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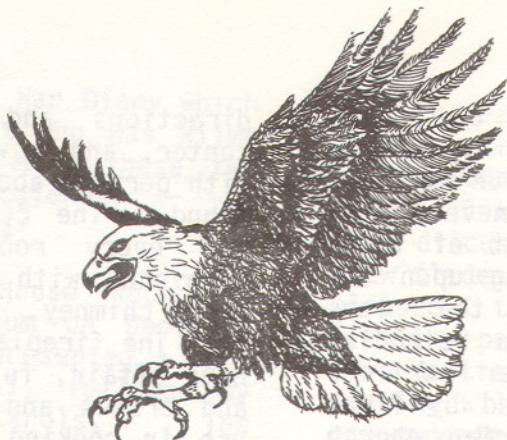
# BALD EAGLE

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EAGLE

VOL. 12 No. 1

LECOMPTON, KANSAS

SPRING 1986

RECOLLECTIONS OF A KANSAS TOWN

(Continued from last issue)

by  
William Christian Hoad

Part II

The Lecompton of my boyhood in the early eighties, was not quite so trim and orderly as it was in 1904 or 1905 when it was discovered by Professor Abbott, then at the University of Kansas. There were more sunflowers and sandburs and jimson weeds in the streets, and fewer stone paved gutters. There were fewer orchards and vineyards, but more hazelnuts and dogwood and wild crab apple trees, and the woods along the river were a perfect jungle of wild grape vines and Virginia creeper. There were numberless old ruins to explore, not yet torn down for the great blocks of cut stone of which they were chiefly composed. The higher hills around town contained great quantities of fine white limestone, easy to quarry and work, and of excellent quality for heavy masonry construction. The early settlers always referred to this outcrop as "the Lecompton limestone," and this name was later accepted and officially fixed by the geologists. Most of the earlier public buildings, and many residences, were built either wholly or in part of this beautiful and durable material.

It was romance galore to a gang of a half dozen boys, with a pup or two, on a long summer day to go

adventuring down to the old federal prison, with its narrow slits of windows and its heavy, nail-studded oaken door; to heave rocks down the fire-marked furnaces of the ancient lime kiln; to scale a rock bluff near the ferry landing, and to drink from the cool spring at its foot; to make echoes ring down cavernous old cisterns, in whose depths dark waters could be glimpsed wherein might live no one knew what strange creatures; or especially to climb the crumbling walls of the old Capitol ruin, an extra hazardous pleasure which every mother's son of us had been solemnly warned again and again never, no never, to indulge in. This old Capitol building had been laid out of such size and character that it could scarcely have been completed for five or six times the amount appropriated by Congress for it. The initial appropriation of \$50,000 was spent in laying about half the foundation and in carrying up three walls of one wing to a maximum height of perhaps thirty feet, when, because of lack of funds, the work was stopped never to be resumed.

A somewhat longer trip brought us to the top of the high ridge east of town, where we could hunt for fossils in the old abandoned quarries or frighten the bats out of the priest's house, and be in turn frightened by them, at the ruins of the old Catholic church. On the townward slope of this ridge had been the Irish quarter of the town and here the Roman Catholic Church, which seldom makes mistakes, had begun the erection of an imposing

church edifice. The home of the priest had been finished before the palsy struck the town, but the four walls of the main church structure never had a roof. Right in the heart of town, however, and still fronting upon the principal streets were the less ambitious foundations of a Methodist Episcopal church, the upper portions had been long ago destroyed by fire, and an abandoned Presbyterian church building, in whose silent belfry we used to hunt for young pigeons.

This Presbyterian belfry, with the disintegrating spire above it, fairly swarmed with pigeons, and these birds were game for anyone who would hunt them. Old Deacon Sellars was very fond of pigeons, but failing eyesight and other infirmities of age made it next to impossible for him to get them. The Deacon was a pious soul, and at prayer meeting could usually be depended on to start his favorite hymn--"When I Can Read My Title Clear to Mansions in the Skies." The boys of the town knew the deacon's weakness for pigeons, and although occasionally they brought him a pair of squabs, more often they made game of the deacon himself. It was a comical sight to see the old man, after perhaps his daily call at the post office, stumping furiously home with Ab Todd or some other graceless scamp marching along behind, just out of reach of the old man's cane, and singing in a nasal imitation of the Deacon's Wednesday night tones:

When I can shoot my rifle clear  
To pigeons in the sky,  
I'll bid farewell to pork and beans  
And dine on pigeon pie.

Occasionally our wandering took us clear out to the old "Stanton House," nearly three miles to the east of town.

This was built in 1857 or 1858 by Frederick P. Stanton, then territorial secretary, who saw the future Lecompton as a great metropolis and who built for himself and his posterity a worthy home on what was to be the future edge of the city, beyond the clamor and confusion of the business section but still within easy reach of the best society. The house was built after the fashion of a Virginia mansion, being a square stone structure with two great halls running through it in both

directions and intersecting at the center, and a wide colonnaded veranda with portico above, running all the way round. The ceilings were very high, and every room in the house was furnished with a broad fireplace and ample chimney.

The fireplace in the kitchen was a huge affair, fully equipped with hooks and cranes and other accessories for use in cooking. All the woodwork of the house was selected black walnut, and the door and window casings and other interior woodwork were beautifully carved. The house itself was set on a high hill overlooking the city, but also with a wonderful view of several miles of river and of the opposing bluffs beyond the wide stretch of river bottom to the northward. In the days of my boyhood this house was occupied by a farmer's family who spread their scanty household goods over a part of the lower story and used the upper rooms as storage space for grain. They were always glad to see visitors, for the nearest neighbor was more than a mile away. A visit to this old place was always a wonderful event to us youngsters, and not to us alone but to many an older person as well.

A good many of the first settlers were still in Lecompton when I was a boy, and it was my greatest delight to get them to tell me stories of the stirring early times. There was Colonel William Nace, the much loved "Uncle Billie" of a whole tribe of boys and girls, who ate his apples and rode his ponies to their hearts' content. "Uncle Billie" was a fire-eater from Mississippi who always rode a powerful bay horse, even about his own farm, and who for many a year never left his home and barnyard without a pistol in his pocket or a carbine slung from his saddle. There was William Leamer, a silent and serious man of business who had built Constitution Hall; and better still, Mrs. Leamer, whose recollections of people were more vivid and whose tongue was much more willing. Uncle Alec Glenn, from Tennessee, and his sister, Aunt Jane Wizer, with two or three others of the same warmhearted kind, technically not really and truly aunts and uncles but for all practical purposes just as good, or even better.

Finally, there was quite an assortment of honest-to-goodness grandparents and great-aunts and uncles who were always able, and sometimes willing, to recount the old time stories, or to show me just where the old post office stood, or how it came about that the rival town of Perry, situated about three miles away and directly across the river, had managed to obtain the melodious bell which we could hear on quiet days and which formerly sent forth its honey-tongued appeal to saint and sinner from the Presbyterian belfry in Lecompton.

The most satisfying of all these was my own great-uncle, William Henry Christian, who had been postmaster of the town during its most stirring period but who was now spending his more peaceful later years on a homestead farm a little way up the river. "Unc' William" was full of interesting stories and, after his pipe had got to going well, the asking of a tactful question or two was like stirring up the backlog in his own wide fireplace. A little judicious poking always brought forth a rise of sparks, some heat and uncertain crackling, and finally a clear and steady flame of anecdote and comment concerning the cabbages and kings of the earlier day.

One of Unc' William's stories of the post office I still remember. Hunting deer across the prairies was the greatest sport the country afforded, and the young men of the early settlement often indulged in this pastime. On one such occasion the post office was left in charge of "Dutchy," a stolid but dependable German to whom a wild race across country had no attractions. Dutchy was duly instructed concerning the high responsibility of his commission and in particular was directed not to leave the office unprotected even if the hunters should be away until late at night. As dusk approached Dutchy grew nervous and finally got a couple of muskets and loaded them up with heavy charges of powder and buckshot. He then sat down back in the office at a point commanding the door, and prepared to wait there in the dark until the time when he should be relieved. Upon returning from the hunt late at night

two or three of the hunters thought it would be fine to have a little fun with Dutchy. To this end they tramped up to the post office entrance with much stamping of heels and jingling of spurs, pounded upon the door with their revolvers and demanded to be let in. Dutchy inquired in a quavering voice, "Who vas dere?" but the only response was more vigorous pounding and hoarsely worded demands that he should open the door. The next thing the fun makers knew was that a charge of buckshot had come through the door with a terrific explosion and much splintering of wood, followed in a few seconds by another to speed their frantic flight. By some good miracle no one was seriously hit, but the pleasure of the evening was totally spoiled for at least some members of the hunting party.

#### READERS RESPOND

In response to a plea in the "Bald Eagle" for stories about living in Lecompton in earlier years, Bob Steinmetz sent the following communication. His experiences occurred some 50 years after those of Will Hoad, so there is quite a contrast.

The first portion of this article tells about his personal life, the second part about his boyhood days in Lecompton. We're grateful for his cooperation.

Iona Spencer & Sara Walter

#### BOB STEINMETZ

I was born in 1929 in Lathrop, Missouri, where my parents, Ray and Ruth (Baughman) Steinmetz were working on a livestock farm. We returned to Lecompton about 1933 and lived in several rental houses around town, moving frequently. Dad worked on WPA crushing rock to pave the roads. He also drove his own truck to haul crops, lumber and firewood. In 1935 I began school at Lecompton Grade School. Mr. Summers was principal and Helen Norwood was my first grade teacher. Also my second grade teacher. Teresa (Griffin) Anderson was my third and fourth grade teacher. I still correspond with her.

We left Lecompton in 1941. After WWII began Dad got a good paying job in the steel mills in Gary, Indiana.

After the war we moved back to

Kansas, where Dad farmed north of Williamstown. I finished high school at Perry in 1947. Got into printing and writing a column in 1947 on the Oskaloosa Independent. In 1951 I volunteered for the Air Force and spent a couple years in Tokyo working on Pacific Stars and Stripes, the GI daily newspaper. I came home to work at Hall Lithographing in Topeka for awhile and spent several years from 1955 to 1960 working for Ed Abels at the Lawrence Outlook, where we published the Perry Mirror, McLouth Times and Eudora News.

In 1960, Pat, my wife since 1951, and I moved to Florida with our four young'ns. We've been in printing, publishing and writing since. The past eight years, we've had our own printing company, publishing books and newspapers. I still write a weekly column for several newspapers. I've also written material for Phyllis Diller and Minnie Pearl. Oh, yes, to continue the bragging, I've had four books published. They are: "Jayhawking Florida Traveler," (1972); "In The Land of Funshine," (1973); "More Sun in the Funshine," (1979); and "Sumthin' in the Funshine," (1982).

We have six grown children and 14 grandchildren and live about a mile from the Atlantic Ocean in Boynton Beach, Florida. Blue Eyes (my wife) and I have a large motor home and travel a lot.

#### LIFE IN LECOMPTON CIRCA 1930-'41

By Bob Steinmetz

Growing up in Lecompton was fun when I was a kid about 50 some years ago. It was like being Opie on Mayberry RFD, only for real.

My Granddad was a tall, quiet man named Owen Baughman. His name is in some history books for having run the ferry across the Kaw River as a younger man. But he was old when I knew him with pure white hair and a heavy white mustache. His truss showed through his striped overalls.

He had a large apple orchard across the street from their small frame house. Once a day he would crank up the old Model-T Ford and go down to the Santa Fe train station and pick up

the sack of mail and haul it to the post office downtown. I rode along a lot and got to know the station agent, whom I think was named Mr. Taylor. He ran the telegraph, sold tickets and handled baggage and freight.

Once in awhile Granddad Baughman would allow me to tag along when he went fishing, which he did almost daily. His favorite spot was where Coon Creek ran into the Kaw River. This took some pretty strenuous walking to get to since there were no roads through the woods.

That's when Granddad would talk about the past -- almost reluctantly. He had run away from home when he was only 14 to become a cowboy. That sounded pretty wild to a lad of six who had trouble finding his way home from school. Another time he let it out that he had been in on the Oklahoma Land Rush. But he must not have staked out any claim, since he lived in Lecompton.

Once I asked him if he'd ever fought any Indians. He smiled his leathery grin and allowed as how he'd had one lone Indian shoot one arrow in his direction. "But he was about a mile away, so it didn't even come close." He thought it was more funny than dangerous.

Granddad pitched horse shoes a lot downtown, on the main street across from the grocery store. The pits were in front of the old hotel that was falling down in the 30's. A bunch of old men hung around and pitched horse shoes solemnly with little comment.

My parents, Ray and Ruth Steinmetz, sister June, and I lived in many different houses in Lecompton, including the one on the hill Dwight Eisenhower's parents were married in. It was a great place with a large garden and enough room for a pasture.

But my favorite spot was what I called the jungle, which was a patch of woods in the hollow with a small stream that ran through it, and sometimes didn't. There I could be Tarzan, an explorer or anything I wanted to be and the rest of the world couldn't find me, except my mother at meal time, or chore time.

My Uncle Don Baughman would occasionally take me down to the Kaw River bridge where we would take turns

shooting at turtles on the sandbars below. They were pretty well safe from me and Uncle Don would be nervous about me dropping his rifle in the river. The bridge was a rickety single lane bridge which was wiped out several times by floods. It was scary to drive or walk across.

One of my favorite spots to hang around was the blacksmith shop. It was at the top of the hill in a low building with a Prince Albert tobacco sign on the side. There was always a smoky smell and strong odors as the smithy worked his trade. He would let me pump the bellows to make the coal glow with bright red heat. This would heat the horse shoes so they could be shaped for fitting. It was just up the street from our house a short ways so I spent lots of time there.

On hot days one of the Hildenbrand boys would let me ride around town with him as he delivered ice in his pickup truck. We'd go by the ice house and load up then drive by each house in town. Each house had a sign in the window with 25, 50, 75, or 100 marked on each edge in large letters. These signs were turned with the number on top indicating what size block of ice was needed for the ice box that day.

No one had refrigerators. We had the primitive ice boxes with a box for ice on top and a storage compartment below for food. The ice melted slowly with the melted water dripping to a pan below. Some people simply drilled a hole in the floor to let the water run through. A large block of ice makes a lot of melted water so it was easy to forget to empty the tray and have water all over the kitchen floor.

At one point we lived on the best hill in town, the one that leads to downtown. Across the street was the telephone office, in a private residence. We could hear the operator answering and plugging in the switchboard.

But winter on the hill was something special. The older men, like my dad, began making large bobsleds capable of holding 10 to 12 people. Then we would have races to see who could slide the farthest or fastest. If the snow or ice was good, we'd go down past the grade and high school, make the corner by Wingfield's and

bottom out down by the creek near Crady's house. We'd laugh and giggle and forget all about how cold it was. Then we'd take turns dragging the heavy sled back up the hill.

An old fellow who lived next door to us had the contract to grade the dirt streets of town. He had a slow, but powerful team of horses that drug a heavy grader around. Occasionally I'd ride along with him, but it was pretty boring, hot and dirty. I don't recall the old fellow's name, though I'm sure most old timers do, but I do recall that one of his horses was named Dan. The women of the town believed instead of saying "Dan," as he urged the horses on he was actually saying, "Damn," but that was never proven. That was considered pretty risque in public back then.

When WWII began in 1941 our family left sedate Lecompton for the grimy steel mill city of Gary, Indiana. We never moved back to Lecompton although we lived nearby after the war.

Still today, 45 years and 1600 miles away, I still think of Lecompton as my home town. I hope the Jungle's still there and some lad is playing Tarzan and dreaming dreams. If so, he can be happy he lives in a place where they haven't blacktopped everything.

#### MEMBERSHIP REPORT

We, the Lecompton Historical Society want to thank all of you, who have renewed your memberships. We especially want to thank the members who sent in extra donations to help our cause. Your support is very much appreciated. If you have not renewed your membership, please do so as soon as possible, as in the future, we want to make a supplement for the newsletter listing all of our members.

Our membership now totals 717, with 397 annual members and 275 life members and 45 memorials.

Our new life members and memorials are as follows:

##### Life Members

Letha R. Cook (Glenn)  
Agnes Ruth McClanahan (Morriss)  
Susie B. Richardson (Boydston)

Marian L. Hyatt (Clark) --- A gift from her husband Ed Hyatt. Her grandfather, Rev. Marion T. Clark was a circuit rider out of Lecompton for the United Bretheran Church.

#### Memorial Memberships

Dick Boydston and Mary (Thomas) Boydston --- A gift from their children, Charley Boydston, Susie Richardson and Bill Boydston. The Boydstons at one time lived in the Bartlett house east of the Post Office. Christine Wenrich and Frances C. (Lippy) Wenrich --- Mrs. Frances Wenrich and her daughter Christine have been recent recipients of a memorial membership, as a result of a gift to the Lecompton Historical Society from the Christine Wenrich Estate. Mrs. Wenrich was a Lecompton teacher in the 1890's and Christine attended the Lecompton Grade school. Miss Wenrich gave many items of historical interest to the museum when it first opened.

Iona Spencer

#### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Lecompton Historical Society members will soon begin another year of hosting Sunday afternoon visitors and special tours at the Lane University Museum, continuing the effort to promote our historic community; and because of that effort, Lane Museum and the Lecompton Community is now being recognized as an interesting tourist attraction throughout the State of Kansas. As we have said many times, YOU are the individuals who have made the recognition possible, and we say "Thank You", again and again. If you are interested in a special tour of the museum for a group, club or family reunion, or school children, please contact Sara Walter at 887-6267.

Iona Spencer does a super job of keeping track of our membership roll, and brings new members in every month! Mae Holderman has also experienced a very successful year as Funding Chairman. We appreciate every hour (and we know it takes a lot of time)

you ladies spend in boosting this organization.

The Lecompton Historical Society participated in the Kansas Travel and Tourism Show at the City Auditorium in Topeka in January. This annual event gives us an opportunity to place Lecompton among other tourist attractions, including those from the largest cities in the State. Harold and Margaret Jasperson, Shirley Funk, Mae Holderman, Iona Spencer, Donna and Charles Vausbinder, Darrel and Joyce Colton, Rich and Karen McConnell, Jason and Avril Dexter, Opal Goodrick, David and Darlene Paslay, Karen and Malcolm Smith, George and Arloene Simmons all helped to set up, operate and dismantle the booth which displayed Lecompton's illustrious James Lane episode.

The Annual Territorial Day Celebration will be held June 28th under the direction of Connie Robertson. This is a great community event which provides the opportunity for former residents to return for the day. If you might be interested in helping with this, or have any helpful ideas to share with the committee, please contact Connie, at 887-6238.

The rehabilitation of the Winter School is proceeding and is "lookin' good." Senator Wint Winter would like to hear from anyone who might have any special memories about the school. They would appreciate information concerning the bell, and also the school number which was located on the front of the building. This is an exciting project for our community.

The Lecompton Historical Society will participate in the celebration of Kansas' 125th birthday with the unveiling of a unique painting of the Territorial Seal made and donated by Ellen Duncan. Not many people are familiar with this special seal which was used prior to Kansas becoming a State. The unveiling will take place in the Chapel of Lane University Museum at 2:00 P.M. June 28th---Territorial Day. We will also be celebrating the

publication of a Civil War Diary which was kept by John Scott who was Wilma Morris' grandfather. Mark these two events of your June calendar -- you won't want to miss them!

A Christmas "Open House" Reception was held at the Museum on December 22nd. Michael Beers presented a very enjoyable piano recital, followed by singing Christmas Carols. The highlight of the beautiful Chapel decorations was a 12-foot native pine tree from the Charley Paslay farm. Several people inquired as to how it was managed to get the tree inside the Chapel, and Charley and David Paslay and George Simmons could tell them "it wasn't easy." It was brought up the fire escape!

The Open House came about because the regular meeting had to be called off due to the ice and snowstorm, but it was such a success, we hope it can become an annual Christmas event. Almost 100 people attended, and the yearly photograph taken at this time for historical purposes turned out very nice.

Thanks to David and Darlene Pasly, George and Arloene Simmons, Opal Goodrick, Ione and Charley Paslay and Dorothy Shaner for helping with the decorations, and also to Opal for being in charge of the Reception, and to her co-workers, Louise Norwood, Janice Rake and Ione Paslay. We also want to thank Joe Stauffer, David Paslay, Jeff Goodrick and Bob Morris for helping remove the ice from the parking lot for that special day.

THE LECOMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Lecompton, Kansas 66050 is a non-profit corporation for the preservation of historical sites and artifacts. We exist because our membership makes it possible through dues, donations, and/or work. Since you have a common interest with us in historical preservation and education, you should join if not presently a member. Dues are extremely reasonable (\$2.50 per year or just \$50 for life for an individual) and other 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 mail the following information with your check:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Program Chairman, Janice Rake, has arranged the following programs for the coming months: On March 13th, Douglas County Extension Agent Bill Hundley will discuss concerns of gardeners, and show slides. On April 3rd, we are very pleased to have Congressman Jim Slattery present a question and answer Town Meeting program. Notice that this meeting will be held one week early to accommodate Congressman Slattery's schedule. On May 8th, Glenn Kappelman will discuss Lecompton Stamp Covers and early Douglas County Post Offices.

A recent edition of Kansas University Basketball Coach Larry Brown's Show featured the Historical Map of Douglas County that was produced by Adam Waite. A portion of the feature story had Sara Walter describing Governor Stanton's Home. It was great publicity on a statewide network for our community.

Recent additions to our outstanding collection of artifacts include ornate leather side chair by Fern Hadl Brenneman, religious picture in ornate frame from Barbara Hubert, 14 volumes of Hawthorne's Works by Maurine Roy, doll and turn of the century baby clothes from Betty Myers & Althea Ginder, and antique Christmas ornaments from Mae Holderman.

Thanks to the following people and groups for a job well done: the Lecompton Volunteer Fire Department for developing a plan of action in case we ever should need their help at Lane University, Bob Christman for

installing the fire extinguishers, to our Bald Eagle staff for producing a publication that is second to none, and to Sally Wright and Mae Holderman for preparing the 1987 budget for the Lecompton Historical Society. This all takes a lot of time which is much appreciated.

Paul Bahnmaier

#### MEMBER DEATHS

Mary Alice Teegarden passed away December 31, 1985 at Excelsior Springs, Missouri. She was born June 17, 1913 at Elmira, Missouri the daughter of Miller and May Peircey Bisbee. She was a medical receptionist for a physicians office in Topeka before she retired in 1975. She was a member of the Church of Christ and the Lecompton Historical Society. Her husband John T. Teegarden died in 1956. Survivors include a sister Mrs. Lena Benton and a brother Ross Bisbee. Burial was in Lawson Cemetery, Lawson, Missouri.

Phillip L. McClanahan, 81, died November 4, 1985 at his home in Osawatomie. He was born November 1,

1904 to James A. and Laura Case McClanahan at Herring, Iowa. The family moved to Belle Fourche, South Dakota where he completed school. Later he moved to Lecompton. He was united in marriage to Miriam Weis March 16, 1931. She died in February of 1977. On November 26, 1979 he married Eleanor Chase. He is survived by his wife Eleanor at the home, five sons, three daughters, three stepsons, one stepdaughter, 17 grandchildren, 16 stepgrandchildren, seven great grandchildren, twelve step great grandchildren, and two brothers Fred and James. Burial was in Osawatomie Cemetery. He was a member of the Lecompton Historical Society.

Ila B. Webster passed away Monday November 11, 1985 in Salina, Kansas. She was born April 6, 1908 near Tingley, Iowa. She and her husband, Osborne, operated the O.K. Webster Jewelry Store in Salina for more than twenty years. She was active in church work and was a member of the United Methodist Church of the Cross in Salina. Survivors include her husband Osborne of the home, a brother Vernon McMinn and two sisters, Irene Sanford of Lecompton and Doris Leonard of Topeka. Burial was in Gypsum Hill Cemetery. She was a member of the Lecompton Historical Society.

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