "was known to all the plains tribes of Indians. They believed the water of the spring had special merit and that the spring had supernatural power. It was a sacred place of the Pawnees.

"Tribes known to have made frequent pilgrimages to the spring included Pawnees, Arickarees, Wichitas, Comanches, Cheyennes, Sioux, Osages, Kaws, Kiowas and Arapahoes. They all came to hold ceremonials to ward off evil spirits."

Plains Indians stopped visiting the springs when white men began to exploit them. A bottling works distributed Waconda water, calling it Waconda Flier.

In 1884, a stone structure was started, the beginning of the sanitarium, hotel, and resort that would operate there for many years.

The claimed medicinal value of the Waconda waters was the key to its prominence. According to publicity used by owners of the springs, the water from Waconda once was awarded the World's Fair medal for mineral waters of superior medicinal qualities.

Patients came from many states. The register recorded they came from far points: Indiana, Texas, Illinois, Utah, Georgia, Wyoming, South Dakota, Colorado, and Arkansas.

One of the first swimming pools in the entire country was built at Waconda Springs in 1914. People drove for miles with horses and buggies to bathe in the mineral water.

Although Waconda Springs was never really promoted as a tourist spot, publicity given it by Kansas Industrial Development Commission increased visitation up to ten visitors a day, and it was considered a potential tourist attraction for Kansas.

This information was drawn from an article by Dick Mann in the Topeka Daily Capital, published November 9, 1952. The fate of Waconda Springs had not yet been sealed by the Glen Elder flood control dam constructed on the Solomon River.

ROOKS COUNTY

Woodston Cozy Court

by Leo E. Oliva

Woodston had hotels and boarding houses almost from its beginning in 1885. D. E. Cole from Paola KS opened the Hotel DeCole in December 1885. About the same time Hannah Burrows opened the Woodston House hotel and restaurant. In 1902 Dan Douglas opened a third hotel. These hotels, with frequent changes in ownership and names, served the town until the automobile became popular and the highway through town moved from Main Street to the north side of town. All hotels were closed by 1930.

In 1940 the large family home of local businessman Frank Shutts, located near the Sinclair service station on Highway 24, was purchased by N. H. Crandall who remodeled the house with rooms to rent as well as family residence and office, and he built several tourist cabins. The business opened as Cozy Courts. As the only motel in town, it attracted many travelers, who also enjoyed the nearby service station and a restaurant, the Hiway Cafe. There were several other service stations and restaurants in the town.

In 1941 Louis and Meda Bonny, owners of the Sinclair service station next door, purchased the Cozy Courts. They lived there and continued to provide accommodations in apartments and the cabins. They sold the cabin camp and the service station after World War II, and there were several owners of both businesses during the next few years. A laundromat was installed in one of the cabins in 1964. The big house, containing apartments and the motel office, burned in 1970, ending the Cozy Courts. By this time Interstate 70 was completed across Kansas and the former stream of tourist traffic on Highway 24 had declined to a trickle.

Perhaps the most famous guest at the Cozy Courts was entertainer-comedian Red Skelton who, along with his driver, stayed there in the late 1950s. Skelton ate at the nearby cafe and entertained staff and patrons during the evening meal and again at breakfast. He proclaimed that the pie prepared by cook Bessie Earl was the best pie he had ever eaten, and Bessie was proud of that praise until her dying day.

Today nothing remains of the cabin camp. The service station has been converted to a private storage building. The Hiway Cafe is vacant and deteriorating. It is difficult to believe that this little complex was once a busy tourist stop on Highway 24 in the Solomon Valley.

SHERIDAN COUNTY

Tasco Recreation Areas

Taken from the Sheridan County History Book, A History of Love and Labor, Volume 2.

Part of Tasco's claim to fame during the 1920s was not just the town itself, but rather two large pleasure resort areas that were developed for recreation purposes near the town. One was known as "Houseworth's" and was on the Houseworth Ranch three-fourth's mile north of Tasco. The other was "Ewer's Place," a mile and a half to the northeast of the town. At both places lakes were developed and bath house, diving boards, diving ladders and slides into the water were constructed. Both places sported fine baseball fields, tennis courts, horseshoe grounds, skating rink, rodeo, and other recreation.

At this time, northwest Kansas was devoid of any other similar places offering such facilities, and they proved to be crowd drawers. People came in great numbers throughout the summers for recreation, especially on Sundays and holidays—the Fourth of July usually being the best time of the year. Many baseball tournaments and other contests were held at one place or the other, and people from all over the area of northwest Kansas knew where Tasco was.

The two owners of these recreational areas had a great rivalry with each other as to who could promote the greatest crowds and have the most going on. At the Houseworth place, there was a very large natural spring which bubbled up through fine sand at several hundred gallons a minute. This was a drawing card for people. A water wheel was constructed, which, when crowds were on hand, turned continuously by water from a flume leading from the lake. At this same place there was a large outdoor dance hall and something was always going on there. Oftentimes it was used for revival meetings by itinerant evangelists coming through the area.

Not to be outdone, "Ewer's Place" also had its crowd drawer. Its owner was Rollo Ewers, the man who was so mechanically skilled. Houseworth's place was one of more natural beauty, but Ewer's ingenuity never failed to draw crowds. One great attraction was the "Death Dive," which was performed before large crowds at the lake on holidays like the Fourth of July. It was a dive performed at night by a daredevil diver, Lester Schropp. Clothed in full-length heavy underwear under his swimming suit, and wearing heavy woolen socks, he would mount a 50 foot platform with a diving ladder at the top. After having doused himself with gasoline, all the lights would be turned off, and he would ignite himself and remain standing high in the air for an instant before diving the 50 feet into the water to extinguish the flames. It was a performance that never failed to draw crowds.

Very little evidence remains today of the existence of these two exciting recreation areas. Both of them died out in the Depression years, when people could little afford such luxury or recreation.

Tasco almost had another resort that was practically within the town itself, but it failed to be completed. The Bank Savings Life Insurance Company of Topeka, Kansas, owned mainly by E. H. Lupton and Sons, held a mortgage on a large house and property adjacent to Tasco. This land was lost to the insurance company, and they rebuilt the original house. A man by the name of Bill Missinger came to Tasco in 1931 and ramrodded the project for the company. Putting in many rooms, baths, fireplaces, etc., they planned it as a resort for the company's executives during their vacations. Unfortunately, the Bank Savings Life Insurance Company folded up before the work was completed. This took away something that could have been a very great asset to the community.