



~ Part 26 ~

Reflections on a Common Theme

Early Businesses

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MITCHELL COUNTY

Early Businesses

by Barbara Axtell

Asherville was the first permanent settlement in Mitchell County. Asherville was laid out as a town in 1866 by Colonel John Rees. The first businesses at Asherville were a lumber yard, barber shop, drug store, tailor shop, ice house, Shull's hardware store and implement shop, Brown and Dickie's general store, Chapel and Reeves Livery stable, confectionery store, and an ice cream parlor that sold bakery products. C. H. Griffith had a hotel fitted up in elegant manner. Asherville had three doctors, Dr. Bourney, Dr. Reeves and Dr. Harrison.

Asherville had many firsts in the county: It had the first general store, the first post office with John Rees as postmaster; his son, German Grant Rees, was the first white child born in the county; Whit McConnel and Nancy Marshall were the first couple married in the county. Asherville had the first rural high school and one of the first schools, if not the first, as the first two years of the school records were never turned into the organized district in 1871.

In 1872 a store was put in Beloit by Williams and Finnigan. There was a grist mill and the first lumber yard was owned by the Walker Bros. Lumber was hauled from Greenleaf.

A notice in the Beloit Gazette on April 25, 1872, asked the 12th Judicial District of the State of Kansas to organize the town of Beloit into a city of the 3rd class. The history of Beloit began at the foot of Mill Street, on the Solomon River, where the Beloit Mill was built. Here a spring pushed forth and was a stopping place for Indians, soldiers, buffalo hunters, and settlers on their way westward or looking for homesteads in the vicinity. The site was called Willow Springs.

A saw mill was erected in 1870 and in 1871 a flour mill was added. The mill was sold to Farmway Coop, Inc. in 1945 and was converted to a feed mill. Because of unsafe conditions, the old landmark was razed in 1975.

A good system of waterworks was put in by the city about 1895. Electric lights were added in the city in 1890.

The first business house in Beloit was built on the north side of Fourth Street, now South Street, by L. D. Williams early in 1871. It was a general merchandise store. The Catholics and a few others held services in a portion of the upstairs for a while. The upstairs was also used by Williams for a home.

In 1871 a cottonwood building was erected in Beloit at the corner of Court and Mill Street. It was used as a schoolhouse, town hall, and for religious gatherings.

A livery stable and the office for Southwestern Stage Co. were located at the corner of Main and Mill.

The first hotel was the Cornell House built in 1871 at 220 S. Mill Street. The second hotel building in Beloit was built by Tim Hersey in 1872. It was known as "Hersey House" and was located at 220 South Mill. The Avenue Hotel was constructed in 1875 at the corner of East Main Street and Hersey Avenue.

F. H. Hart started the first bank in Mitchell County in 1873.

A. T. Rogers was owner of the Rogers Elevator and was a dealer in livestock in 1883. J. H. Roberts owned a large furniture store and J. T. Barnes ran a real estate business in 1883.

The Girls Industrial School was opened in 1888, sponsored by the WCTU and citizens of Beloit, who maintained the school until its formal adoption by the state legislature in 1889.

In 1870 the population of Mitchell County was only 485 and Beloit was organized in 1872. In the five years from 1870 Mitchell County's population skyrocketed to 4,885.

The Bunch-Miller Drug Co. was established in Beloit in 1882 on South Mill Street. It was later moved to the southeast corner of Main and Mill Streets.

Beloit's first library was housed in the old City Hall which stood on the site of the present Municipal Building. It was opened to the public on Saturday afternoons. Ava Soper was the first librarian. She served in that capacity until the Port Library opened.

In the winter of 1873 an iron bridge was built across the Solomon River at a cost of \$10,000.

ROOKS COUNTY

Stockton National Bank

by Roger Hrabe

The Stockton National Bank has been a fixture in Stockton for well over 130 years. Here is an abbreviated history of this longtime Stockton business.

Jay J. Smyth & Co., Bankers, Stockton, organized in May 1879 by J. J. Smyth, Cashier First National Bank, Marion, Iowa, and Charles C. Woods, then practicing lawyer of Marion, Iowa, now cashier of The Stockton Bank. In the July 29, 1881, edition of The Rooks County Record, the following ad appears: "The Stockton Bank (Jay J. Smyth & Co.) Does a General Exchange and Collection Business, Long Time Loans Negotiated, Stockton, Rooks Co. Kansas."

It should be noted that a new town on the railroad building from Alton to Stockton in 1885 was named Woodston to honor Charles C. Woods, who was instrumental in getting the railroad built and the town established, plus he offered to donate \$500 for construction of the school if the town were named Woodston.

Chas. Woods purchased Lot 2, Block 5 North of Main in Stockton on January 15, 1886, for \$1200 (the lot on the northwest corner of Main and Walnut Streets). On April 22, 1887, Chas. Woods deeded Lot 2 to the First National Bank of Stockton for \$1200. The bank building on Lot 2 was constructed the same year and "1887" and "Bank" appear on the building. This is probably when the entire "Bank Block" was constructed, a series of eight buildings that runs west from the bank building that are of the same height and design, although several have had facelifts altering their appearance.

A new bank named the Exchange State Bank was organized on August 1, 1900. This bank most likely purchased the assets and deposits of the Bank of Jay J. Smyth as it occupied the same location as the Smyth bank, and eventually the Smyths sold their lot to the new bank in 1905. J. W. Anderson was elected as the first president of this bank.

In 1905 another meeting was held for the purpose of converting the Exchange State Bank to a national organization to be named The Stockton National Bank. In June 1919 W. F. Hughes purchased controlling interest in the bank and his family ran the bank until 1960.

By 1930 the National State Bank of Stockton had failed and its bank building on the southwest corner of Main and Cedar Street was sold to The Stockton National Bank. The Stockton National Bank moved its banking operations to that location and remained there until 1965.

Jack B. Berkley moved to Stockton in 1956 with an agreement to eventually purchase the bank from the Hughes family. He began gradually purchasing shares and by 1961 had acquired controlling interest in the bank. He was elected president of the bank that year and the following individuals were elected to the board of directors: H. J. Berkley, Jack B. Berkley, Robert B. Berkley, Eloise M. Berkley, and Leo C. Bird.

In 1965 The Stockton National Bank built a new bank building where the old Beck Hotel had stood for many years (on the corner of Cedar and North First Streets).

In 1970 the Berkley family purchased the Rooks County State Bank in Woodston from John McCormick. This was originally organized as a separate organization because of banking laws at the time.

Stockton Bancshares, Inc. was formed in 1980 as a bank holding company and The Stockton National Bank became a subsidiary of that company. All owners exchanged their shares in the bank for shares in Stockton Bancshares at that time.

As the farm and financial crisis of the late 1980s worsened, banks began to fail or have financial problems and Stockton Bancshares Inc. was able to acquire three more banks. The Farmers & Merchants Bank of Hill City and the Trego-WaKeeney State Bank were purchased in 1988. The next year it acquired the Farmers State Bank of Bogue and converted it to a branch of the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Hill City.

In 1993 the Rooks County State bank was merged into The Stockton National Bank and became a branch. In 1994 due to an increased need for additional office space, The Stockton National Bank expanded to the west, and added five additional offices along with a larger data processing room and storage room.

In 1998 Jack B. Berkley died. He had started working in Stockton in 1956 and became President of the Bank in 1961; he had served in Kansas banks for 50 years. John A. Berkley was then elected President and James E. Berkley elected Chairman of the Board.

In 2000, The Stockton National Bank celebrated 100 years of banking.

In April of 2000 the Bank decided to close the Woodston Branch which had been in operation since 1909.

In 2001 The Stockton National Bank started an external remodeling consisting of a new pitched roof and a new front entrance.

In September 2013 the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Hill City was merged into The Stockton National Bank., and in August 2014 The Stockton National Bank acquired First Security Bank & Trust of Norton and Lenora.

WOODSTON, Blacksmiths

by Leo E. Oliva

One of the first businesses in any country town was the blacksmith, whose services were especially needed by area farmers. Information about blacksmiths can be gleaned from local newspapers.

Soon after Woodston was established on the railroad constructed from Alton to Stockton in 1885, J. H. Kincaid built a blacksmith shop which he soon sold to George Nedrow who leased it to Levi Pierce. Within a year this shop was operated by John Ireland and H. A. Cormany. They repaired all sorts of equipment, fabricated new parts, and made horseshoes. One wonders at the frequent change of ownership, but some of these early blacksmiths were plying their trade to earn income while establishing a farm. Others moved on to other towns.

The second blacksmith shop in Woodston was opened in 1886 by H. C. McNutt, who had helped his father Rollin in the family blacksmith business on their farm in Ash Rock Township north of Woodston (the farm and blacksmith shop were located approximately one-half mile east of the Ash Rock Church which is five miles north and one mile east of Woodston). The location of McNutt's original shop is unknown, but he soon built a new shop where the Rooks County State Bank was later located, now the location of the Woodston City Office on Main Street.

McNutt sold his shop in 1888 and returned to the farm. H. A. Cormany and his brother G. H. moved their business to this location and leased out their old shop to Frank Cormany and a Mr. Blazier. Within a few weeks they moved everything to the McNutt shop and closed the other one. It is not known how long the Cormany shop continued.

In 1894 L. J. White was operating a blacksmith shop when he was joined by his brother William from Oklahoma. In October 1899 Earl McNutt was listed as a blacksmith. He sold his business to Briggs & Douglas in 1903, later operated by George Briggs. In 1905 Briggs sold to H. C. McNutt (who originally built the shop) and Jack Orton. McNutt added a lightning rod business and reportedly enjoyed many sales over a large territory.

McNutt soon built a new and larger shop across the alley north of his Main Street location. He sold the old shop to Carl Wallace who moved it to his farm. The Rooks County State Bank was built on that lot in 1909.

H. C. sold the new shop to his brother Ira in 1906, and Ira brought his son Bert into the business which was known as McNutt & Son. This shop also went through a series of owners, including Clarence & Scott Minnick (1912), Ira Engler (1915), and E. D. Taylor & H. F. Hobelman (1924). This shop burned down in 1927 and Bert McNutt purchased the lots, moved a house on the north part for his family, and built a new blacksmith shop which he operated until he retired in 1943. Edwin (Doc) Yoxall operated the shop until 1956, when he sold it to Fred Cook. Either Yoxall or Cook erected a metal building for the business, on the south side of the old shop building. Cook retired in 1965 and the building was used for other purposes.

Robert E. (Bob) McCall opened a blacksmith and welding shop in 1948 in a former hardware store on the south side of Main Street and one block west of the Rooks County State Bank. He continued the business until his retirement. This was the end of blacksmithing in Woodston. Bob McCall still lives in Woodston, one of the towns oldest residents. He will gladly share stories about

his business and the history of the town if you stop by his "White Elephant" building on the south side of Main Street for coffee.

GRAHAM COUNTY

Graham County's Bygone Business Store

From the Graham County Historical Society Archives

Herbert DeWitt "H. D." Clayton was a man of multiple careers and successes: Teacher, Farmer, Newspaper editor, and, finally, manufacturer of farm implements and school playground equipment.

Clayton was born at Hiawatha, Kansas, and was the first white child born in Brown county, this in 1859; he came to Western Kansas in 1887 as a teacher at Prairie Dale (on Bow creek) and other schools while also devoting himself to a highly-successful farming enterprise.

By June of 1902, Clayton had invented and patented what was referred to as a "weed-cutter" implement and had declared his intentions to place it on the market.

Early in 1909, the Rowe and Zohner Hardware became The NORTH SIDE HARDWARE COMPANY, under the ownership of H. D. Clayton, P. L. Stout, and S. S. Nevins. Clayton quickly established his "knife weeder" manufacturing concern in the spacious basement of the thriving business.

At first constructed of wood and steel, the bulk-and heavy-device was offered in one-, two-, and three-row models, the sole purpose of which was to provide "first time over" cultivation of listed corn. The horse-drawn weeders were designed to "sled" down rows of planted corn while shearing off the lister ridges, killing weeds while "throwing in" soil to protect young plants.

Within a few years, the heavy-and-cumbersome wooden devices had been supplanted by lighter and stronger steel and iron models. Actually, Clayton offered a "new model" virtually every year, though model changes came to be minor and were typically made at the suggestion of farmer-users of the weeder.

While immensely popular locally-and countless testimonials in local newspapers verified the popularity of the weeder—the Clayton adjustable Knife Weeder, also frequently called "the sled weeder," was shipped over a wide area; many weeders were "railroaded" to other states. Eventually, with the advent of powerful and functional tractors, multi-row wheeled cultivators replaced the sled weeder.

Beginning in 1924 Clayton began the manufacture of his "Playground Merry-Go-Round" from a factory on North Pomeroy in Hill City. Offered in 16 styles and "high" and "low" models, the steel-and-wood merry-go-rounds, guaranteed for 25 years, were sold to many hundreds of schools, municipalities, and even to private individuals as an invaluable piece of exercise equipment. In 1941 Clayton was forced to abandon his lucrative business because of ill health.

Until recently there was a Clayton manufactured "Playground Merry-Go-Round" in a Hill City park until it was removed due to current playground equipment safety regulations. On display at the Graham County Historical Museum is a salesperson's sample of the merry-go-round that was used to illustrate the Hill City firm's product to regional schools. Also on display are several models of the Clayton Adjustable Knife Weeder.

SHERIDAN COUNTY

The General Store—Gone But Not Forgotten

by John Schlageck

Years ago every town had one. They served as a meeting place for friends and neighbors. You could catch up on local news and wet your whistle at the same time.

This long-gone establishment was the general store. It carried candy, soda, cigarettes, gas, hardware, and a few clothing items like gloves and hats. Some were even run by a registered pharmacist and carried medicine for what ailed you.

In the small northwestern Kansas community where I grew up, Albert Dreese owned and operated the general store in Seguin. Dreese would take your shopping list, grab a brown paper bag and grope through dimly lighted aisles and the maze of store items, carefully selecting and filling your order.

When he returned he'd hand my mom the bag and me a sucker or balloon before bidding us good-bye and returning to his cronies and the pitch game at the small table in the center of the store.

Dreese never rang up your bill on a computer or cash register either. He figured everything in his head, wrote it down on a small note pad and made change out of the front pockets of his trousers.

While a card game was in progress, it was up to individual players to serve themselves a soda or beer and deposit the correct change on the counter top. No interruptions please—the game was all-important. Peanuts to munch on while playing cards were weighed out on a scale and poured into a small brown bag.

During the winter, no one stoked the potbellied stove except Mr. Dreese because a cherry red stove would melt all of his chocolate bars, or that's what he told all the youngsters who visited his store. Why, he even ran old Mr. Reinhart out of the store one day for tampering with his stove.

Another source of entertainment in the general store was a one-armed bandit—yep, right in the little community of nearly 50 hearty souls. Farmers around home didn't need to travel to Las Vegas to gamble—they farmed for a living and dropped by the back room of Mr. Dreese's store. The sheriff never knew about this one-armed bandit, or so I thought.

Every so often when I had a few coins burning a hole in my pockets, Davey Thummel and I would walk down to the store and plunk down a dime for a Coke and fill it with a nickel bag of Planters peanuts.

Albert Dreese isn't around anymore. Neither is the store. His business and others like it couldn't compete with the giant supermarkets and box stores offering lower prices and modern conveniences all under one roof.

No, Mr. Dreese's store didn't have air conditioning for those hot, northwestern Kansas summer days. It didn't have air pudding (elevator) music, coupons, or anything you could want, or didn't need, to entice customers from Norton, Colby, Oakley and the rest of northwestern Kansas.

All Mr. Dreese had to offer was himself, a smile, and dedicated service to his friends and neighbors who dropped by his small general store.

Yes, Albert Dreese is dead and a part of history died with him. We don't have general stores anymore. His personal touch and sincere interest in his neighbors, friends and customers has been replaced by whirling blue lights, swarming shoppers and cars, screaming kids, and aisles and miles of consumer items.