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BALD EAGLE

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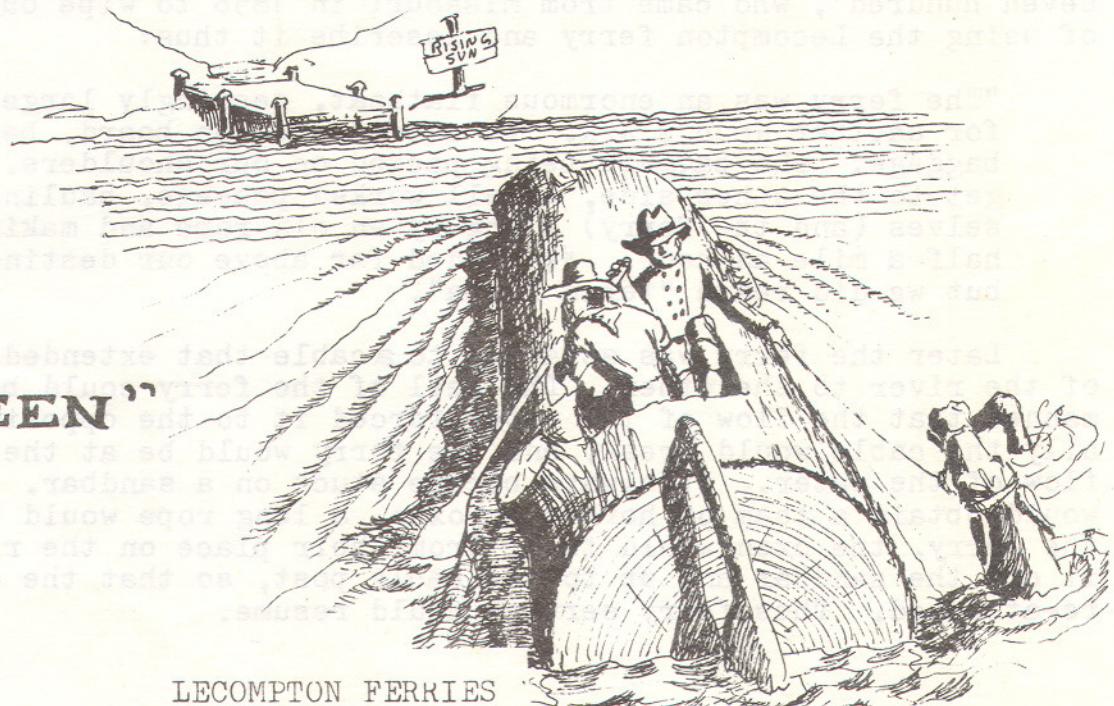
EAGLE

VOL. 10 NO. 2

LECOMPTON, KANSAS

SUMMER 1984

"THE FAIRY QUEEN"



LECOMPTON FERRIES

River ferries were a necessary part of transportation in our early Kansas territorial and state history. There were no real roads and no bridges. The Kansas River was not easily forded, due to its deep holes, undercurrents and quicksand. Many traveling days were lost by people wanting to cross a stream if in flood or simply having a temporary high. There was no alternative for them but to make camp and wait until the water lowered enough to chance fording it. For this reason ferries became important to people such as missionaries, government personnel, soldiers and those travelers passing through on their way to California and other western points.

In 1852, William R. Simmons of Indiana, who had served in the army during the Mexican War, was permitted to enter Kansas Territory. He walked along the Kansas River until he came to a place that pleased him. This later became part of Lecompton, Kansas. He took a squatter's claim and settled in.

He provided some shelter for himself, and then he cut down a sycamore tree to obtain a huge log, 20 feet long and 5 feet in diameter. He exca-

vated an area in the center 5 feet in length and 3 feet wide. He then carved a scantling 4 inches by 6 inches for a keel. Simmons named his creation "The Fairy Queen". A single large paddle was used to propel the ferry across the river. The passengers sat in the hollowed out area, while if a horse were involved, it was compelled to swim, being led by its owner who was sitting in the center section. Because of the convenience of having a ferry in that particular place, the army permitted Simmons to remain there, although Kansas Territory was not then open for settlement. As to the cost of crossing on this ferry, Ely Moore stated that Simmons charged him a \$2.50 gold piece to go from the south Kaw bank to the north in 1853.

Just how long Simmons operated this ferry is unknown but it was probably not later than 1856, because of a description of the ferry that was used at Lecompton in 1857. A member of a group called "the twenty-seven hundred", who came from Missouri in 1856 to wipe out Lawrence, talk of using the Lecompton ferry and describe it thus:

"The ferry was an enormous flatboat, seemingly large enough for another Noah's Ark. It received us on board, bag and baggage. The baggage being packed on our shoulders. To get to the other side, we all worked passage, hauling ourselves (and the ferry) along by an old rope and making about half a mile an hour. We landed far above our destination, but we did reach "terra firma".

Later the ferry was attached to a cable that extended from one side of the river to the other. The keel of the ferry could be set in such a manner that the flow of the water forced it to the opposite bank. Occasionally the cable would break, and the ferry would be at the mercy of the flow of the water. It always became stuck on a sandbar. Then someone would obtain a team of horses or oxen, a long rope would be attached to the ferry, the oxen would then, from their place on the river bank, pull it off the sandbar and up to the cable post, so that the cable could be re-attached. Thus ferry service could resume.

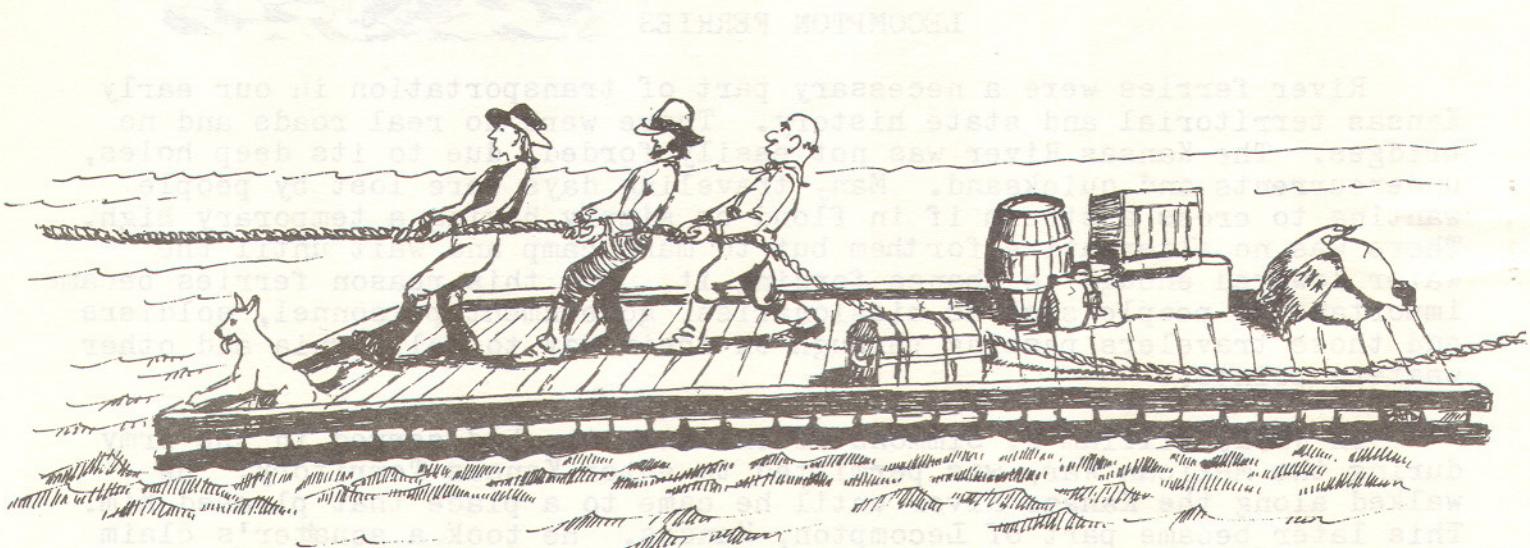


Illustration of a flatboat being pulled across a river by a team of animals, likely horses or oxen, using a cable system.

"Wall, in crossing the river, I spied the old fellow dozing in the shallow water, so I just shooed the old man onto the sandbar, then with my hatchet I hit him between the eyes, till he quivered all over. Jumping astride him and putting both hands in his gills, I aimed to sure land him, but the sand gave way under my feet, he gave me a wag or two with his tail, and away he went down to the bottom in the mud among the rocks and limbs of trees, up again, down again, till he plumb split that river in two. And say, that thar came nigh to being my everlasting bath. And if you saw any fuss in the waters down Boston way last month, that was the old cat and me, sure!" I asked who got the best of it, when he answered by saying, "If he claims the honor, he's telling no lie. When I got my senses I were down thar on a sandbar plum busted! Say, I believe that thar Jonah yarn".

Moore then told him that he was seeking a ferry, and Simmons pointed to his sycamore log. He launched his "boat" and they crossed the angry, rushing Kaw with but one paddle to propel and guide it. The only mishap was to the horse. As he had swum after them, a log had struck him on the shoulder, turning him completely over. However, he was uninjured.

As they reached the north bank, Moore prepared to leave, but Simmons persuaded him to stay to hear the events of his life. The most poignant being the time he was turned down by Miss Nandy Wilcox of Indiana.

August 1854 when Boone and Rodirique came to the Bald Eagle locale, searching for a town site, they, after a five mile trek, decided to rest on the hill east of what became Lane University. Rodirique later related that as they were about ready for the evening meal, they were aroused by the snapping of the brush to the west, resembling the stampede of a herd of cattle; and as they looked at the brush, a man with tattered garments, hatless, hair awry and a face as red as the setting sun, jumped into their midst, saying; "I smelled your smoke and smelt a fuss. What are you doing hyar? This air my land and nobody can jump it and die with a whole skin!" This was Simmons guarding against claim jumpers. After parley and an invitation to supper, diplomacy won -- Simmons was to possess one-eighth of the city, free of all expenses and the town site of Lecompton was practically established.

Simmons' name was found in the 1855 census, but sometime between 1860 and 1865, his name was no longer listed and he had apparently moved on, as no further trace of him was found.

Iona Spencer and Sara Walter

Territorial Day

Territorial Day will be June 30th. This will be a fun time in the good old home town. If you have any questions, contact Don and Evelyn Willis. Maxine Dark will again be in charge of the ice cream social for the Lecompton Historical Society.

President's Notes

The third exciting year for Lane University Museum is currently underway. Interest in touring Lane and Lecompton continues to increase, as shown by the number of tours and visitors so far this year.

Recently, in the presence of a group of people not familiar with this area, conversation lead to Lecompton and our rich history. Some in the group thought we were surely exaggerating events that happened here. This is the kind of thinking that must be overcome when mention of our historic town comes into the conversation. Lecompton is important NATIONALLY, and for far too many years, we have allowed other people to overlook or ignore that fact. It all started because we were on the losing side of the Civil war - 120 years ago - and losers are seldom given recognition for having any accomplishments. But, just for instance, what town in America can say that the administrations of four presidents were influenced by happenings right here in Lecompton? Very few!

No one can take our rich history away from us, and there are thousands of printed words to bear this out in the history books, Congressional Records, newspapers, and even the National Archives, and if the walls of Constitution Hall could only talk, we'd have a first hand report of exciting happenings right here on historic Lecompton's Main Street. What we need to do is to develop a little "Texas style" bragging philosophy, so people will know where we are, and what we're all about!

The Kansas Legislative Wives and the Northeast Kansas Division of County Commissioners and County Engineers were among the many recent visitors to tour Lane University Museum. Our volunteer guides have really been working overtime to provide visitors the opportunity to visit Lane Museum and Lecompton. Without their cooperation, we could not accommodate the requests of the groups who want to tour our Museum. One of the rewards is to hear the complimentary remarks made by many of the visitors who are really surprised and pleased to find that a museum of this stature could exist in a small town such as Lecompton. Remember, each of you have played a part in making our museum a success.

Our collection of items continues to increase because of people being impressed with Lane University Museum, and due to your loyalty. The following items have been donated or loaned recently: Cover for the Hammond organ by Elda Flowers; a unique army hitching post by Audrey and Calvin Maust; a very old quilt, a crocheted bedspread and a foot warmer by Charles and Peggy Howe; class picture by Chet Gibbens; a family picture by Robert Fleming; a picture of Glenn Church by Oneta Glenn; a picture, map and Army silverware by Mae Holderman; a small printing press by Shirley Funk; a "C.C.C." book by E. H. Murphy; class picture by Joe Garcia; a milker bucket by Dr. and Mrs. Spurny; two lamps (one Aladdin and one oil) and a gasolene iron by Maxine Dark; a quilt by Charles Wilhite; an antique wheel chair and a book by Bernie Bower and a family picture of the Milliken family by Harold Milliken. Thanks to each of you for your interest and support.

On April 18th, a Quilt Show was held at Lane Museum under the direction of Elizabeth Johnson. Twenty-six quilts were selected to be shown at the county-wide Quilt Show at the Watkins Museum in Lawrence in May. Thanks to Elizabeth and to Hulda Erhart for the extra work of sewing hanging sleeves on the quilts, and also to the volunteers who worked at the Quilt Show in Lawrence. This has been a very successful event the past two years.

Your Help is Appreciated ---- Thanks to Don McAfee for fixing the lower level porch light; David Paslay and Opal Goodrick for overseeing the installation of lights in the display cases; Wally and Mae Holderman, Dorothy Shaner, David Paslay and Paul Bahnmaier for mowing the property around Lane University and the Lecompton High School Building. Opal Goodrick for arranging the display on President Eisenhower's campaign items; Iona Spencer for planting tulip bulbs; Julia Springer for overseeing the addition of many new names to the Life Membership plaque; Sara Walter, Elda Flowers and Lydia Long for working in the Library on the first and third Wednesdays; Joyce Dexter for representing the Historical Society at the Legislative Wives reception in Topeka; Sally Wright, Nellie Glenn and Sara Walter for attending a Northeast Kansas Tourism meeting; Connie Stilson for providing the publicity for the coming year; Iona Spencer for her diligent work with the fast-growing membership list; Arloene and George Simmons for securing the many pictures for the ever-popular Lecompton High School Hall of Fame; Ellen Duncan for serving as editor of the "Bald Eagle", and to our many volunteers who help with the tours and work days at Lane University Museum. A simple "thank you" does not seem enough, but hopefully the satisfaction of a job well done makes it all worthwhile.

In response to a letter by Connie Stilson, the Kansas Magazine spent an afternoon in Lecompton preparing an article on Lane University Museum. The resulting story will appear in the Summer (June) issue, and we are certainly anticipating seeing this issue. If you would like a copy of this special issue, we will have some extra ones available for 75¢ each.

President - PAUL BAHNMAIER
Editor - ELLEN DUNCAN
Genealogical Writer - IONA SPENCER
Historical Writer - SARA WALTER

THE LECOMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecompton, Kansas 66050 is a non-profit corporation for the preservation of Historic Sites. We are eager for continued membership and new members!

Individual membership is \$2.50 per year, from December to December. Life membership is \$50 per individual. Contributions are tax deductible. Checks should be made payable to the Lecompton Historical Society, and mailed to Mrs. Iona Spencer, R.R. #1, Lecompton, Kansas 66050.

(Please clip and mail with your check)

\$2.50 Annual Individual Member.

\$50 Individual Life and Memorial Life Member.

Other Contribution _____

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Note: If your name or address is not correct as shown on this copy of your Bald Eagle, please let us know.

MEMORIAL LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

Dr. Henry and Myra (Spangler) Wenrich

John N. and Nettie (Baughman) Day

Francis and Gertrude (Evans) Hoad

The donation for the above memorials was very much appreciated. Thanks

Samuel "Sam" Dark, Jr. memorial by his wife Margaret Dark

Alfred M. and Eulah E. (Burrell) Goodrich-memorials by their daughter Margaret L.

(Goodrich) Thompson

LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

Miss Ann Greene Keller

Wayne Stover

Margaret (Bahnmaier) Dark

C. R. "Bud" Roberts

Thanks to all. We are pretty sure the above names will be on the Life Membership plaque which will be on display when the Lane University Museum opens the first Sunday in May. Our Life Membership list has climbed to a total of 232 and our membership has increased to 537.

The annual Glenn reunion will be held Sunday June 24, 1984 at the Tecumseh Park, Tecumseh, Kansas with a covered dish luncheon at noon.

Laura E. Taylor, 78, passed away March 12th, in Topeka. She was an authority on flower arranging and had earned numerous trophies and awards. She was a member of the Lecompton Historical Society. She married Frank M. Taylor, August 17, 1924, in Topeka. He survives. A son and two daughters also survive her. Internment was in Mount Hope Cemetery.

Lucy M. Large, 82, passed away April 17th. She had lived in Lecompton 45 years. She and her husband Perry, operated a grocery store and filling station here for many years. Lucy thought a lot of Lecompton and in recent years was always very pleased to return to Lecompton for special events. She married Perry Large in 1919. He died in 1965. She is survived by 4 nieces and 2 nephews. She was a member of the United Methodist Church and a Life Member of the Lecompton Historical Society. Services were held at the U. M. Church in Lecompton, with burial in Fowler Cemetery, north of McClouth.

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The ferryman would call "O-ver! O-ver!" when he left the north river bank for the south, and the same when he left the south bank for the north. The boys of the town would gather on the south side, eager to watch the ferryman when he was compelled to wade into the water to push the ferry off a bar. The frightened horses would rear and plunge, and the women and children scream from fright. As the ferry neared the south bank the more venturesome boys liked to dive under it and hang on its edges until it was moored. The landing place on each side of the river employed riprapping, networks of sunken logs, brush, stones, etc that limited the size of channel available for the ferryboat. (This ferry operated until 1876.)

Owen Baughman is said to have operated the ferry in the 1890's. Albert R. Greene (built Ruth and George Bahnmaier's house) agreed to buy the ferry and put it in good running order if the Lecompton people would put up \$50, and Lane University would give him the lots at the site of the ferry landing. This was done and Mr. Greene had the ferry in good order, when a sudden rise in the river destroyed much of the materials and work. The town then put up \$100 to restore the ferry and soon it was again in use.

Greene lived about 1/2 mile from the ferry, a wire was strung from the ferry to the house, and when a patron on the other side of the river wished to call the boat, the wire was pulled, ringing a bell at the other end and summoning the ferryman. Mr. Greene employed a man to run the ferry during the day, but he was averse to running it after dark, there being practically no business then. On several occasions Mr. Greene was routed out of bed along about midnight to take the ferry across the river to bring back some belated individual. This happened once or twice too often, and Mr. Greene retired from the ferrying business.

The ferry was important to Lecompton as it carried provisions from Perry, Rising Sun and Thompsonville to towns on the south side and vice versa. Thompsonville supplied Lecompton with flour which was an important commodity. The ferry did a brisk business until the bridge was built in about 1899.

The fees for using the ferry were as follows:

Two horse wagon	50¢
One horse buggy	30¢
Loose stock over 5 head	- 5¢ per head
Loose stock less than 5 head	- 15¢ per head.

Iona Spencer - Sara Walter

References:

- Kansas Historical Quarterly Vol. II, 1933 pp. 343-346
Vol. 11, 1909-1911 - pp. 465-468
Lecompton Sun, May 21, 1897; June 4, 1897; Jan. 12, 1912.

WILLIAM R. SIMMONS

William R. Simmons during his youth lived for a period of time in Indiana. As a young man he joined James H. Lane's regiment and fought or ran with him during the U.S. war with Mexico in 1845. He received two wounds in that struggle and returned to Indiana to recuperate. After an unhappy love affair he went to Independence, Missouri. In March 1852, he left Independence, and after having made a trip across the plains with Seth Ward, he wandered up the Kaw River into a territory where he met up with many bald eagles. There he camped and took a squatter's claim. Simmons started a ferry at his claim site and with his fishing, he was able to meet his financial needs.

Ely Moore, Jr., in an address at an old settlers' reunion in Lecompton in 1907, tells of his first meeting with Simmons. He was sent with a message to Leavenworth by his father who was the Indian agent near Paola, Kansas. The Kaw river was in flood, so he couldn't cross it. He was directed to follow the California Road west to a mound (Coon Point), then take a trail north, which would lead him to the Kaw River and a place called Bald Eagle where there was a ferry. Then quoting Mr. Moore, the story continues:

Upon reaching the river I closely scanned its banks both up and down the stream, but my eyes were unrewarded. Disappointed, I was about to give up my search, when my horse pricked up his ears and riveted his attention to the brush, a rod or less to the east of where I stood. Advancing a few steps my ear caught a monotonous drone of suffering lamentation, but I soon detected the intonation of that beautiful hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountain to India's Coral Strand", as it was being strangled by some unseen being. Upon nearer approach, I espied a man sitting astride a log. In his right hand he held a knife, in his left a pair of pinchers, and was in the act of skinning what I supposed to be the half of a large calf, which was suspended from an overhanging limb.

Before I could address this butcher of the wilderness, he, without turning his head or apparently noticing my presence mumbled "Stranger, light and look at your saddle," the universal salutation to a stranger in those days, which interpreted means, "Dismount and rest." Obeying his invitation and stepping to his side, I queried, "My friend, what is that from which you are removing the skin?" "Just a baby blue cat; just a baby -- won't weigh over seventy-five pounds," he drawled. I remarked that I saw no resemblance to a cat in the object before him. He turned partly around on the log, and looking at me with a countenance replete with sympathy at my ignorance asked: "Stranger, whar are you all from?" I told him I came from the East. "Wall", he ejaculated as he resumed his work, "so did the cholera!" Not until this time did I realize it was a catfish. I expressed my surprise at its size, when he repeated, "Only a baby. I had a fight with this youngun's old dad t'other day". Tell me about it I ventured.