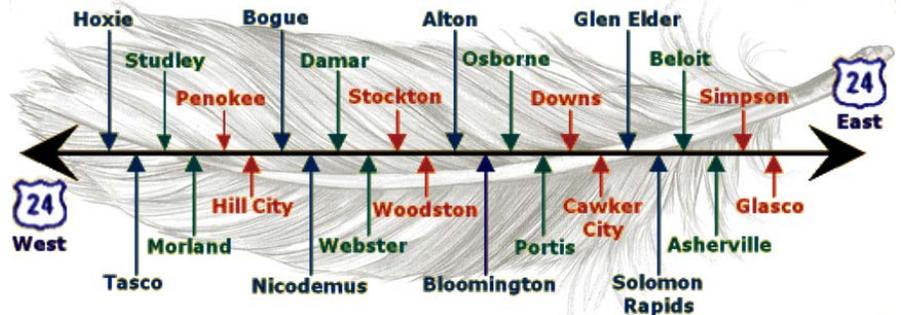
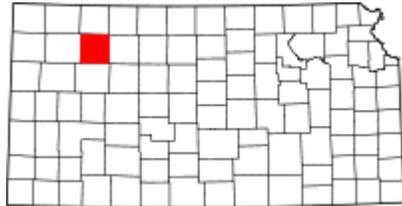




Studley, Kansas

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History of Studley

by Don Rowlison

[This is twenty-first in a series featuring the 24 communities in the Alliance. Don Rowlison, from Studley, is site administrator at Cottonwood Ranch State Historical Site and member of the SV24 board. The valley communities will be presented in alphabetical order, so long as the community provides the material by deadline (March 1). Next issue will be Tasco.]

Just as many other places in western Kansas, the community of Studley has lost most of its population during the last 80 years. From a booming, unincorporated trade center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it has devolved to a small, sleepy hamlet in the 21st century with a current population of 33.

The reason Studley is termed a community, rather than a particular town, is because it was never incorporated as a city from its beginning in the 1880s. A city system of law enforcement, sewers, sidewalks, water, city government, and city taxes were never a part of this hamlet's history, hence; there are no public records for the village itself nor the various listings of buildings, their owners and tenants, or city maps depicting those buildings, as well as the duration of those various homes and businesses. Most of the information concerning Studley has been collected from area newspapers (no papers were published in Studley), old diaries, letters, land abstracts, some business ledgers, and oral histories gathered from residents or previous residents, and the descendants of those previous residents.

Archaeological Information

Archaeological information suggests that our valley, the South Solomon, has been occupied by people for approximately 10,000 years. A time when the river contained much more water, the valley was full of varieties of tall grasses, probably fewer trees than at present, and teeming with both large and small wildlife. The valley continued to change gradually through wet and dry periods along with both warmer and colder years, and during those times witnessed the growing populations of American Indians. In fact, about 1,000 years ago, the valley people had built small clusters of earth-covered houses and their cultural remnants have become distinct enough to be called the "Solomon River Phase" by archaeologists. Those early people lived in "earthlodges" and cultivated their small fields which contained several varieties of corn, beans, and squash/pumpkins; hunted both big and small game; fished in the river and feeder streams; gathered wild nuts and berries; and traded stone used for some of their tools with people in other areas of sometimes hundreds of miles away (stone tools have been found throughout the valley made from rocks originally from such places as Texas, North Dakota, and even Idaho). The American Indian population in the river valley waxed and waned through

time as weather and available natural resources impacted a locale, much as we see today.

As time went on, many different groups of people either occupied or made use of the Solomon Valley. The Kansa, Pawnee, and Omaha tribes entered from the east and northeast. The Plains Apache, Kiowa, and Comanche, in the early years, came from the north and later bands of Cheyenne and Sioux visited the valley while the Arapaho came from the west to use the valley. When reservations for "immigrant" tribes were established in eastern Kansas during the early 1800s, such groups identified as the Delaware, Shawnee, Pottawatomie, and others, used the valley of the Solomon for a westward route to access the large herds of buffalo which mainly occupied the western half of Kansas. These various groups often met for trade but sometimes relationships were stressed and hostile actions were not uncommon. When the Euro-American "buffalo hunters" arrived in the valley, after the American Civil War, things rapidly changed. A different type of settlement began after the demise of the great bison herds. Towns with permanent buildings were constructed from east to west in the valley as sod houses and "dugouts" dotted the valley floor and hillsides. Railroads began to connect these new towns and clusters of buildings with cities both to the east and to the west of the Great Plains. Emigrants from the eastern United States and western Europe brought in many new ideas and different life-ways to the valley. Within about 30 years the Solomon River Valley suddenly witnessed changes to its environment and population that had taken 10,000 years to build.

As with most states in the Great Plains, settlement by Euro-Americans trended westward with the eastern portions of the valley considered more "civilized" than the western end. Abraham Pratt, an Englishman and ex-sailor, is usually credited as being the founder of what is now Studley, which is along U.S. Highway 24 and straddling the Graham-Sheridan County line. Pratt came, his second time and to stay in America, in 1878, from Ripon, North Yorkshire, which is in the north-central portion of England. He had been a businessman, owning at least two, and possibly three, pubs; a liquor mercantile; and a bottling works for aerated waters. The family's story relates that Pratt disembarked at the port in New York City and then traveled to south-central Nebraska to seek a home- stead. In Nebraska he found that all of the land he liked was either claimed or had been filed for at the area's government land office. He allegedly heard of land, which contained few human inhabitants, to the southwest along the upper reaches of the South Solomon River Valley. He came to eastern Sheridan County, found a place he liked, then went to the district's General Land Office in Kirwin and filed for a 160-acre homestead (along with the intention papers to become an American citizen) just south of the South Fork Solomon or about one-half mile south of present U.S. 24, or approximately one-quarter mile south of where the Studley grain elevator now stands. On his homestead he originally built a "dug- out" of sod, stone, and a little wood.

One Town, 2 Names

Abraham Pratt is considered the "father" of present Studley. At one time he was the postmaster, the township's Justice of the Peace, owner of the lumberyard, a part-time farmer and sheepman, an insurance salesman, as well as being influential enough to have other Englishmen join him within the locale. Being the first postmaster, he originally chose Skelton as the name for the U.S. Post Office and named for the River Skell which flowed by his hometown of Ripon, England. That name was adequate until the Lincoln-Colorado Railway constructed its railroad through the community in 1888.

At that time, and just east across the Graham-Sheridan County line, another town called Carll began and was platted. The plat of Carll contains street names, alleys, surveyed city lots, and suggests the beginning of an incorporated town. That townsite, with businesses and residences, began in a north-south direction in Graham County and north of the river, while Skelton grew in the same direction but across the county line in Sheridan County. Confusion prevailed, with Carll and Skelton essentially being in the same place but having separate names and divided only by a shared, dirt street (the county line). Because of this confusion the U.S. Postal Service, in late 1893, and probably in agreement with the railroad, demanded a name change to have both incipient towns, Carll and Skelton, share the same name. Abraham Pratt was still the postmaster and officially changed the name of the two hamlets to Studley, effective in January 1894. The name "Studley" was chosen and named for Studley Royal Country Park which is a historic site two miles west of Ripon, England. As you travel U.S. 24 you will miss the highway signs announcing "Studley" due to the fact that the signs became "collector items" and had a lifespan as road signs of about three months.

From the hamlet of Studley westward, up the river valley, was primarily an extended British settlement during its early days of the 1880s. Not only did the community have an English name but those early settlers retained their British traditions, such as having "tea" in the afternoon unless there was a critical emergency, celebrating the various British holidays (as well as the American holidays),

and even subscribing to London's Daily Mirror to stay current on the homeland news. British accents could be detected in the locale past the mid-twentieth century and recipes for tasty scones and aging meat were quite common. One may still see the influence of "Yorkshire" construction at Cottonwood Ranch State Historical Site just a half-mile west of Studley on the north side of the highway.

Studley's Heyday

Studley mostly witnessed its heyday during the two scores of years from the 1890s to the 1930s. The hamlet once contained a church, school, bank, hardware store, two grocery stores, a blacksmith shop, lumberyard, post office, two livery stables, two different saloons, a creamery, barbershop, restaurant, implement dealership, and on its western outskirts a grain elevator in conjunction with the railroad's depot and a stockyard for shipping livestock. At one time a "community center"/dancehall was a prominent attraction in the community. Dances held almost every Saturday night were a magnet for social interaction as well as for "bootleggers" to distribute their illegal, adult beverage. These activities may have given rise to Studley's nickname of "Little Tijuana" as it was a "border town" (Sheridan and Graham counties), was sometimes wild, and being unincorporated it had no resident law enforcement. The dances were held in a building in Sheridan County and the story goes that, if the "bootleggers" were forewarned of a visit by the Sheridan County authorities, all they had to do was walk across the street into Graham County and be out of the legal jurisdiction of the Sheridan County law enforcers; a border town in its own right.

What Happened to Studley

What happened to Studley as a very active hamlet which once supported numerous businesses? People have witnessed what many of the smaller towns, and even some of the bigger ones, in the Solomon Valley have experienced; we hope that it is simply a current phase with fewer residents and less businesses. Studley has suffered just as the rest of the rural communities in the valley. To really put a single cause for the demise may not be possible, although many variables must be factored into the considerations. Many of the communities began a downhill slide during the 1920s when times were reasonably good in America and prices for agricultural products were also good, but not great. Was it automobiles that caused the closing of small "Mom and Pop" retail stores as people could go farther and faster to conduct business in larger towns? Was it more mechanization on the farms which required fewer hired hands to do a day's work? Many of the hired hands had families that needed supporting businesses and schools within their communities. Was it the growing popularity of mail-order catalogs requiring the patronizing of local stores unnecessary? The years of the Great Depression and "Dirty Thirties" saw much of the population go somewhere else due to economic conditions and crop failures. World War II caused many of the remaining young male workers to leave the valley and start families and homes in other states after the war. The 1950s saw a temporary boom in some of the counties along the South Solomon as oil was pumped from the various fields by mostly transient workers and the "baby boom" was also in full swing. But the gradual decline continued and often went unnoticed by the residents who saw the end of an era as "pioneers" died but did not immediately notice the lower birth rate and the lack of larger families with five, or more, children; and of course the immigration and the establishment of numerous ethnic groups who once formed and occupied the valley's communities and small towns.

Today, Studley has no post office, the church is "discontinued," the grade school closed in the 1960s, and the remaining grocery store closed in the early 1970s. After 110 years the railroad, which gave life to many of the businesses, was dismantled. The local cooperative, created to meet all of the agricultural needs, has been consolidated and purchased by an area corporation; but still maintains a service station and grain elevator in Studley; the remaining businesses within a once bustling community.

Much like the stock market, Studley has gone through its "correction" period and the people in the crowded cities to the east, west, and south will again discover that the South Fork Solomon Valley is the place where quality living and growth has existed for 10,000 years and will persist for many future years.

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