



~ Part 30 ~
Reflections on a Common Theme
Local Traditions

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CLOUD COUNTY

Water, Water Everywhere

by Joan Nothern

There are traditions here that are not unique to this place. Rather they reflect, they even confirm, being of rural Kansas. The daily weather review comes first to mind. Tenths of an inch of rain compared, place by place, and percentage of chance for precipitation in the coming days—remarked over and over. Concern for the surrounding fields is betrayed in these ritual morning exchanges.

Family and friends gather for an annual fish fry— the harvest of many hours spent with friends fishing ponds and the lake, perhaps the river too, with the accumulating catch frozen until the anticipated traditional fish fry.

The symbol of a fading tradition is the clothesline. “Monday, wash day” meant yards were transformed by clothes waving in the wind—on a regular schedule. Home dryers have moved this chore indoors, spread over the week. But this is a good place to name the constant in these observations: Water. Water for crops, food, washing.

Water figures in the rituals of home life: doing the dishes, scheduling family baths, putting on the coffee or brewing tea, watering the flowers—indoors and out, tending pets. Providing water for birds. The habits that define our days become family traditions.

We start young, entertaining children with nursery rhymes and finger plays. Remember The Itsy-Bitsy Spider? Jack and Jill? Rain, Rain Go Away? All with water woven into children’s lives. They are a tradition perpetuating fun and awareness of the natural world.

These gentle traditions create a rhythm in our days and weeks and lives, an underlying rhythm that sustains just quietly.

MITCHELL COUNTY

The Mitchell County Mills

--- from Historical Moments of Mitchell County

The history of Beloit began at the foot of Mill Street, on the Solomon River, where the Beloit Mill was built. Here a spring gushed forth and was a stopping place for Indians, soldiers, buffalo hunters, and settlers on their way westward or looking for homesteads in this vicinity. This site was called Willow Springs.

A young man, Tim Hersey, conceived the idea of a water power site to manufacture lumber out of the large cottonwood trees that lined the river banks. He constructed a temporary dam and erected a saw mill to which logs were floated from above the dam.

Mr. Hersey brought a crew from Abilene, Kansas to construct the dam. They lived in a dugout along the river bank west of the mill site. The only building on the town site at that time was a log cabin built by Aaron Bell. The crew members were Hugh Whitley, head teamster; Ellis Bryant, lumberman from Vermont was head sawyer; John Curtain, who later represented this district in the State Legislature; Al Sheltbrand, Joe and John Taylor.

The saw mill was erected in 1870, and in 1871 the flour mill was added. Early day owners were James N. Burns, F. L. Vreeland, A. T. Rodgers, J. C. Fisher, and E. C. Shelton. C. Blair was manager for over 22 years and B. C. Brumage head miller for 34 years. Gold Coin and Standard A brands of flour were shipped to all parts of Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

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.

Condensed from an article by Louise Hyde Dooley, appearing in the May 3, 1975, issue of The Beloit Daily Call.

Tanquary Mill

In 1873 L. D. Williams built a mill on the banks of the Solomon River about 8½ miles southeast of Beloit. In 1874 W. B. Tanquary from Chicago, Ill. bought the rights and enlarged the mill which was built close to the river.

In 1879 a flood destroyed this mill and a second one was built which was 32 x 70 feet by W. B. Tanquary and his son, Perry. This building was on higher ground, about 80 ft. up the bank. The mill was connected with the wheels by a long iron rod and water power still used to grind white and graham flour from the wheat and meal from the corn. People from far and near brought their grain to this mill.

When W. B. Tanquary died another son, Walter, came and helped operate the mill.

At the turn of the century, Perry and Walter Tanquary sold the mill to F. W. Paulsen and it continued under his management until fire destroyed the building in 1936.

Mr. Paulsen made a breakfast food from wheat that was very popular. The Paulsens had one son, Robert. Mrs. Paulsen acted as game warden for many years and was very proficient in her job.

OSBORNE COUNTY

Alton Rural High School Alumni Banquet

by Carolyn Williams

This is the time of year when all little schools or "has been" schools come together for the traditional Alumni Banquet. It's a rite of passage that those in larger schools don't seem to enjoy. Maybe that's because they very seldom knew all of their classmates, only a select few friends. The teachers are not always as close to their students as they are in smaller classes in smaller schools, so the "urge to return to their roots." is not felt so keenly. But here in the Alton Rural High School, the homing instinct is still felt.

After the Christmas season has passed, the Alumni president and secretary bring their heads together, even if by email now, and begin discussions about "when and where we're going to have it."

Alton High School began its life in 1900 with 13 students, taught by one teacher in a three-year course. Three years later, 1903, eight students comprised the first graduating class. Later, in 1920, the "New High School" was voted in and ready for occupation in 1925.

But in 1912, before the erection of their fine new building, the Alton Alumni Association began. At that time it was the custom to hold the graduation at one of the local churches with the Alumni Banquet served in the fellowship hall. It was a graduation party and Alumni Banquet altogether! One of my sources says, "During the depression years the Alumni Association became inactive. On October 4, 1938, a meeting was called to reorganize. In May 1939 the Alton Alumni Association entertained the seniors. Tickets were 50 cents per plate." How important celebrating the graduation of their young people was to those who had already achieved that goal, even through those worst hard times.

Here in Alton there have been numerous moves of the memorabilia from the hallways of the ARHS building to a special trophy room, to the local Legion building, Hardman Hall, but the once-a-year tradition continues. Forty-year up to sixty-year class reunions are often held in a local home of a class member, a church basement, or a restaurant nearby. But THE REUNION that tops them all is the Alumni Banquet where all graduates and spouses are together in one decorated room to remember the good old days

Our town spruces itself up, even going so far as to have a PRIDE cleanup day sometime within a month of THE DAY. The yards of unoccupied houses suddenly are mowed. Flowers suddenly sprout where they hadn't been before. The town takes on a sparkle reminiscent of Christmas. We're having company, not just for the one day, but we celebrate three days!

The Sunday after the banquet the local foundation has a Sunday lunch for everyone visiting in the local B&Bs & homes in the community. The Monday after is always Memorial Day, so the celebrating continues with the annual 21-gun salute, laying of the wreath at the central tomb, and a short program provided by the local American Legion Auxiliary.

One lady recited "In Flanders' Field" for many years; now I've been given that privilege. I was told one time that the most memorable rendition was given by the local barber, Cole McClellan, who had a very strong voice which carried throughout the entire cemetery.

But the tradition that holds our small community together continues as we all don our many hats for this special time in our lives. Even though our family members are not in this community, we know that in those other communities where they now rest these same traditions carry on. That's what traditions are—remembering.

ROOKS COUNTY

Rooks County Free Fair

by Susan D. McFarland, Rooks County Museum Coordinator

There is one tradition that binds all of Rooks County together—and that is the County Fair every year. It is a big freakin' deal!! From observation over the past three years (and a lot of listening to visitors to the museum), nearly everyone who resides in Rooks County spends at least one day/evening at the County Fair in Stockton every August. It is one of two months in which the Rooks County Historical Society doesn't have a monthly meeting (the other being December, for obvious reasons).

The charm of the County Fair is easier to understand once you attend the Fair. The festive atmosphere where everybody is absolutely, positively having a good time, the understandable pride of the 4-H members in their exhibits, be they cookies or a fine Black Angus heifer/bull, the displays of merchandise by vendors, both large and small, both inside buildings and outside in traveling wagons/ tents, is contagious and results in an overall emotional state of "well-being" and that, despite everything you hear on the news from the outside world, "everything is well" in this small corner of the universe.

In today's fragmented world of entertainment and information, it is rare indeed to find such a community-oriented event that absolutely brings everybody together. It wasn't always that way, though.

The first county fair was held in 1879, but there were no fairs in 1880 and 1881, the reason unknown. In those early years, there was no guarantee there was going to be a county fair—in 1885 the Western News asked: "What has become of the Rooks County fair association? We saw a call for a stockholders meeting a few weeks ago in the Rooks County Record, yet no fair dates have been set." In 1886, "Due to a lack of interest the Plainville Agricultural Fair Association was organized and a fair was held in Plainville on October 12, 13, and 14." Hard to picture this today—but the only county fairs held in the years 1887 and 1888 were held in Plainville. Crop failures (due to drought) in 1890 made holding a fair impossible. It wasn't until 1895 the event was held, although it did finally rain for three days.

The County Fair picked up steam from that point forward with interruptions along the way. One interesting interruption happened in 1917. The Fair was supposed to be held on September 4, 5, 6, and 7, and Fair Books were printed. But the County Fair was not held because of "the World War" (although the state fair was held in Hutchinson Sept. 15-22, and the Kansas Free Fair was scheduled in Topeka from September 10-15, 1917). The printed Fair Books were used for the Fair in 1918, with the 1918 dates being added.

The next interruption was in 1936, although the 4-H organization held its own fair. Hot weather, drought, and grasshoppers were a few of many reasons there was no real County Fair (in today's meaning of the word). In 1943, the County Fair was canceled because of the epidemic of the much-feared polio disease. In 1944, the 4-H and FFA fair was a one-day event because of tire/gasoline rationing and the farm labor shortage. A 4-H and Vocational Agriculture fair was held—but somebody forgot about advance publicity. Opps!! The year 1946 saw the first regular Fair event since 1942. This fair was billed as "Rooks County and Adjoining counties." Tuesday it was the Graham County fair, on Wednesday it was Osborne county's day, Thursday belonged to Phillips County, and on Friday it was a combined Ellis and Rooks counties day.

The Fair Book for 1951 proclaimed, "This year the fair will be known as the Rooks County Free Fair on account of the fact that entertainment features, free acts and carnival advertising gives it this name." It was also the first year the 4-H exhibits were limited to Rooks County only. The Warren Harding 4-H building was built in 1963 (although it was named Harding Hall much later).

In the Rooks County Historical Museum we have on display what I call "The Fair Quilt." The Stockton Quilters' Guild spent numerous hours on this project and donated the end result to us. It is

an excellent exhibit and the museum visitor should take a few moments and ponder the resulting product, not just the hours and skills it took to put the quilt together, but the hours and hours (and money, too) it takes to pull a county-wide social event like the County Fair together in a successful fashion. Plan now to attend the 2017 Rooks County Free Fair, August 13-19.