

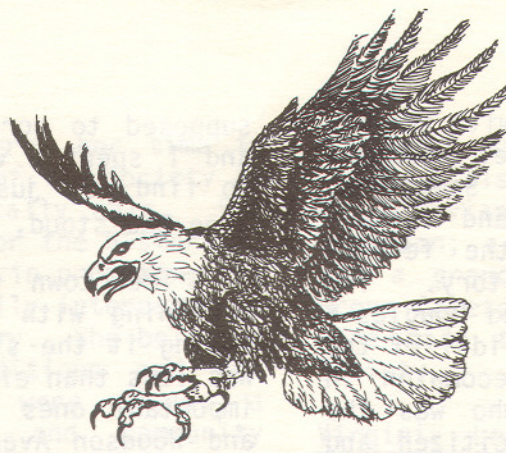
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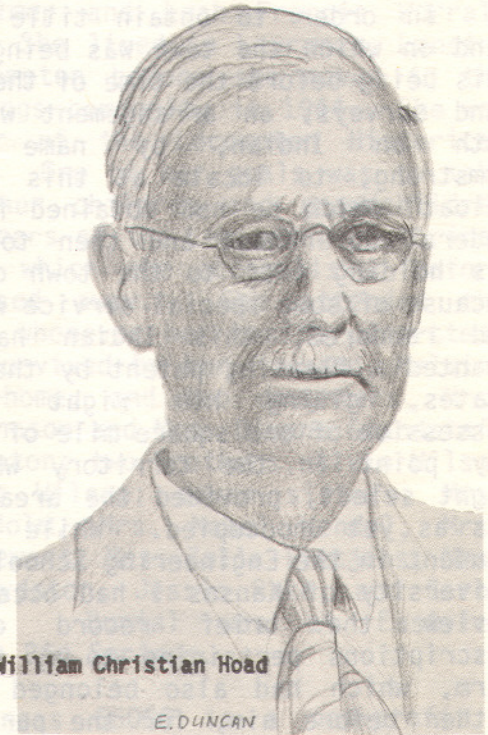


RECOLLECTIONS OF A KANSAS TOWN

By
William Christian Hoad

The year 1854 saw the beginning of a number of towns in which much of the early history of Kansas was made. The Douglas Bill establishing the Territory of Kansas was signed May 30, 1854. Two weeks later the Leavenworth Town Company was organized and by October it was selling lots. The new town of Leavenworth was located on the right or western bank of the Missouri River, about two miles below Fort Leavenworth, which had been an army post since 1827. In July the Atchison Town Company was organized and drove its stakes about twenty miles farther up the same river. In August a pioneer party of the New England Emigrant Aid Society established the town of Lawrence on the south bank of the Kaw at a point about forty miles above its confluence with the Missouri, and in December Topeka was founded, also on the south bank of the Kaw, about twenty-five miles farther west than Lawrence.

It was during this same summer that the settlement at Lecompton was begun by a party of settlers from Pennsylvania. These had followed down the Ohio River to its mouth, thence up the Mississippi to St. Louis, thence up the Missouri to Westport Landing--at the foot of the bluffs on which Kansas City now stands, --and thence westward by way of the Santa Fe Trail to the stopping point at Big Springs, from which their destination was practically in view.



William Christian Hoad

E. DUNCAN

This party appears to have included a number of adherents of the United Brethren Church, a small but militant religious society which had its origin in that nursery of church sects, the valleys and hills of Pennsylvania. It was largely due to the vitality of the religious impulse thus implanted that the town in later years survived the shipwreck of its political fortunes and was able to reconstitute itself as a quiet and orderly village, ministering to the simple commercial and social needs of a somewhat restricted but thriving farming community lying on three sides of it.

Within a few months after the initial settlement there came Andrew H. Reeder, also of Pennsylvania, the first

governor of the Territory, with the new territorial secretary, Daniel Woodson, of Virginia; Chief Justice Samuel D. LeCompte, of Maryland; and others associated with them in the federal administration of the territory. The budding town, at first called Douglas * after the popular political idol of the day, was quickly renamed Lecompton in honor of Judge LeCompte, who was the town's most distinguished citizen and the first president of the Lecompton Town Company.

In order to obtain title to the land on which the town was being built, this being before the time of the public land surveys, an arrangement was made with an Indian, by name George Armstrong, to locate at this point a "float" which he had obtained from the Federal Government and then to assign his holding over to the town company. Because of some special service which he had rendered, this Indian had been granted a floating patent by the United States, giving him right to the possession of one square mile of land at any point in the territory which he might select, provided the area chosen was as yet unoccupied. While I was a student in the Engineering School of the University of Kansas I had occasion to review the brief record of the descriptions pertaining to my father's farm, which had also belonged to his father before him, for the purpose of making a survey of the land. Back at the very beginning I found the description of this patent "from the United States of America to George Armstrong, a Wyandotte Indian," and reading about as follows: "Beginning at a cottonwood tree on the south bank of the Kaw or Kansas River about fifty miles above its confluence with the Missouri, thence south one mile, thence east one mile, thence north one mile to the south bank of said river, thence westerly along the bank of said river one mile, more or less, to the point of beginning." My father's farm was

* Douglas was a small settlement about 4 miles east of Lecompton. Lecompton was first called Bald Eagle before being renamed.

supposed to corner at that same point, and I spent a vast deal of time trying to find out just where that cottonwood tree had stood, forty-five years before.

The town was laid out from the beginning with the purpose in view of making it the state capital. No street was less than eighty feet wide, the more important ones were one hundred feet, and Woodson Avenue, Shannon Avenue and Elmore Street were one hundred and twenty feet in width. Capitol Square was a fine ten-acre tract upon a beautiful knoll overlooking the river but closely adjoining the business section of the town, and Court House Square occupied a somewhat higher but less slightly eminence a little farther away. Along the entire mile of river front, and connecting the northerly ends of all the streets, was a strip of ground from one hundred to two hundred feet in width set aside as a "levee" after the fashion of cities situated along the Mississippi River and other southern waterways, and dedicated to public use forever. It was at this public levee that the flat-bottomed, side-wheel steamers from St. Louis moored to discharge and take on passengers and packet freight, during river stages which permitted navigation. This levee was afterwards vacated by the state legislature, and became the right-of-way of the Santa Fe Railroad through the town.

The seat of territorial government was finally established here in August, 1855, after some fifteen months of wandering: from Fort Leavenworth to Shawnee Mission; from there to Pawnee; back to Shawnee Mission again; and finally to Lecompton.

Professor W.C. Abbott in an article on "Political Warfare in Early Days in Kansas" (Jour. Am. History, III, 627) speaks as follows of the town at this stage:

Thus was Lecompton born, and here, in the fall of 1855, was established the seat of government. But the town became not merely the territorial capital. Partly for that reason, partly on account of its location near the center of

free state activity, Lawrence, it became the headquarters of the pro-slavery forces. For the next five years it was a stirring place. From Lecompton, men went to take part in the so-called Wakarusa War against Lawrence in the winter of 1855. Here, in the following March, were brought the seven free-state leaders, with their chief, Dr. Robinson, as prisoners. In May forces went from here to sack and burn Lawrence. Here in return, four months later, came James H. Lane and his '1200 men with cannon' to avenge the attack on Lawrence and release the seven prisoners. The tale of events is too long to be completed here. Between 1856 and 1858 the town rose to the height of its power. Hotels, some of them of considerable size, were built to accommodate the officials, the leaders and legislators, the land seekers and floating population of the new capital. Here were the executive and judicial offices of the territory, and that of the surveyor-general. This man, John Calhoun, had been surveyor of Sangamon County, Illinois, having for his assistant the young Abraham Lincoln. He had been appointed surveyor-general by the influence of his friend, Stephen A. Douglas, and he reported to the commissioner-general of the land office, Thomas A. Hendricks. And he was the presiding officer of the convention which produced the Lecompton Constitution.

For the use of the surveyor-general and the territorial legislature a large frame building was erected by one William Leamer *, lately arrived from Pennsylvania, who had built up a thriving mercantile establishment on the main street and who was rapidly coming to be the town's most prominent capitalist. This building contained the land office below and the legislative hall above. It was substantially built

* Records indicate the building was built by Colonel William Nace.

of black walnut lumber throughout and is still standing, though now in very shaky condition. I have many times explored its vacant rooms and sounded its moldering walls. Subsequent to November, 1857, when it sheltered the Constitutional Convention which drafted the notorious Lecompton Constitution, it was always known as "Constitution Hall." During its later life the old building saw many vicissitudes and had many strange experiences, not the least strange being that for twenty years the old time legislative hall, in the second story, was used as headquarters and assembly room by the Grand Army of the Republic.

A stage line to Lawrence was put into operation some time in 1857 and a newspaper, the Lecompton Union, was set up. Professor Abbott, in the article previously mentioned, pictures in rapid succession the stirring debates in Congress over the fate of the Territory, the quick growth of Lecompton to a population of three or four thousand, the long roll of distinguished political and military leaders who made the town their headquarters during the few years of its glory, the intrigues, the border warfare, the overflowing energy of the town as exemplified in the sending of a party westward to the edge of the Rocky Mountains to found the town of Denver, named for the governor of the territory, the stormy sessions of the territorial legislatures, the constitutional convention, the growth and dominance of the free-state party culminating in the admission of the territory as a free state and the establishment of the state capital at Topeka, and the gradual decline of the once vigorous territorial center.

It was inevitable that as an aftermath of the failure of the town's political ambitions there should spring up a crop of personal jealousies and recriminations and that there should be much discord and strife. In particular, the southern element of the population soon found itself a defensive minority instead of the ruling power, with a more recently arrived and rougher element in control. Many disorders went unchecked

and much suffering ensued. My mother's mother, who had come from Virginia in 1856, and who had been recently widowed by the death of her husband, came near to being burned to death, she and her children, when their home was fired over their heads as they slept, and this was merely typical of the general disorder of the community. The reconstruction period immediately following the close of the Civil War was especially hard. My father's father who moved to Lecompton with his family from Olathe immediately upon being mustered out of the Union army, oftentimes said that in 1865 it was absolutely unsafe for a man known to have ten dollars in his pocket to go out on the street after dark.

And yet the town in some fashion pulled itself together and, although it lost most of its population, it somehow found a new life. A final quotation from Professor Abbott's brief article will suffice to bring the town through this hazardous period down to, and indeed somewhat past, the time of my own boyhood:

For some years the tide of emigration from North and South contributed its quota to Lecompton, as to other places, and it began a rough transition period common to frontier settlements, which endured in some form through the Civil War. The incongruous elements of its population, as the national struggle rose to its height, added its weight to the existing rivalries and roused here, more than elsewhere, violent party feeling to embitter the situation, and the place saw dark days. Yet, when the great conflict was over, Lecompton did not suffer the fate of some such centers of vigorous life whose very location has been nearly if not quite forgotten. When the politician and promoter, the frontiersman and adventurer had passed, there remained the sturdy original stock which had founded the place, most of whom had never been wholly in sympathy with the cause for which the name of their town stood. Nothing, perhaps,

illustrates this better than the tradition that in this center of pro-slavery politics there was never but one slave, a body servant who had followed his master from his Southern home. To these were added in time other permanent settlers from North and South. They are there still, they and their descendants and neighbors, an intermingled strain of both sections, a peculiarly American community. The village still lies well up among the rolling bluffs which rise from the south bank of the Kaw, between Lawrence and Topeka, nowadays a little aside from the railroad which runs close along the bank of the slow but often dangerous stream. It is a pretty place, half hidden in spring and summer by the orchards which reach up to and invade its boundaries on every side. The census tells us that it had in 1890 some 450 souls, in 1900 some forty less. But, despite this, it seems in no danger of extinction; it seems, indeed, not unprosperous in its modest way. With half a dozen well shaded streets, as many stores, its cottages for the most part trim and well kept, and a few more pretentious dwellings, good walks and quick hill drainage carried off in stone gutters, it offers a pleasant contrast to the picture one conjures up of a muddy and unkempt western outpost. It recalls, in fact, not so much the memory of a frontier town as that of a New England or Middle States village, quiet, secure, contented, with the wild days of its rude and boisterous youth well behind it.

(To Be Continued)

"Recollections of a Kansas Town", by William C. Hoad, was printed in "The Quarterly Review of the Michigan Alumnus" in the Fall, 1939 edition. The Kansas Room at the Spencer Library at Kansas University, Lawrence, Kansas, provided a copy to be used in the "Bald Eagle." As it is rather lengthy, it

will be divided into several units to be printed in later editions. It describes the life of a boy in Lecompton in the 1870's and 1880's.

The author, William Christian Hoad was born January 11, 1874 at Lecompton, Kansas. His parents were Francis Dearing and Gertrude Evans Hoad. His home was on the hill north and west of the town, and is now owned by the Duncan family. He later had two brothers, Francis Marion and Bruce Evans Hoad. He was educated in the local public schools and the preparatory school of Lane University.

He entered Kansas University in 1894 and received his bachelor of science degree in civil engineering in 1898. He later did graduate work in sanitary engineering in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1906-1907. In 1900 he was appointed assistant professor of civil engineering at Kansas University. In 1911 he received the rank of professor.

In connection with his work at K.U., Professor Hoad was Chief Engineer of the Kansas State Board of Health, from 1907-1912, establishing engineering standards for the state water and sewage law that was passed in 1907. He handled investigations and decisions with respect to sanitary improvements in more than 200 Kansas cities and towns, and approved engineering plans for all work related to public health.

On August 7, 1901, William C. Hoad married Louise Green. They had three children, Hortense, William G., and John G. Hoad. (John recently gave the family melodeon to the Lane University Museum.)

In 1912, Professor Hoad accepted a position at the University of Michigan, at Ann Arbor, and was the founder of Michigan's sanitary engineering program. He served as head of this program until his retirement in 1945. In 1943 he received the Kansas University's Distinguished Service Award, the top honor that can come to a member of the K.U. academic family. He died July 2, 1962. (Note: The University Archives

and the K.U. Alumni Association, Lawrence, Kansas, provided the information concerning Professor Hoad's life.)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Another exciting and eventful year is fast drawing to a close for the Lecompton Historical Society. As this is the annual issue we send to prospective members, we would like to review this year's key events. Our attendance at Lane University is again approaching 3,000 visitors. This figure is actual visitors, and does not include our many volunteer guides. Our membership roll has surpassed the 600 figure. We hosted 29 special tours from as far away as Marysville and Iola. Five weddings were held in the Lane University Chapel. The Historical Society sponsored the Commemorative Cancellation Stamp, and also a very successful ice cream social on Territorial Day; had a booth at the Kansas Travel and Tourism Show in Topeka featuring the Eisenhower Story; prepared a display which was presented in the lobby of the First National Bank in Topeka; was part of the Douglas County Quilt Show; and shared a booth at the Douglas County Fair. These activities could not be accomplished without the help of our dedicated members. With your continued support, Lecompton and its rich history will become a household word throughout Kansas. You can take pride in what is being accomplished by our dedicated volunteers and supporters from across the United States.

Dan Rockhill recently returned from attending the Association for Preservation Technology Convention in San Francisco, where he gave a report concerning the truss preservation work he engineered at Lane University. His report was presented between a report on the Wrigley Building in Chicago, and the preservation of buildings in Istanbul, Turkey. This international convention certainly placed Lane University among the higher echelon in preservation and gave Lecompton and Lane University some positive publicity -- thanks to Dan

Rockhill's outstanding work on the roof. A report of this work will appear in the Kansas Preservation Magazine.

Congratulations to Bob and Betty Wallace for their successful efforts in restoring the brick sidewalk and natural stone curbs in front of their home in Lecompton. It looks just wonderful!

Thanks to the following people for donating many hours to make our museum a nice place to visit: Sara Walter, Sally Wright and Julia Springer for cataloging many artifacts at Lane; to Don McAfee for work on the chair lift; to Tom Goodrick for installing the flag pole ropes, and to Joe Stauffer for doing some mowing.

An endowment fund has been established for the Lane University Museum. This fund was established with money donated for Life Memberships and other contributions. We thank all who have had a part in establishing this important monetary backing at our great museum.

The Class of 1965 has undertaken the arduous job of cleaning up the vandalism damage done at the Lecompton High School building. After three days of hard work, the efforts of the members of this class, led by Dorothy Kent Harrell, and a few other volunteers, has made a great improvement in what seemed to be an insurmountable task. We are very lucky to have such a structurally sound and significant building in our community, and future generations will be proud of the efforts being made by this group to keep it in good condition. We are looking forward to the plans of the Class of 1965 to hold the Lecompton Alumni banquet in this building next Spring (Memorial Day week-end) and the Alumni Association would appreciate any suggestions and comments you might have in regard to this very worthwhile project.

Recent additions to our museum collection include: A lard press, a Civil War hat, and 1954 Centennial hat, and other items which belonged to Gerald and Gladys Holloway, and were given by

Lura McAlexander, Geraldine Harrell and Doris Sindt. A Lane University picture from Irene Gordon; a Lane University Music Festival ribbon from the year 1890 by Miriam A. Franklin; a cream separator from Ross and Margaret Wulfkuhle; some collector Valentine cards from Thelma Bellinger; and a Lane University Diary from Lucile Biester.

Thanks to Hamm's Quarries and Skeet Smith for sponsoring a most impressive advertisement promoting the Lane University Museum in the Lawrence Visitors and Tourism Guide. Paul Bahnmaier also notes our appreciation to Nancy Hiebert for suggesting this added publicity for our community.

Another exciting rehabilitation project in underway in the Lecompton vicinity, the Winter School is being renovated by the Winter family. This project will certainly enhance our already historic community. This long-time Lecompton family is to be congratulated for their efforts on this project.

Paul Bahnmaier

DEATHS OF MEMBERS

We regret to report the following deaths of members:

Mary Nelle Lasswell, 64 passed away September 21, 1985. She was born June 4, 1921 in Lecompton, the daughter of Evaline and Marion Lasswell. She graduated from Lecompton High School and the Lawrence Business College. She retired in 1973 after serving 32 years in several positions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including Chief Clerk and Office Manager for the Douglas County Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service. She was a member of the Lecompton United Methodist Church; Rebekah Lodge #698; was Lecompton City Clerk for many years, and a Girl Scout Leader. She was a Life Member of the Lecompton Historical Society and served as Secretary during its formative years. She rarely missed

a meeting and volunteered her time in many areas of the work of the Society as long as she was physically able. She took many photographs for the Historical Society which were used in promoting the museum, and was especially interested in Lecompton and its history. She believed in strong family traditions and her culinary achievements were always a highlight of family and community get-togethers. She is survived by a sister, Marian Opal Goodrich, and several nieces and nephews. Burial was in Maple Grove Cemetery, with memorials being made to the Lecompton Historical Society.

Earl M. Goodrich, 68, of Lecompton, passed away September 26, 1985. He was born February 20, 1917, at Topeka, the son of Alfred Montgomery and Dulah Evelyn Durrell Goodrich. He graduated from Lecompton High School and worked in the Goodrich Nursery until he entered the Service, where he served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He was employed as an electrician at Forbes Air Force Base until he retired in 1972. He was a member of the Lecompton United Methodist Church and a Life Member of the Lecompton Historical Society. His apple orchard and garden were always overflowing with a bountiful harvest. He is survived by his wife, Evelyn, of

the home, and a son, Michael, of Dover, Kansas. Also surviving are two sisters, Mrs. Vivian Crady and Mrs. Margaret Thompson; a brother, Elmer E. Goodrich and a grandson. Burial was in Maple Grove Cemetery at Lecompton. Memorials were made to the Lecompton Historical Society.

Virginia Lee Confer, 57, of Route 1, Lecompton, died Monday, October 28, 1985. She was born July 25, 1928 at Torrington, Wyoming, the daughter of Lewis Elmer and Leah Francis Worrall Wilson. She lived in Lawrence, Lansing and Lecompton before she moved to the Big Springs community in 1944. She was a member of the Lecompton Historical Society. One of her goals was to make all of her children and grandchildren Life Members of the Lecompton Historical Society, which she accomplished before she passed away. She attended the meetings whenever her health permitted. She is survived by her husband, Melvin, of the home, and two daughters, Mrs. Denna Johnson and Mrs. Dianna Grandstaff of Lecompton; two brothers, Alvin Wilson and Kent Wilson; seven sisters; Mrs. Esther Holm, Mrs. Mabel Wendel, Mrs. Hazel Stewart, Mrs. Zolla Tietjens, Mrs. Sally Boydston, Jessie Rake, and Carol Simpkins. Burial was at Eastview Cemetery, Big Springs.

THE LECOMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecompton, Kansas 66050 is a non-profit corporation for the preservation of Historical 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 Membership
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___ Other Contribution \$ _____

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

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

by Iona Spencer

Again, we are proud to announce that our membership is still growing. If you know of anyone connected with Lecompton and think they would enjoy reading our newsletter, please send us their name. We now have 357 dues paying members, 271 life members and 41 memorials, making a total of 669 members.

We, also want to thank all for their contributions. We are very proud to add the following names to our membership plaque, which is on display in the front hall of the Lane University Museum.

Life Members:

- Mrs. Grace (Grey) Dark
- Louis and Marie (Cottrell) Traxler
- Kathryn (McCall) Robson
- Theododre "Tom" Klaus
- Eunice (Brass) Mellinkoff
- Erma E. (Lewis) Laury -- A present from her brother Phil Lewis

- Vernon Hayes
- Pauline (Baughman) Dionne
- Glenn K. Henry
- Melvin D. Confer -- By memorial contributions for his wife Virginia

Memorials:

- Elton "Bill" Dark by his wife Grace Dark
- Virginia "Ginger" (Wilson) Confer by memorial contributions

HISTORIC DOUGLAS COUNTY MAP

A map of Historic Douglas County is now available at the Lane University Museum. The colorful map, which folds out to measure about 2 by 2½ feet pinpoints more than 160 sites. This map will make for very interesting reading during the winter months. It was produced by Adam Waits who is a member of the Lecompton Historical Society.

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