



~ Part 1 ~
Reflections on a Common Theme
County Names

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THE introductory theme of the new county reflections is acknowledging the namesake of each county and introducing the place and its beginning. Forty-one Kansas counties are named for Civil War veterans, and all six Solomon Valley Heritage Alliance counties are among them: a private, a sergeant, two captains, a colonel, and a general. We hope to gain in understanding through this new collaboration.

County Namesakes

You may have noticed on the map of Kansas that most counties are almost square in shape. There are two reasons for that. Most of these are about thirty miles across, comprised of 25 six-mile-square townships under the federal survey system adopted in 1795. Thus citizens could travel by horse to the courthouse to conduct their public business and could return home in one day. Another reason is that, according to the Wyandotte Constitution by which Kansas became a free state in 1861, new counties were required to include at least 432 square miles. Those in the eastern part of the state were formed before the constitution was written; thus Wyandotte County, the smallest, has only 153 square miles.

The law provided that a county could be formed when the territory had 600 residents. Then the governor could appoint temporary officers to call an election and select a town for the county seat. This continued until Kansas had 106 counties, but Garfield County was too small and united with Finney County in 1893, leaving Kansas with 105 counties.

Early interest in knowing the person and the reason for naming a county led to this correspondence about Private John Calvin Rooks, the only private so honored.

A Tribute to John Calvin Rooks

In 1867 the legislature defined the boundaries of 36 western counties which were named by members of the legislature, No.24 being named Rooks County. Randall & Hicks, two Stockton area pioneers, inquired of the Kansas Legislature concerning the choice of this name. The October 18, 1877, Stockton News printed a letter from J. B. McAfee, a member of the legislature, answering their request, including his reason for choosing the name and a short sketch of the life of John Calvin Rooks:

Leavenworth, Kan., Oct. 6, 1877

Messrs. Randall & Hicks:

John Calvin Rooks was born Oct. 27, 1837 near Bingham, Potter County, Pennsylvania. In 1858 he migrated with his parents, Judge John L. and Delilah and siblings to Kansas and settled near Burlingame in Weller County (later Osage) where he preempted a quarter section of fertile land. In 1861, Calvin, as he was called, united with the Burlingame Baptist Church. On Sept. 1, 1862, age 25, he enlisted and Sept. 15th was mustered into the United States Service, in Company I, 11th Kansas Volunteer Infantry. Scantily trained, the regiment left camp at Fort Leavenworth for Fort Scott, Kansas on October 4th. On Oct. 22, 1862 he was in the battle of Old Fort Wayne, Indian Territory and at Cane Hill on November 28th. Where ever they were camped he attended the Thursday night prayer meeting service each week where he met this writer, Lieut. J. B. McAfee. They attended the company prayer meeting for the last time Dec. 4, 1862 held in a large Sibley tent which was filled to capacity. At the close the writer shook hands with each one, asking him to relate his religious experience. Mr. Rooks stated that from the age of nine he had endeavored to be a soldier for Christ.

The bloody battle of Prairie Grove, Arkansas was fought Sunday Dec. 7, 1862 in which the 11th Kansas took an active part. About dusk Mr. Rooks was mortally wounded and taken to the Fayetteville Hospital. At 3:00 he said to the writer, "I cannot live." I then asked him "Do you fear to die?" He replied, "I have served my Redeemer in life and I know He will save me in death." He died December 11th, 1862 and buried in Fayetteville, Arkansas. (After the war by order of the War Department, his remains were removed to the National Cemetery at Little Rock, Arkansas) At the age of 25 years, 1 month and 10 days he fought his last battle—offered his life for his country: a noble patriot—beloved comrade—devoted Christian. Beloved and respected by every member of his company, who appeared to have all friends and no enemies.

Later as a member of the legislature in 1867, I gave the name Rooks to the 24th Kansas County in honor of Private John Calvin Rooks of Co. I, 11th Kansas Volunteer Infantry.

J. B. McAfee, at that time 1st Lieut. Co. I, Vol. Inf.

Not much is known about the life of Rooks except his service record reveals he had dark hair, light gray eyes, and a fair complexion. He moved to Kansas during extremely difficult and fever-pitched times, nicknamed "Bleeding Kansas," joining the military forces soon after Kansas became a free state on January 29, 1861. Rooks County was organized in 1872 with Stockton as the county seat. We think, if Rooks had lived after the war to visit his namesake, he would have loved the undulating land, untouched and covered with buffalo grass, where the Solomon River wound through the center of the county, its banks lined with elm, cottonwood, walnut, ash, hackberry, willow, and box elder trees. We also think he would enjoy it now nearly 150 years later. It is still beautiful and productive due to the care of good land stewards. We would be proud to take him to Codell, Damar, Palco, Plainville, Stockton, Webster, Woodston, and Zurich to meet the 5312 people who live in Rooks County and show him the changes that exist today. Word is getting out that Rooks County is a great place to live, work, and retire. We would also thank him for the ultimate sacrifice he made at Prairie Grove, Arkansas, so we can all live in a free state and country.

Osborne County

Osborne County and the county seat at Osborne were named for Sergeant Vincent B. Osborne, a member of the 2nd Kansas Cavalry under Colonel Samuel Crawford during the Civil War. He was shot in the leg at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, Missouri, August 10, 1861 sent to a St. Louis Hospital where the bullet was extracted, and recovered. He returned to his regiment and served the remainder of the Civil War. After the war he was sent with other troops on a steamboat from Fort Smith to Little Rock, Arkansas, to be discharged from the army. The steamboat was attacked by Confederate troops who did not know the war was over or chose to ignore that fact. The pilot pushed the boat against the opposite shore of the Arkansas River so the passengers could escape, which they did. Sergeant Osborne and another sergeant took time to grab ropes to tie up the boat so it would not float away, and in the process both were wounded. Osborne lost his good leg; the other sergeant lost an arm. They did save the steamboat Anna Jacobs.

When Osborne returned to Kansas, after recovering from his wounds, former Colonel and now Governor Crawford recommended to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton that Osborne be appointed to the position of sutler (post trader) at Fort Harker in Ellsworth County. Later Osborne moved to Ellsworth where he practiced law and helped organize the county government. He also served in the state legislature. He was honored when Osborne County was created by the state legislature in 1867.

Mitchell County

After meeting the qualifications for becoming a county, Mitchell County was named for Captain William D. Mitchell, a Civil War Union soldier who entered as a private and after promotion to captain was killed in the battle at Monroe's Cross Roads in North Carolina in 1865. The vote for county seat in 1870 was Beloit with 143 votes, Solomon Rapids with 43 votes, and Glen Elder with 36 votes. The nice park in Glen Elder Square was left for the county courthouse. Timothy Hersey built a two-story wooden building in Beloit for the courthouse which stood for about 30 years until the present courthouse of stone was erected in 1901 across the street east of the Hersey courthouse.

The Solomon River is the defining feature of the county, running from west to east. The North Solomon and the South Solomon join at a point two miles south of Cawker City and the little village at that junction was called Waconda. It was named after the springs which were some distance to the east, the Great Spirit Springs where the Plains Indians gathered in conference and healing ceremonies. The Siouan word for the "Great Spirit" was Wa-kon-da. There was no Indian maiden

who threw herself into the mineral springs. That legend was given out by the first white owners to draw clients and to sell the potent mineral waters for healing purposes.

An Indian name for the river is "Nepahela," which means "Water-on-a hill." Captain Zebulon M. Pike wrote in his ledger in 1806 and referred to the river as "Solomon's Fork." This stream is quite a swift stream, therefore many dams were built for saw mills and flour mills. In 1883 there were seven mills along the Solomon River in the county.

The soil is a rich loam, and in the valley the soil is very deep. Mitchell County has an abundance of post rock limestone, a very good building stone. Many lovely homes and businesses have been built of stone.

Graham County

Graham County was one of thirty-four counties created by the Legislature in 1867, which divided into counties all of the unorganized portion of the state east of range line 26W. It was named in honor of Captain John Livingston Graham. The Legislature of 1867 laid out the boundaries of Graham county 30 miles square, making it one of the few square counties and giving it an area of 900 squares. From the summer of 1879, until April 1, 1980 the country was attached to Rooks County as a municipal organization. On April 1, 1980 for administrative purposes, by a proclamation of Gov. John P. St. John, the county was organized with Millbrook as the county seat.

John Livingston Graham, the third son of John S. and Hannah Gee Graham, was born at Richford, Tioga County, New York, May 27th, 1832. On April 7th, 1853, at Maine, Broome County, New York, he was married to Nancy Jane, daughter of Anson S. and Mary Steel Slosson. He came to Albany, Nemaha County, Kansas, April 1857 in company with his brother, William and his brothers-in-law Edwin Miller and William B. Slosson. As one of the four original settlers of Albany, he pre-empted a quarter section of land, and engaged in farming. His wife and little son, Charles D., came in March 1858.

After President Lincoln called for a volunteer army from each state to help in the American Civil War, Mr. Graham assisted in raising Company D, Eighth Kansas Infantry in September 1861. He was chosen Second Lieutenant, and served in that capacity till the summer of 1863, when he was promoted to First Lieutenant. The regiment remained in the state until in January 1863 when it was ordered south, was for some time at Nashville, then to the front of the Civil War. He held at the time of his death a commission as Captain, but had not yet been mustered. He was killed at the head of his company at the battle of Chickamauga, September 19, 1863. He was buried by prisoners of his own company at the Chickamauga battle site in Georgia and afterward removed to section B site 1029, Chattanooga National Cemetery in Tennessee. He left a widow and two sons, Charles D. and Fred E. His widow afterward married D.F. Bouton.

Captain Graham was a brave, capable, generous man, an active Christian, a Republican and a Free State man. As a staunch teetotaler, he was one of the few army officers who were never known to taste intoxicating drinks.

Sources: Cutler's History of Kansas / Kansas State Historical Society / History of Kansas

Cloud County

Cloud County bears the distinction of being named twice. First as Shirley County, a joke played by the Kansas legislators. Then, in 1867, the state legislature acted to bestow a name of dignity on the county, for as the butt of a joke it had been named for a notorious Leavenworth prostitute, Jane Shirley. Instead, it was named "Cloud," honoring Colonel William F. Cloud, of the 2nd and 15th Kansas Cavalry and the 10th Kansas Infantry. He was one of the state's bravest heroes. The county seat is Concordia.

After the Civil War, the Solomon Valley was opened to settlers and widely advertised. On April 1, 1866, John and Jeanette Hillhouse, emigrants from Scotland, concluded a long and arduous journey in Shirley County, homesteading on the Solomon River. They had arrived in this country in 1856, traveled overland to Salt Lake City where they were victims of Brigham Young's tyranny. They escaped, first to Nebraska, then Missouri, where John Hillhouse enlisted in Co. K, 18th Missouri Volunteer Infantry, on January 2, 1862. Bushwhacker persecution during the Civil War made the family grateful homesteaders in the peaceful Solomon Valley.

In the autumn of 1869 Senator Edmund Ross came to the Solomon Valley from Washington D. C. and established a post office, with Captain H. C. Snyder, a Civil War veteran, as postmaster. The mail route extended as far as Beloit. The town in the southwest corner of Cloud County was first

known and platted as "Dell Ray" on land that was granted by the U. S. government to one of the earliest pioneers, Isaac Biggs. Biggs succeeded Snyder as postmaster in 1871. It was he who submitted the name "Glasco" to the state legislature in 1879 as the official name of the town. That was the name preferred by the Union Pacific Railroad, which reached Glasco in 1878. The name reflects respect for the Scottish settlers' "Glasgow," but was misspelled when submitted by Mr. Biggs.

Sheridan County

Sheridan County, the county farthest to the west of the six counties in the Solomon Valley Highway 24 Heritage Alliance, is watered by both the North Fork and South Fork of the Solomon River. It bears the name of General Phillip H. Sheridan, a career military man who began his service at posts in the West before the Civil War. During the war, he fought in a number of battles and was quickly promoted to major general. In 1865, his cavalry pursued General Robert E. Lee and was instrumental in forcing his surrender at Appomattox. During Reconstruction, he ruled Texas and Louisiana, until relieved of his command by President Andrew Johnson, and sent west to fight Indians. In 1869 he was given command of the Division of the Missouri, which included the entire Plains region. In 1883, he was appointed commanding general of the army. He died August 5, 1888, of heart disease.

The county was created by act of the Kansas Legislature in 1873, and organized in 1880. Settlements began in the 1860s, but not until the influx of settlers in 1878 and 1879 did events move to organization. The town of Kenneth, begun in 1879, was declared the county seat by Governor St. John in 1880. Kenneth was named after the son of E. J. Turner who had come from Topeka to help with legal matters in organizing. Kenneth thrived until 1886, when the railroad was built two and a half miles south. At that time the town of Hoxie was started, named after the Union Pacific Railroad superintendent. It was in 1886 that there was a vote to move the county seat to Hoxie.

The Hoxie Town Company gave lots to the Kenneth owners to move their buildings to Hoxie. On March 22, the evacuation began, with 23 teams and one yoke of oxen needed to move the Central Hotel building from Kenneth to Hoxie. A great wind and hail storm hindered the moving process, but in two month's time nothing was left of Kenneth except the dilapidated frame building called the courthouse.