

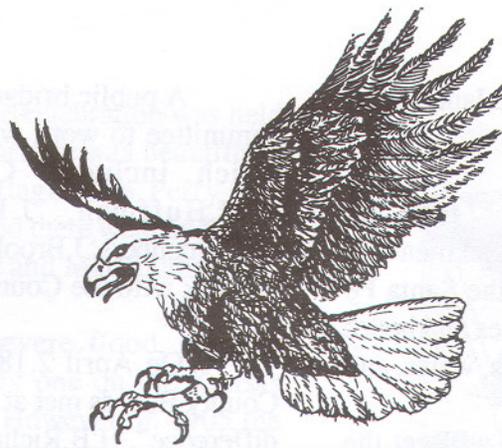
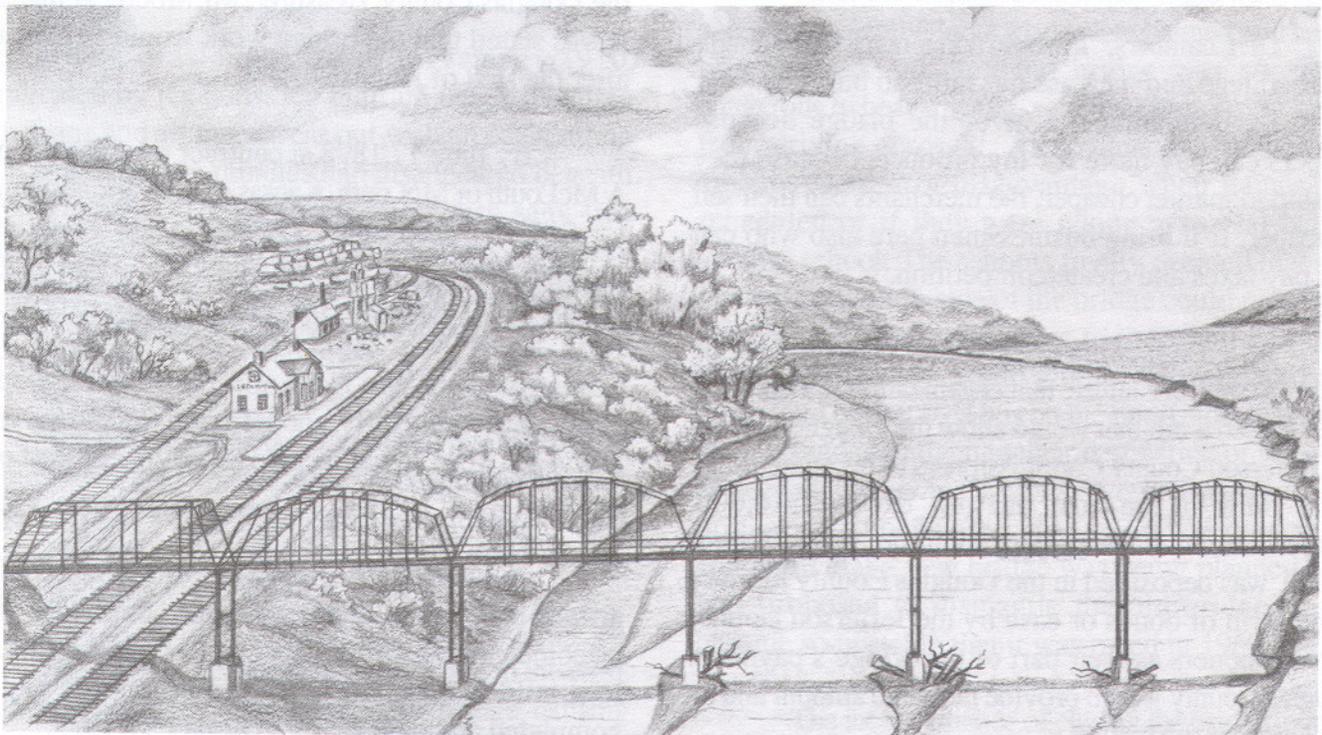
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BALD EAGLE

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**BALD EAGLE'S VIEW OF LECOMPTON BRIDGE PRIOR TO THE 1951 FLOOD** By Ellen Duncan**THE LECOMPTON-PERRY BRIDGE**

By Iona Spencer and Sara Walter

The Kansas river at Lecompton was always unpredictable. If there was a sizeable downpour in the area to the west, or in the area itself, there would be a quick rise in the depth of the water, which in early days (1854-1898) made the use of the only means of crossing the river, the ferry, difficult. If there had been a lack of moisture, and the river was low, the river's sand bars served as traps or places for the ferry to become grounded. This required help of a team of horses on the river's edge. A chain from the ferry was attached to the double-trees and then was pulled safely to shore. As a result,

there was great uncertainty about using it as a means of travel or shipping grain or perishable goods. The ferry manager was not at fault; it was the river's unpredictability.

These problems made the people of the Perry and Lecompton communities aware of a need for a bridge to connect the two areas. A bridge committee was formed in each area to investigate possibilities of such an undertaking. The topic was discussed in the local newspaper, and many people sent in their position

on the matter. Some of them appeared in the January 29, 1897 issue as follows:

A.R.Geene (operator of the ferry) "I think the bridge will give Lecompton and Perry stockmen and merchants competing lines of railroads, the Santa Fe and Union Pacific, which means better rates and better accommodations - such as better stock pens, water, and warehouses.

C.W.Sehon, "Why do I think we will get the bridge? Because demand is great for it. The farmers as well as the town people will be benefited in many ways."

F.B.Hill, "It would unite the people of western Douglas and Jefferson counties and be a convenience to all."

Dr. Chambers, "It would add much to the strength of our college and increase our railroad business."

D. Baughman, "I favor the bridge because shippers can pay more for my produce, because they can ship to market cheaper, the merchants can then sell it cheaper. It'll bring businessmen here also who can help pay taxes and create competition."

As a result of many committee contacts with the Kansas State Legislature, that organization in February, 1897, passed a bill that would allow the Douglas County and Jefferson County Commissioners to permit a bridge to be built if the cost did not exceed \$16,000. Furthermore, that the project could not proceed until \$8,000. was deposited in the Douglas County treasury in the form of bonds or cash by the Jefferson County Commissioners as their part of the bridge's payment. Douglas County would provide the same amount and be in charge of the bridge.

There was some opposition to sale of the bonds until it was pointed out that in 1897, the total assessed valuation of Douglas County was \$4,610,339. That figure included railroad property valued at \$671,090. According to those figures, a levy of 1 1/2 mills would raise \$7,000 of which the railroad would pay \$1,015, leaving only \$5,985 for the county taxpayers. As bonds would run for 15 years, a person who paid taxes on a \$1,000 assessed valuation, would pay 10 cents a year or \$1.50 during the whole period, so opposition was silenced.

A public bridge meeting was held to appoint a committee to work with one from Jefferson County which included Chairman Smith, C.Sehon, G.M.Huffman, J.Baughman, Dr.Bonebrake, H.L.Chambers, J.Brooke, and D.Baughman. They were to work with the County Commissioners as needed.

On April 2,1898, the Douglas and Jefferson County Boards met at Perry and settled all the "bridge difference". H.B.Richards of Lawrence was appointed bridge superintendent and T.H.Davis of Oskaloosa, the consulting engineer. The contract was to be signed in Lawrence on April 4,1898 by the bridge company, and the Jefferson County bonds were to be deposited with the Douglas County Treasurer, Mr.Moore, at that time. It was stated that the bridge work wouldn't start until after the first of August.

By June 17,1898, a contract was let to Senator A.McLouth of McLouth, Kansas and his bridge company for \$14,980. The Santa Fe was to pay the cost for crossing their tracts, and Lecompton and Perry agreed to raise \$950 needed to pay the rest of the expense. By July 11,1898 a site was selected by County Commissioners Wm.Nace and Ike Hughes, Douglas County Surveyor Duffy, and Jefferson County Surveyors Davis and May. It was located about 20 feet west of the ferry.

A two-month supply of bridge material had arrived by October, and it was hoped the bridge would be completed by spring, depending on the weather. Due to a mild winter, work progressed rapidly and was completed and paid for by February 10,1899.

The bridge brought the people of Perry in touch with the Santa Fe railroad system. The well-known conservative and liberal policy of the "roads" caused the competing company to establish better rates, saving shippers considerable money. The traveling public, if they missed a train at Perry, were at times compelled to wait until the next day for transportation; now they could cross the bridge and take the next Santa Fe train. Then, the passengers had but a short wait to travel with utmost speed and convenience. Perry was soon able to boast as Rome of old did, "All roads lead to Perry".

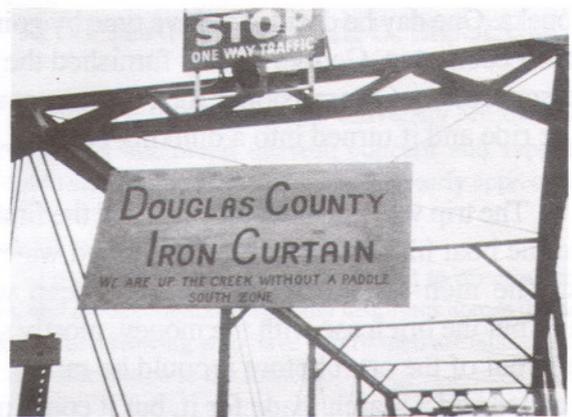
On June 7, 1899, a bridge celebration was held by the two communities. The bridge was beautifully decorated with bunting and flags. The Perry and Lecompton bands each played and there were addresses by C.M. Brooke, George Barker and Matt Edmonds.

In 1903 there was a severe flood, and the Lecompton bridge was the only one on the Kansas (Kaw) river to escape damage. However, in 1905 the floor had to be repainted and three years later the whole floor replaced. In the 1908 flood the whole north approach was taken out and the water extended a mile north from there. So the bridge was repaired and refloored again.

There was high water in January, 1910, complicated by ice jams. Ice built up under the three north spans and all three went out with an ear-rending crash, and in twenty minutes had disappeared beneath the grinding ice. The one farthest north sank two hundred feet east of the bridge, the other two spans sank near the mouth of the Lewis Creek branch. The bridge had been the longest bridge over the Kansas river, being over 1,000 feet long.

The bridge wreckage was raised March 10, 1910, and bids were made for restoring it. The one submitted by the Missouri Valley Bridge company for \$7,990 was selected in July, 1910. By January 13, 1911 it was reopened for travel.

High water as a result of a heavy rain to the west, continued to plague Lecompton on the bridge, causing occasional repair to it, as in June, 1935. However, no damage compared to the flood of June 23, 1951. It was the biggest, grimmest show the town had seen in years. The river was expected to crest slightly over that of the 1903 crest of 24 feet. Huge trees floated down the river and caught fast on the bridge railing. Drift from the raging "Kaw" was augmented by the flooding Delaware river. Water covered land for over a mile north from the edge of the bridge. By early evening, two spans of the five-span bridge sank until the arches beneath the 51-year-old steel and wooden structure touched the water. That left electricity off in Lecompton and gas off in Perry. By 9 p.m. the river crested at 26.6 feet, two feet higher than in 1903.



The Douglas County Iron Curtain. "We are up the creek without a paddle", so read this sign at the bridge's south end.

After the water receded, the bridge was repaired and used carefully, large loads were banned and caution was advised. In 1965 the bridge was considered dangerous to heavy traffic, so school buses were banned from driving across it. As a result, the students and athletes were at a disadvantage when games were scheduled or if they were taking a special class in another school. The schools finally decided that a bus on the Lecompton side of the bridge could pick up the students involved, take them to the south end of the bridge where they would alight and walk across the bridge and be met by a bus on the north side, that picked them up and took them to their destination or vice versa as needed. Otherwise it was a 63 mile round trip if the bridge could not be used. By 1967 it was in such poor condition that a new bridge was being planned and it was proposed to dismantle the old bridge. It then became so unstable that it was razed in 1969.

The inconvenience of closing the bridge involved a considerable number of people. Many of them in the Lecompton area worked in North Topeka and thus had to drive through South Topeka to get to work, and the Perry people whose jobs were in the south portion or at DuPont in Tecumseh, had to drive through North Topeka. The bridge saved many miles of driving, but the closing of it caused fifty or sixty miles of driving to get to their daily work places. Frank Meek of the Perry Bank decided that the shortest way to Lecompton isn't necessarily the cheapest.

Since the 1951 flood, he had made it a habit to go to Lecompton every Thursday to transact business with the bank's patrons. With the bridge out, it had become a long trip, as he had to go around by Lawrence

or Topeka. One day he decided to save time by going by boat to Lecompton. George Holley furnished the boat. Jefferson County Commissioner John Yost went along for the ride and it turned into a dunking party.

The trip was fine until they reached the first pier, when the boat hit some driftwood, shipped water and sank. The men waded out of the knee deep water, unhurt, but the briefcase with the money, mostly silver, floated out of the craft before it could be raised. Help was called and a search made for it, but it could not be found. Meek said he'd stay out of boats with County Commissioners after that experience.

There was action on both Douglas and Jefferson County, toward building a new bridge. Local officials checked with the state's Attorney General and found that Douglas County would have to vote on such a project, because of the amount of its cost. Jefferson County, because their source of funds would be taken out of accumulated federal secondary funds and their payment, would be less than the assessed valuation. Douglas County was larger than that of Jefferson County, as the mill levy allowed for that purpose would be 2 mills, which was set by law, would run seven years. It would take two years to build the bridge and the levy, by law, could run five years after its completion. Therefore, there would be ample funding.

So, contrary to some negative publicity the bridge could be easily provided for. Douglas County would pay \$1,053,000, or 80% of the cost. The county voted on the proposed plan August 8, 1967. The city of Lecompton voted 318 for, 7 against. The total county vote was 4,627 for and 3,203 against. The spirit of neighborliness of the small communities which Lecompton had helped in the past, now helped them.

The issues that persuaded people to vote for the bridge were, the Perry Dam and its tourists, traffic congestion in Lawrence and Topeka, people farming on both sides of the river, mail delivery from Perry to Lecompton, the same teachers teaching in both places, people banking at Perry, Father Bechtel serving both Perry and Big Springs churches, K.U. students and workers going to Lawrence, and utilities that were serviced at both places; gas at one and electricity the other.

Jefferson and Douglas county officials were soon at work on the routine procedure to prepare for building the new bridge. The Commissioners met June 24, 1968 to review the final bids. Frisbie Bridge Co., Inc. made the lowest bid and the contract was awarded to them after bids for approaches on each side - north and south - were selected by the State Highway Commission.

Work on the new bridge abutments began November 25, 1968 and the bridge span soon thereafter. The span was 1,640 feet long with two lanes, and built of concrete and steel. Due to heavy rains, high water, and freezing weather, the work was considerably slowed, but the new bridge was ready to be dedicated September 26, 1970, two weeks after its completion. About 2,000 people attended the ceremony that took place on the bridge.

Harold Crady was master of ceremonies and introduced the speaker, Senator Shulta, Walter Kampschroeder and August Noll, all who spoke briefly. He then introduced Mrs. Harvey Booth who cut the ribbon which officially opened the bridge. She was so honored because her husband, then deceased, had worked so hard for the bridge's erection.

After the ribbon was cut, the Perry-Lecompton high school band led a parade across the bridge from the north to the south side. Honored guests in a decorated school bus, floats, antique cars, horse-drawn wagons, riders on horseback, motor cyclists and children on decorated bicycles followed the band to the Lecompton school grounds, where afternoon games and a barbecue for 900 people took place. Fireworks at dusk concluded the celebration.

Today the bridge is widely used by tourists to the Perry and Clinton lakes, workers, grade and high school students, and for those needing medical and banking services or to go grocery shopping. It is a wonderful convenience and a lovely addition to our landscape, and is yet to be easily foiled by any high water challenge of the Kansas river.

REFERENCES

Lecompton Sun: 1897 - 1/29; 2/26; 3/12; 5/28; 6/18; 7/9; 12/10. 1898 - 1/21; 3/4; 4/15; 5/6; 6/17; 7/1; 9/23; 10/28; 11/1; 12/30. 1899 - 1/13; 2/3; 2/24; 3/10, 19, 24; 6/2, 16; 7/9; 8/4. 1905 - 4/21. 1908 - 2/14; 5/29; 6/19; 8/23, 28. 1910 - 1/14, 28; 3/18; 6/3; 7/22; 11/18; 12/16. 1911 - 1/13. 1914 - 2/12. 1930 - 6/19.

1963

Corliss Hodson Beerbower	Bill Chinn
Jesse Moore	Sharon Coffman Nowlin
Donald Raybern	Chuck Roberts
Joyce Kraft Robuck	Ronald Stauffer
Richard Traxler	Joyce Wyatt Schloetzer
Linda Van Riper Miller	Gary Stauffer
Cheryl Buchheit	Donna Carr

1973

John Beckwith	Shirley Smith Bones
Mark Boose	Iona Childers
Dean Christy	Ann Clark
Wayne Cook	Marla Cottrell
Larry Hale	Glen Hatcher
Sherilyn LaDuke	Jenny Lister
Kenny Lobb	Pam Lober
Sheri Neill	Teresa Sheire
Deborah Stadler	Tim Walter
Anita Worley	Chris Wulfskuhle

1983

Paul Barlow	Glenda Bayless
Brenda Bayless	Bret Carvell
Dain Christman	Christy Curran
Travis Daniels	Bill Edwards
Shari Flora	Wayne Foster
Michelle Fowler	Shelley Gordonder
Robert Harrell	Kate Higgins
Dawn James	Jim Margita
Charlene Miller	Randy Phillips
Kristi Powell	Kevin Powell
John Schmidt	Carrie Stephens
Mark Stevens	Brian Walter

Larry Wright

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We are proud to announce that this is our largest Life and Memorial membership report since our first Bald Eagle in 1974. When all of our renewals are in, we will have well over 1,100 members. Most of our new members have a connection to our Historic city, Lecompton. Hurray for Lecompton, Rah, Rah, Rah!

LIFE MEMBERS

Laura (Shirley) Blakeley	Norma (Cree) Walter
Robert Shirley by sister, Laura Blakeley	George Gantz
Virginia (Richards) Rainbolt	Bob Skahan
Earle L. Kasson	Karen (Fish) Kasson
Fay (Stainbrook) Talley	Lloyd Talley
Donna Jean (McClanahan) Harding	Roy Harding, Jr.
Alice Lee (Scott) Blake	Marvin Blankenship
Norma (Robison) Blankenship	C. Kelley Downing
Opal L. (Matney) Hall	Thomas S. Hart
Wm. J. Smith by wife, Dorothy	Mary K. Sanford

Alice Faye (Carr) Clark

Shirley (Holderman) Funk and Richard Holderman
by their parents, Wally & Mae Holderman

MEMORIALS

Cecil L. Lasswell by wife, Pauline (Pat)
Frank M. Taylor by sister, Hazelle (Taylor) Dyer
Laura (Steves) Taylor by sister-in-law, Hazelle (Taylor) Dyer
J. Donald Taylor by sister, Hazelle (Taylor) Dyer
Mary (Hays) Mathews by daughter, Carolyn Stewart
Willis R. Colman by son, Clare J. Colman
Nellie (Van Neste) Colman by son, Clare J. Colman
Florence (Frye) Wingfield

*Iona Spencer, Membership Chairperson***EXCERPTS FROM EARLY DAY NEWSPAPERS**

From the Lecompton Union, A.W. Jones & R.H. Bennett, Editors, Lecompton, K.T., November 20, 1856:

LECOMPTON CITY

There is not a more prosperous or thriving little village in the Territory, than Lecompton - and it bids fair in a short time to be one of the largest places in it. The country around is rich as any in the world - well timbered - and the Kansas river affords an abundant supply for all purposes - and in addition to its natural advantages - it will have all the artificial circumstances - that adds importance and strength to a place. This is the headquarters of government. The Governor resides here, the Legislature meets here, the Land Office is here, and the Judges will hold their courts here. So far it has grown under every disadvantage, situated in Douglas county, the hot-bed of abolitionism in the territory, it felt more seriously the effects of the disturbances and was stunted and crippled in its growth. In addition, other places in the territory have attracted the attention of the public, and capitalists have gone through it and around it without investing

a cent in it. But we are happy to state that things are assuming a more cheering aspect - the sound of the axe, saw and hammer, is heard from morning until night, and frequently we rise in the morning and walk over a lot, without the vestige of a house on it, at night we see erected upon it the hull of a good and comfortable building.

Notwithstanding this, the cry is still "house room," and the demand far exceeds the supply. As an evidence of this fact, houses that cost from two to four hundred dollars to build, are renting for from \$250 to \$300, and selling from \$600 to \$1,200. Within the last two months eight or ten new houses have been built and there are at present fifteen or twenty nearly completed or under contract. Lots that sold for \$100 four weeks ago, cannot be bought for less than \$200. All that it wants is workmen of every kind and men of capital. Come gentlemen, there is room for speculation.

IN DAYS OF LECOMPTON
"The Third Capital of the Territory of Kansas"

"Then was Much Kansas History Made - Educational Institution occupies Foundation of 'Permanent' Capitol"

Nine towns were candidates for the third territorial capital of Kansas - Leavenworth, Lawrence, Lecompton, Kickapoo, Tecumseh, St. Bernard, Douglass, White Head and One Hundred and Ten. The location was to be fixed by the pro-slavery legislature at Shawnee Mission in 1855. It was a fierce contest. Lecompton won on the third ballot. The only other towns which received votes on that ballot were Tecumseh and St. Bernard. The other six had fallen by the wayside. In accordance with the vote on location a law was passed establishing the permanent capital at Lecompton and ordering the territorial officers to move from Shawnee Mission to the new capital at the earliest practicable moment. That was in August, 1855. At that time Lecompton was a village of a dozen houses. There were no public buildings there to accomodate the territorial officers. A legislative commission composed of F.J. Marshall, H.D. McMeekin and Thomas Johnson, was appointed to select suitable grounds and erect the necessary public buildings. The cost of the buildings was paid out of the congressional appropriations.

William Nace, under contract, put up a building near where the Lecompton post office now stands. Later a foundation was put in for a permanent capitol building. That is as far as the building ever got. The capital remained in the temporary building until Lecompton lost out. Lane Univer-

sity now occupies a portion of the foundation of the "permanent capitol."

Much Kansas history was made while Lecompton was the capital. The executive offices were removed to Lecompton during the early spring of 1856. The first official act of the pro-slavery officials in the new capital was to issue warrants for the arrest of free state men who had brought on the Wakarusa War, a fiasco, and later the siege of Lawrence. Many of the free state men for whom warrants were issued either evaded or resisted arrest. But in May, 1856, seven prominent free state men, then called "treason prisoners," were rounded up and brought to Lecompton and held prisoners under heavy guard. They were: Charles Robinson, George W. Smith, George W. Deitzler, Gaius Jenkins, George W. Brown, John Brown, Jr., and Henry Williams. During that same month some Missourians came over to help officials round up the free state men for whom warrants were issued. Using this as an excuse, they sacked Lawrence. The newspaper offices, Governor Robinson's house, the new hotel and several other buildings were pillaged and destroyed. This aroused the free state settlers to a high pitch. The pro-slavery officials made Lecompton a military camp. Troops were mobilized there to form expeditions to put down free state settlers in their resistance of outrages per-

(Continued on the next page)

..... Please Clip and Mail With Your Check

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.

Dues are \$4 per year for individual membership and \$6 for a couple's membership. The dues from December to December. Life membership is \$50 per individual. Contributions are tax deductable. Checks should be made payable to the Lecompton Historical Society, and mailed to Mrs. Iona Spencer, 1828 E. 100 Road, Lecompton, KS 66050.

- \$4 Annual Individual Membership
- \$6 Annual Couple's Membership
- \$50 Individual Life or Memorial Membership
- Other Contribution \$ _____

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Obituaries

GARNER E. GROH died December 19, 1992 in Lawrence. He was born January 16, 1921 at Peculiar, Missouri, to George and June Sechrest Groh. He was a WWII veteran and was involved in the Berlin airlift. He and his wife operated an antique shop. He was a member of many organizations and a faithful member of the Historical Society. Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth, a daughter, Karen Lee Testa, stepmother, Martha Groh, stepbrother, Roger, 3 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

RICHARD EWING HANSON died January 8, 1993 in Poultney, Vermont. He was born October 31, 1905 in Taianfun Shandong, China, the son of Peter Oliver Hanson and Ruth Stevenson Ewing. He graduated from the University of Kansas and Union Theological Seminary in New York. He was a longtime missionary in China and had been interned in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in 1942. He served as a minister in several United Methodist churches. He is survived by his wife, Margery, two sons, Rev. Peter Hanson and Rev. Richard Hanson, Jr., two daughters, Nancy Stevenson and Elizabeth Mellen, two sisters, Ada Ruth Woshinsky and Elizabeth Hayes, two brothers, Perry and Hobart, 10 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

FAY M. MORRIS died January 4, 1993 in Topeka. She was born January 18, 1923, the daughter of Nathan and Harriet Barry Morris, and spent her life in Topeka. She began her nursing career during WWII and continued in various Topeka area hospitals. Survivors include a sister, Maize George and a brother, Raymond.

petrated by marauding bands of pro-slavery recruits from the Southern states. A fight occurred between the opposing forces on August 16, 1866, at Franklin. Three bands of Southerners were routed. Many of them were captured and taken to Lawrence. The following day Governor Shannon went for an exchange of prisoners. On September 5, a group of men under General Lane appeared on the bluff near Lecompton. The pro-slavery officials and soldiers were thrown into consternation and thought the town was going to be attacked. The 200 pro-slavery soldiers made a fort of the foundation of the proposed capitol building and intended to defend the capital. A flag of truce was thrown up and the attack was averted by cavalry.

**TERRITORIAL DAY
WILL BE
JUNE 26th**

FUTURE PROGRAMS AS ANNOUNCED

BY MARGARET WULFKUHLE

MARCH 11 - Stan Herd, Field Art

**April 8 - Perry-Lecompton
High School Singers**

President - Paul Bahnmaier
Secretary - Marie Traxler
Treasurer - Alice Clare (Sally) Wright

Historical Writer - Sara Walter
Genealogical Writer - Iona Spencer
Illustrator - Ellen Duncan

Typesetter & Editor - Chuck Wright

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