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LECOMPTON, KANSAS

WINTER 1994



THE ROWENA HOTEL

Kansas had been opened as a territory in August, 1854. The center of the government organized at Fort Leavenworth at the United States Army Base. After a year of seeking an appropriate place for a capital, Lecompton, K.T. was chosen. There were few dwellings there, so investors hurried to the town to build hotels and houses. The territorial government would soon meet there in addition to the U.S. government offices, so good accommodations were a necessity.

The need for a lavish hotel in which the government officials could be quartered was of great importance because many of them would be from the east and accustomed to a more elaborate standard of living than was available on the newly organized frontier. As a result, Aristides Roderigue organized a group to invest in such an undertaking. The group selected a plan for a large stone hotel. As there were

no stone masons in the area, Roderigue went to St. Louis, Mo. to find some. There he engaged Mark Migliario to go to Lecompton to build the hotel, and his brother Constantine soon joined him, as he too was a skilled stone mason. They were both Italian immigrants and soon decided to make Lecompton their home on a farm west and south of town, and later built a large stone house where they lived the rest of their lives, and it is still inhabited.

The hotel building was started in 1857 and completed in 1858, was to be 45' by 90', have 9 rooms on the second floor, 11 on the third, 5 on the first, besides an office and a large dining room. There was also a series of work rooms down in the lower level. It was to be heated with stoves, lighted with lamps or candles, and have outdoor plumbing. There were to be seven cisterns in the basement which would be pumped into a large tank on a scaffold on the west side as the water source.

The exterior of the hotel had 4 entrances on the east, south, and west. The south entrance had a large flat rock inlaid in the ground that served as a porch that led to the beautiful double entrance glass doors and across to the west side. Also carefully cut small stones were inlaid in the area that framed the doors. The east side of the building had a long "strip" staircase that led from the street directly up to the door which also had a large glass section in it.

Three huge chimneys rose above the roof and accommodated all the stoves in the building, even the kitchen stove. There was a steep staircase on the west side of the building, that provided access to the second floor and care for the water tank. There was also an entrance on the west that opened to the kitchen area and was a place to receive groceries and other merchandise.

S.O. Hemingway was the first proprietor, Charles Montandon was in charge of the saloon then in one of the lower rooms in the basement, as was a barber and repairman. The Kansas Stage Company's Office was in the hotel, and stages left daily for all parts of the Territory, and it also made connection with Missouri River Steamers and the Hannibul and St. Joseph Railroad.

When the Rowena Hotel opened for business, it was considered the most lavish hotel west of the Missouri River. It was very comfortable and had a competent staff. The Territorial officers preferred to stay there. On Jan. 2, 1859 there were fifty-four guests registered at the hotel and the next day only 25. This was at the time the legislature was to meet, and they were adjourning the meetings to Lawrence, wanting to avoid Lecompton and her reputation for favoring slavery.

The Rowena had been financed by a group of people who promised to pay \$500.00 each. Mr. Leamer and Robert Stevens had participated in that investment. In 1858 when the Free State Legislature voted to move to Lawrence, the federal officers voted to remain at the Rowena, going to Lawrence only when they had business to transact. The Rowena had been doing well until then, but after that it started losing money and needed the investors to come forth with their money. Mr. Leamer signed the \$8,000 note but none of the others did. After the hotel failed Leamer stepped forward again and paid the whole \$8,000 plus \$2,000 to pay other expenses. None of the other participants helped. In addition to that the

chef had ordered groceries costing over \$500.00 which he also paid.

Entertainment became an important part of the activities at the hotel. A large saloon was under the supervision of Robert Nace a former native of the "old dominion," so he was amply able to conduct the saloon in a quality way. Hemingway had recently erected in the Rowena Hall two of Brunswick & Co.'s celebrated marble "bed Billiard" tables and that also attracted customers.

The dining room was a place for entertainment and conversation. In 1858 when James Denver was appointed Territorial Governor, and the territorial legislature was in session, the place was full to overflowing. A guest entered, very excited over news he had just been told, that gold had been discovered in neighboring Colorado. During the discussion, a group, primarily legislators and U.S. government officials, decided to organize a small wagon train and send them to Colorado to a place in the Rocky Mountains, where they would stake out claims for their backers and also to plat a town there, as that was still a part of Kansas Territory. A caravan was put together and left from the Hotel. It traveled west for several weeks, finally arriving at the site of the gold discovery. Upon investigation it was found that all desirable claims had been taken. However, the group staked out a town and platted it before leaving. The government needed that done, as so many people were going there to settle and some organization was essential. They then left for Lecompton. On their last day of the trip they conceived the idea of killing all varieties of wild game they could get, clean and skin it, then upon their arrival at the hotel, give it to the chef to prepare a big dinner for that night and invited all their promoters to a wild game feast, perhaps to try to compensate for the lack of gold claims. This was done, and at the feast that evening, they were discussing what to name the new town, and couldn't agree. Just then Gov. Denver entered the room, and several enthusiastically yelled, "Call it Denver." It was met with loud cheers, and it was so named. That is how the big city of Denver, Colorado was platted and named. So the results of the trip were a city well planned, a wonderful meal, and a city well named.

In January, 1859, the hotel keepers made preparations for the multitude of people who would come to the territorial land sale. They came from all over the east, south and west to buy land for farms or for homes, so the hotels were always over crowded.

In December of 1859, the Legislature would meet, and it too would result in the place being crowded, so they had to plan for them so they were entertained and spent their time pleasantly.

In January, 1860, William Barnes became in charge of the Hotel. On March 29, 1860 a party was held in the Rowena Hall and all enjoyed it to the fullest extent. The music was of the best kind and made those present "make the light toe" to skip gracefully over the floor, keeping time with the notes. At midnight the assembly was made happy by the appearance of bountiful refreshments, supplied by Wm. J. McKinney of the City Bakery, who received the thanks of everyone "for his deed in resuscitating dilapidated nature."

Another dance was planned for June 15 but was called off because of criticism of such activities by some of the local people. However, it was rescheduled for June 17, and was thoroughly enjoyed. After the dance the guests were all treated to a supper prepared by Mr. Barnes of the Rowena Hotel.

In June 1860, William Barnes, the Rowena proprietor resigned, and the position was taken over by Wesley Garrett. Barnes was going to St. Joseph, Mo. to work in a hotel there. The reputation that the Rowena had for being one of the finest hotels in Kansas would be sustained by Mr. Garrett, who had an entertainment house on the hill. Mr. Defendorf would continue as clerk. The 1860 census shows that Wesley Garrett and his family listed as tenants along with 29 guests, which included Gov. Samuel Medary and D.T. Mitchell, a lawyer.

Late in July, the area sustained a serious windstorm that rolled the tin roof off the Rowena like a rug and carried it 1/4 mile away. There was also other minor damage to several parts of the building. It was fully restored, but by 1862 there was little business at the hotel as the Douglas County seat had been moved to Lawrence after Kansas became a state in 1861 and Topeka was named State Capital at the same time. As a result, the Legislature and county officers were all gone from Lecompton and the Rowena was without customers.

On August 9, 1860, the right spirit was aroused for a party at the Rowena. Some sensible persons (a group of bachelors) arranged an entertainment for the young people of Lecompton. They organized a dance, led by "Willisful Quadrill Band" of Lawrence. It was spirited and sociable. At just the right hour supper was served in the very best style in the

Rowena House. The ladies were charming and agreeable, the young gentlemen "spruced", the music excellent, the supper the best, and all together the party was the outstanding social affair of the season. Ex-governors Shannon and Stanton added dignity to the assembly. At a reasonable hour, the company separated, wishing no doubt, long lives and prosperity to the bachelors of Lecompton.

In 1862 the hotel proprietor desired to sell as there was so little income. So it was sold, variously reported at a county tax sale in 1862 for \$600 and also set a direct sale to an organization that was planning a church college for the town as well as a dormitory for the students.

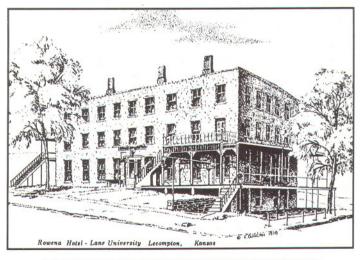
In 1865 the United Brethren church organization had obtained enough money to organize a university and had selected five professors for instructors. There were rooms for fifty students in the dormitory, also a library, large dining room, commercial room, large sitting room, kitchen facilities, and a sizeable basement.

While the students were living in the dormitory of the hotel building a cute incident happened. The matron and her husband, the caretaker, at one time had a flock of geese, and it was the daily habit of these geese to tumble out very early in the morning and file hopefully around the building, in search of any scraps which the amateur housekeepers in the upper stories might have thrown out their windows under the cover of darkness. After awhile the matron noticed that the number of geese in her flock was steadily diminishing, the ordinary disappearance rate being about one a week. Do what she would she was unable to solve the mystery until one morning, having got out of bed unusually early and hearing a beating of wings against the wall of the building, she rushed outdoors just in time to see a fine gander moving rapidly toward a third story window at the end of a fishing line. Following this episode the University faculty declared a closed season on geese.

By 1880 the school was crowded and a building was constructed on the partially built basement of the original state capitol that had been started in the 1850's. It was one block east of the Rowena. It was completed and dedicated in June, 1882. It was used in conjunction with the Rowena until 1902 when Lane University moved to Holton to be united with the Campbell college there. The building was then turned over to the United Brethren Church, and was used as a church, and some high school classes that had been in the local school building.

The Rowena was vacant for a period of time, until H.D. Larimer, formerly of Perry, Kansas, purchased it in August, 1903 and opened a hardware store and implement business there. He had a large implement shed and a stable built on the west side next to the alley. Larimer replaced the staircase with a two story porch that covered the whole east side and a small portion of the south. It was of two levels, the lower porch to the first story was beautifully done with each of the numerous posts part of an arch above. There was also a smaller porch that served as part of the lower porch roof, but also was used as an entry to the second floor by steps to that area. The floor of the porch served as shelter for the street level and provided entrances to the various businesses there. It also provided a place to evade the rain or snow, heat or cold.

A stone wall was built on the building leading from the south to north of the south yard of the building so it would be level and yet above the street. This wall was used to sit on by the men who played horseshoes to the east of it. It was also known as the "amen" corner. Because the men came there to visit and discuss how the town was being run and if they approved.



THE PORCH THAT LARIMER BUILT ON THE HOTEL

Larimer's family lived on the second floor. He had a good business and each year thanked his customers by treating them to a watermelon feast. Larimer ran the store until 1910 when he sold it to I. Fist, who in 1911 sold it to H. V. Olive. It then was sold frequently - in 1912 to Hart & Co. then in Sept. 1912 to L.D. Wegener, then he sold it to S. Bagley in 1915. Bagley gave notice in the newspaper that he was closing out the business, and on Jan. 27, 1916 it

was sold at sheriff sale to satisfy a mortgage of \$1500. It sold for \$1800.

In 1916 the east side of the main street suffered a huge fire and the Iliff Mercantile company, the August Hildenbrand general store and creamery were completely burned. The Post office, Dr. Kerr's office, Todhunter's meat shop, barber shop and Lee's hardware store had less damage. Lee's was not burned but the stock was carried out into the street, as was that of the other merchants and was damaged by a rain storm that occurred during the night.

The next day the remaining stock was moved into the old Rowena Hotel that had been rented by Iliff. The first floor room was divided in half. Iliff took the west half and Hildenbrand the east half. A small room in the northeast corner was used by the Post Office which was operated by Lula Todhunter. R. Lemuel Iliff had rented the whole building and rented to those needing space. They remained there until a large brick building was built to replace the burned ones, then they went back across the street into a nice new building. However "Gus" Hildenbrand stayed in the Rowena. He made changes and refinished the lower floor. The Lecompton Sun, the local newspaper, was printed on the second floor by George Connell, Alf Mikesell operated a barber shop and George Norwood, Sr. a wood working shop in the basement.

August Hildenbrand then apparently obtained possession and opened his store there after some remodeling was done and conducted his business as a general store until September 20, 1923 when he sold his stock to George Z. Whipple. Later F.M. Graves started a cafe there in the large room.

In April, 1924 the post office moved from the old dormitory building to the southeast room of the building across the street. The new location was much more convenient for the public because there were no steps to climb. The room that had been used was just a temporary place since the fire in 1916, but in 1925 the post office moved back across the street to the Hildenbrand building. During this time Robert B. Slavens was postmaster.

In Nov. 1925 George Whipple moved his store into the Kreider building.

In 1929, the cafe ran by Graves changed hands and Mr. and Mrs. John Carl took over. The Santa Fe Track workers lived on the second floor about that time, while their houses were being built down at the railway tracks. The local post office was also in the lower west end about that time.

Soon the building was so deteriorated it was abandoned and again sold at an auction. It had various owners, such as August Schmitt; W.E. Davis; Douglas County Sheriff sale in March, 1940 to John Kilsworth; to Martin Pressgrove; and to Ernest Brown in 1947, when Ernest had the remaining walls torn down for the rock. He sold to the Veterans of Foreign War in 1949. They then moved a building down there to use for meetings. When the V.F.W. sold to the City of Lecompton in 1982, the building was then moved up by the water tower and is still there today. As of 1994, 136 years later the land is now the Rowena Park, maintained by the city of Lecompton.

Researcher: Iona Spencer-Writer: Sara Walter

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COMMENTS FROM OUR PRESIDENT Paul Bahnmaier

Thanks to the following for donations and contributions to the museum. It is the continued interest of present and former residents that help make the museum so successful.

Horst Wulfkuhle of Germany for a monetary contribution, maps and other interesting documents.

Allie Collins Banks for an Oak rocking chair, boot jack, lamp hanger and corner shelf.

Frank Oberland for historic coins.

Lecompton Fire Department for Lecompton Grade School books.

Beverly Bahnmaier Van Dyke for Greenwood Valley, Winter school and George M. Bahnmaier farm pictures.

Irma Kellogg Wallace for a Gavel.

Dorothy Shaner for Lecompton clippings and city town minutes.

M.S. Wurstefelt for floor polisher, flour sifter, scissors, and an old telephone receiver.

ROCK POST SIGN

A unique new sign has been placed at the south entrance to Lane University Museum. The sign is composed of three native stone fence posts from western Kansas with "Lecompton Territorial Capital, 1855 to 1861" cut into the stone. This excellent work and donation of the rock was all completed by Pat Istas. Thanks for a great job Pat.

LECOMPTON ON NATIONAL T.V.

A recent T.V. series on C-Span featuring the Lincoln-Douglas Debates has mentioned Lecompton and the Lecompton Constitution on several different occasions. This publicity just underscores the statement that Lecompton is one of the most historic cities in America.

The following article which appeared in the Kansas Historical Quarterly and written by Robert W. Johannsen of the University of Illinois said this about Lecompton.

"During the latter years of the decade preceding the Civil Wars, the town of Lecompton, Kansas Territory, received a notoriety that completely belied its humble and dusty existence. Its name became a by-word in political controversy. Spread across newspaper columns from coast to coast and hurled forth by countless political speakers, the town's name came to symbolize one of the most significant developments in a growing section conflict."

This is only a part of his research paper about Lecompton.

CONSTITUTION HALL

Work is to start soon on the completion of Constitution Hall in and around the National Landmark and Historic site. Tim Rues, the curator is on site part of the time at this writing. He is an excellent addition to the community. The State of Kansas has \$260,000 appropriated by the Kansas Legislature to spend on the rehabilitation work. Dedication will be next Territorial Day June 24, 1995.

THANKS

Thanks to Sally Wright for 20 years of dedicated service to the Lecompton Historical Society as Treasurer. Sally has retired this year after helping the society in many different roles during past years. Also to Chuck Wright for type setting and editing the Bald Eagle the past two years. Their interest, support and contributions will always be appreciated.

BY PAUL BAHNMAIER

ANNUAL ALUMNI BANQUET

The annual Lecompton High School Alumni Banquet will be May 27, 1995. Plan to attend.

1925

RUTH BAUGHMAN HAROLD FOREE WILBUR HILDENBRAND WARREN MCCALL EARL MAUST MARIE PASLAY **MAYBELLE SLAVENS**

ELTONDARK JENNIE GRAUEL MARGUERITE MCCALL FLOSSIE MCRAE RUTH NACE JULIA SHIRK SARA DUMMER

1935

DOROTHY ARMSTRONG CLIFFORD BRASS CHESTER GIBBENS **EUGENE HARDING** RUTH NORWOOD RUSSELL SEHON PEARL SLUSSER

EARL GOODRICH HOMER MCCLANAHAN RAYMOND SCOTT HENRIETTA SLAVENS DOROTHY WOLF

1945

ELAINE BANKS GLENNHENRY GERALDINE HOLLOWAY HOMERLESLIE ALLENK. WINTER

LELAND HARTMAN BETTY HIBNER

1955

JOHN K. BAHNMAIER ALANFENSTEMAKER SUSIE HAGEN ROBERT HILDENBRAND REGENA MYERS MARGERY PLUMB ROSALIE ROGERS **FREDDIESMITH** WILLIAM TURNER PHILLIP WIZER

DEAN L. CHILES JANET GERLEMAN ROY HARDING **MARY KIBBEE** JOHN NILSEN DUANE ROBINSON LARRY SANFORD VIRGINIA SMITH VIVIAN WYATT MAYNARD PERSON

1965

DONNA ANDES JOYCE BANMAIER BONNIE DECKER MIKE GOODRICH SARA HARRELL DOROTHY KENT DENNIS LESLIE **BILL NEUSCHAFER** DIANNA SANFORD LINDASTAUFFER **ROSALEE WALTER** RICHARD WRIGHT

LINDA ANDES **MARILYN CREE** PAULA S. GODFREY WILLIAM GRIFFITHS RICHARD KAHLE LINDA KITT RONNIEMILLER CONNIE NORWOOD **GEORGIA SIMMONS OLIVER STOCKWELL** SYLVIA WALTER

1975

JOHN BARRON JIM CORPENING AMY HODSON DAVID LADUKE JULIE POWELL **DEBBIE STAUFFER** DEBBIE CORCORAN JEANETTE DAVIS MARY ICENOGLE RANDY MANIS JAMES STANSELL JEANETTE WILKINSON

1985

DAVID ALDRICH INA BLOOM **BRAD CHRISTMAN WENDY DELG** GERALD KASSON JEFF ROBERTSON **BELINDA SKINNER**

CARIE BLANKINSHIP AMY BUNCE DON CURRAN II ROD HOFFER JANELL MARTIN MINDY SANFORD SCOTT STANSELL

W.W. I LECOMPTON MILITARY

We got two responses to our last newsletter of Lecompton Military men. We had in the names of registrants a name of Amaziah Howard Saielis(?). We now know that this was Amaziah Howard Shields, the father of Ann Shields Dunaway.

Shirley Rogers Williams wrote to say that her father Kirby Bunnell Rogers, son of Herbert and "Tillie" Rogers enlisted in the U.S. Army, served in France as a Machine gunner. He took part in some of the major battles, was hospitalized twice.

Kirby and his wife Jessie E. Jackson Rogers both attended Lecompton High School when it was held in Lane University building. He later attended Lawrence Business College, which later became a part of Kansas University.

LECOMPTON CAPITAL

THE BOOK "LECOMPTON CAPITAL WORTH REMEMBERING" MAY BE PURCHASED FOR \$10.50 AT THE MUSEUM OR \$12.50 IF MAILED.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

It is time for dues paying members to renew their membership. We now have 642 Life and Memorial memberships; 474 dues paying members, making a grand total of 1,116.

Life Members: Norma Jean Gomez (Brooke); Linda Lou Jasso (Ballard); David Dark

THE BEGINNING OF LECOMPTON

TOLD BY THE KANSAS WEEKLY HERALD IN LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS TERRITORY, SAT., JUNE 1, 1855.

This town is situated on the south side of the Kansas river, 50 miles from its mouth, and opposite the mouth of the Sautelle or Grasshopper River, the largest and best timbered tributary of Kansas. The site was selected by the proprietors, after having personally examined the greater portion of the Territory, as being one where the best advantages for the building of a new and large town were there immediately at hand. Limestone, material for brick, timber of all qualities, good spring water, grazing, and every comfort and facility that the pioneer can ask or expect, is at command.

The survey has been made by an experienced engineer from an Eastern city, and all streets, squares and reservations, have been made on a large and liberal scale. This site can be approached by all the principal road connections in the Territory and the proprietors are now busily engaged in making improvements for the reception and comfort of the Spring emigration. Settlers will find this place the most inviting-as every home comfort that capital can obtain will be furnished.

Contracts have already been made for erection of warehouses and hotel buildings, and a steam saw mill be in operation in a few days, which will burn out from seven to ten thousand feet per diem. Lithographs can be seen in all the principal cities of the Union, and on the ground. Any further information can be obtained by addressing Hon. S. D. Lecompte, Messrs. Spalding & Brady, Westport, Mo.; G. W. Clark, Potawatomi Agency; or by calling upon Messrs. Thomas & Wm. R. Simmons, at Lecompton.

THE KANSAS WEEKLY HERALD OF LEAVENWORTH ON SAT. AUGUST 18, 1855 REPORTS:

The young thriving and beautiful town of Lecompton-of which we have frequently spoken on previous occasions-has been designated by our Legislature as the permanent seat of Government of this Territory. We do not believe that a more desirable, beautiful or eligible point could have been selected for the location of the Capital. Beautifully situated on the Kansas

river, opposite the mouth of its largest and best timbered tributary, surrounded by a country rich in agricultural and mineral resources, accessible by all the principal roads in our Territory, the town of Lecompton possesses every natural advantage necessary to make it the largest and most beautiful inland town in our Territory. The situation of the town site is unsurpassingly beautiful, while its streets, squares and reservations have been made on the most liberal and unobjectionable scale.

TERRITORIAL OFFICERS SEPTEMBER 22, 1854

The following are the Territorial Officers, who will be among us in a few days, to start the wheels of government in Kansas. Andrew H. Reeder of Pennsylvania, Governor David Woodson of Virginia, Secretary Madison Brown of Maryland, Chief Justice Saunders W. Johnson of Ohio, and Rush Elmore of Alabama, Associate Justices.

THE CHRISTMAS VESPERS

AND

OPEN HOUSE

will be

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1994

at 2:00 P.M.

City_			State	Zip	
Name				Address	
]]	Other Contribution \$		
]]	\$50 Individual Life or Memorial Membership		
	[]	\$6 Annual Couple's Membership		
	[]	\$4 Annual Individual Membership		
Life m	nembe	ership is	for individual membership and \$6 for a couple's men \$50 per individual. contributions are tax deducted al Society, and mailed to Mrs. Iona Spencer, 1828	table. Checks should be made payable	
			N HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecompton, Kans rical sites. We are eager for continued membership		or the

• • • • Please Clip and Mail With Your Check • • • • •

OBITUARIES

Thurman S. Pete Edmonds of McLouth died Aug. 1, 1994. He was a farmer. He was born Jan. 9, 1912 the son of Edwin S. and Rachel Edmonds. He was active in various community organizations. Survivors include a sister Hazel and several nieces and nephews.

Una Elizabeth Krieder of Boulder, Colo. died Aug. 3, 1994. She was born Jan. 31, 1898 the daughter of James R. and Margaret Anna Graves Stockwell. She attended the University of Kansas and was active in civic affairs. She married Karl M. Kreider in 1918. He died in 1983. Survivors include a daughter, Margaret K. Larsen and a grandchild.

Inis Faye Liles of Topeka died Aug. 13, 1994. She was born May 24, 1933 in Big Springs, the daughter of Gilbert P. and Gladys Glenn Henry. She married Darrell "Bud" Liles June 23, 1950. He died Feb 10, 1986. Survivors include two daughters, Diana Loader and Debra Liles; a son Darrell Dean Liles; a sister Helen Humphrey; 4 brothers; Bert Guy Fred and Glenn Henry, three grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Waneta Jean Willits of Kanwaka died Sept. 29, 1994. She was born July 9, 1927 the daughter of Willis R. and Nellie Van Neste Colman. She married Harold W. Willits in 1947. He survives along with 2 daughters; Romona Willits and Lori Owens; two sons, Mark and Lance; a brother Clare Colman; seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. She was active in many civic and community organizations.

Hazelle T. Dyer of Lawrence died Oct. 19, 1994. She was born June 6, 1910 the daughter of John Millard and Etta Sophia Lutz Taylor. She received a bachelor's degree and masters degree in social work from the University of Kansas. She lived in McPherson and Lindsborg before moving to Lawrence three years ago. She married Silas Dyer in 1941. He died in 1979. A daughter, Carol Ann Dyer died in 1965. Survivors include two nephews, Donald and Philip Taylor; and a niece Barbara Carlson.

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