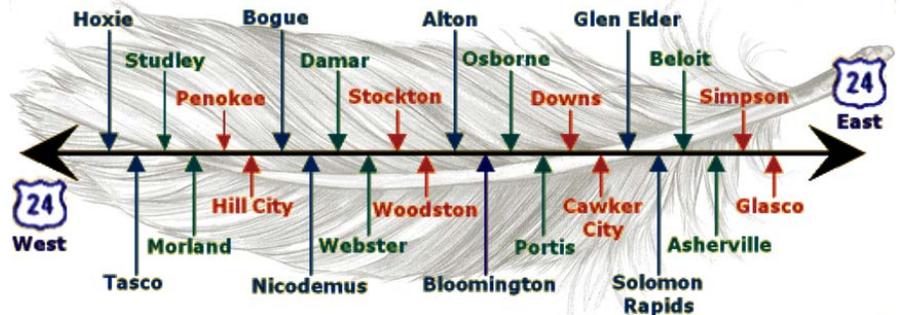




Glen Elder, Kansas

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History of Glen Elder

by Phyllis Porter

When the Civil War ended and the Solomon Valley was considered safe for settlement, farmers came to homestead public land and towns were founded to serve those farm families. A new way of life on the plains was beginning, and Glen Elder is part of that story.

The wide open prairies had been Indian Territory, and Waconda Springs located three miles west of Glen Elder was a special place of worship for many tribes. Buffalo, deer, antelope, and other wildlife roamed this land by the thousands. The Indians killed the buffalo for food, shelter, and clothing that was essential for their needs. Times were changing as the white settlers moved in and big-time game hunters came to kill the buffalo and other wild life for sport and the products obtained. Within a few years, the buffalo were gone and the Indian way of life was gone.

Some of the early white settlers made friends with the Indians, but conflicts arose, as would be expected, and many lives were lost. In May of 1870, near the bluffs on the south edge of Glen Elder, five settlers (John Greer, Solomon Miser, William Kenyon, Scott Guffy, Hugh Nesbit) were planting corn on the south side of the Solomon River, unaware that Indians were nearby. When attacked, they were unable to reach the guns they had left near the bluff, and the lives of Geer, Kenyon, and Miser were lost, but Guffy and Nesbit made their way down stream and hid in the brush until they felt safe and made their way to the fort on the George Stinson property in "old" Glen Elder located on the east side of Limestone Creek north of the present Glen Elder.

The Indians were soon forced to leave and give up their land to the newly-formed white settlement. In 1866, an early pioneer, named either Smith or Decker, arrived and made a dugout on Limestone Creek by the present Max Porter home. He established a home and planted a garden but did not stay very long.

The first known settlers to remain in this area were the Truman and Emeline Allen family in May 1869. They occupied the dugout left by Smith or Decker, but within a few months the family moved farther up the Limestone Creek, about one and a half miles north. George Stinson then homesteaded the land the Allens had vacated and his brother, Franklin, took an adjoining claim to the south,

which is now within the city limits of Glen Elder. This all took place before the township or county existed.

George Stinson started the Kanzy Bitter Saloon which was soon surrounded within a stockade for protection from the Indians. This fort was across the creek east of their dugout. He also built the first hotel in Mitchell County, which was named "Log Cabin Home." This sign was carved in a rock and today stands in the yard at the Max Porter home. It is believed that this is the only artifact from the original town of Glen Elder.

Don Peaslee settled on land three miles east of the present site of Glen Elder in 1870. This land had been surveyed earlier to form a county; however, a census was necessary to determine the number of residents within the area before it could be a legal county. Don Peaslee was appointed to assist with this first census, and in 1870, Mitchell County and Glen Elder Township were formed. This census showed 25 people residing in this township. George Stinson, a resident, was credited with naming this early settlement. National Archive postal records show Stinson was appointed the first Glen Elder postmaster on July 5, 1870. He was also named Justice of the Peace.

Horace Vallette acquired a homestead and moved to Glen Elder in 1871. The town consisted of the Kanzy Bitter Saloon, a stockade, Log Cabin Home, Red Cloud Saloon, John Allen Feed Stable, a blacksmith shop, and a few log structures. Vallette started a general merchandise store in a building owned by Stinson. In two years, he moved his store to a nearby settlement, Athens, but only remained there a short time and returned to Glen Elder. He then started a store in the present site of Glen Elder.

John Neve and Milton Spencer, with their families, took homesteads about this same era. They started a sawmill on the Solomon River near the bluffs on the south edge of the present town of Glen Elder. Many of the first frame structures were built with lumber from this mill.

By 1872 George Stinson moved on west, and Charles Davis, who occupied the land vacated by Stinson, became the new postmaster. He also purchased an interest in the mill. A gristmill was soon added and began operating as the Empire Mills.

A town site was soon platted where the present Glen Elder business district stands and a petition was submitted to the court on December 25, 1872, to have this town named "West Hampton." West Hampton's first store sold flour from the mill.

Soon settlers were arriving almost daily, taking homesteads, working farms, and starting new businesses. The railroad came through in 1879. At that time the settlers of both the north and south locations (Glen Elder and West Hampton) merged into one town. There are many versions of how Glen Elder was chosen for the town's name, but the most common is that the postal department, wanting to be nearer to the new railroad line and not wanting to change the address, played the major role in keeping the Glen Elder name. The city was incorporated on November 28, 1879, and was registered as a third-class city.

By this time the churches were beginning to be organized. The Friends Church was meeting in a dugout two and one-half miles south and west of Glen Elder. The Methodist Church built a stone church in 1880. In 1886 land was purchased by the Church of Christ, which was later changed to First Christian Church. A building was constructed on the site. These early-day pioneers had the fortitude and faith these churches would grow in the community and they were correct as the three churches remain very active in the everyday life of the community today.

In 1887 a public grade and high school (below) was constructed from native stone, the famous post rock limestone of the region. The school was considered to be one of the most magnificent buildings in the area. It was placed on the hill just above the town, from where one could see both Beloit and Cawker City. This building was torn down in 1938. Another post rock building is the Castle Service Station and Garage, built by Ernest Norris in 1926 and still standing in very good shape (historic photo above). It is on the National Register of Historic Places.

In their marvelous book, *Land of the Post Rock*, Grace Muilenburg and Ada Swineford noted (p. 129): "The service station built in 1926 by the town's pioneer in the automotive industry, E. W. Norris, represents a departure from the architectural style of the older buildings. Castlelike in appearance, it is in fact unusual. . . . Townspeople say Norris got the idea for his miniature medieval castle while serving with the American Armed Forces in Europe in World War I. In Luxembourg he saw a castle he liked. He studied it, and when he returned to his automobile business in Glen Elder, he drew up plans for a service station that would resemble that castle as much as possible."

As noted, the available public lands of the Solomon Valley attracted farm families. Farming has continued to be the way of life around Glen Elder, even during the devastating depression and the dust storms of the 1930s. This small town has continued to survive and grow.

In 1971 Glen Elder High School closed and unified with Cawker City. The school became Waconda East. At the present time, the school has merged with Downs and is now known as Lakeside High School. Glen Elder has grades K-3. The loss of the school is a definite blow to a town and community. The children scatter in all directions and the families that are essential for a town to survive also go out of town for school. They make new friends and all the activities go elsewhere.

We have had new businesses open since the construction of the buildings that house Wayne's Sporting Goods Store, as well as Long Rider's Barbeque and Cunningham Telephone and TV Communications. Winkel Manufacturing near Glen Elder is known statewide for the farm equipment they construct.

Memorial Day is a special big day for Glen Elder, when many high school alumni return for reunions and visits with family and friends. In August the annual "Glen Elder Day" is celebrated and brings a large crowd to town . There are games for young and old-fun runs, softball tournament, train rides for the kids, threshing bee, talent show, all topped off with a parade, street dance, and a BBQ meal. Everyone has a great day.

Waconda Lake at our backdoor is a drawing attraction for all sports-minded people. There are hunting lodges, guide services, and our sporting goods store offering everything a hunter and fisher would need.. People from other states and from hundreds of miles around come for hunting and fishing. It helps to keep Glen Elder on the map.

Glen Elder continues to survive the forces that have caused many small rural towns to decline, and with determination and its many new residents it will survive. The welcomed dreams that brought early-day settlers to this area welcome our new residents today.

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