

Tired Group Of Men Located McPherson After Hard Task And Trip From Salina In 1872

Couldn't Find Marker After Eventful Trip In Stagecoach Over Trackless Prairie

By W. J. Krehbiel

Seventy-five years ago this coming June 4 a tired bunch of men clambered out of a rickety stage coach which had stopped at high noon in the middle of a vast prairie where there was soon to be a town called McPherson Center.

One of them, L. G. Skancke, a young land office clerk from Salina kicked the tall prairie grass apart eagerly hunting for something he didn't seem to find. The others, stretching their weary muscles, looked far and wide with straining eyes hoping to see something of interest—a habitation, a tree, an Indian or buffalo perhaps, but far as eye could see there was nothing but grass and sky and blazing sun. From their slight eminence, which they knew to be the McPherson Flats, they could see for miles but not even a hill or friendly shrub rose higher than the low montony of the vast prairie, sloping gently away from them in all directions.

They were hungry from their half-day ride from Salina but the insistence of Skancke won the help of James Marlin, Oscar Seitz, R. H. Bishop and surveyor T. J. Wickersham in searching until they found the stone set by the government survey to mark the northwest corner of section 28, township 19, range 3 west of the Sixth principal meridian, which was to become the north limit of the town they proposed to found.

After a hasty lunch prepared by the driver, Mr. Huebner, who had amply stocked the stage with edibles and drinkables, they moved a half mile further south and Skancke dug a hole at Kansas Avenue and Main street to mark the spot where the corners of the four quarter sections of the town-site met. Seitz broke ground to mark the corner of the lot on which now stands the Grand Building. Bishop excavated a spot to mark the corner of the present telephone building.

No one has recorded that they erected a flag or had other ceremonies though it can be conceived that they did some tall speculating about the future of what they that day had wrought on that endless prairie and that in addition to their lunch they paid due and proper respect to those jugs that did not contain molasses. Receding sun and trackless prairie, however, forced an early return to Salina in the hope of fording the treacherous Smoky before nightfall and to escape the ducking they had experienced there in the morning.

From McPherson Center to Lindsborg they saw no trees except a few far away at Paint Creek and those at the Smoky but they drove through lush prairie grass and bluestem that in places was six feet high. While great herds of Texas longhorns were at that moment grazing south of the Flats, the town founders did not

Don't Stop Your Paper

From the McPherson Republican of Dec. 25, 1879. No comment necessary:

"A certain man got mad at the editor and stopped his paper. The next week he sold all his corn at four cents below the market price; then his property was sold for taxes because he didn't read the sheriff's sale notice; he lost ten dollars betting on Mollie McCarthy ten days after Ten Brock had won the race; he was arrested and fined eight dollars for going hunting Sunday, simply because he didn't know it was Sunday; and he paid \$300 for a lot of forged notes that had been advertised two weeks and the public cautioned not to negotiate them. He then paid a big Irishman with a foot like a derick to kick him all the way to the newspaper office, where he paid four years' subscription in advance, and made the editor sign an agreement to knock him down and rob him if he ever ordered his paper stopped again."

McPherson College Was Founded Here In August 1887

"Impressed by the numerous advantages McPherson has to offer," the German Baptist Brethren in August, 1887, founded McPherson College, although the school actually did not begin until a year later.

There were no graduates at the first commencement program on June 4, 1888, but there was a program to celebrate the event and about two weeks later the school was the principal in "the largest transaction ever to take place in McPherson up to this time," when all the campus and college lots and the college annex were deeded to McPherson College.

At that time, there was a four-story 40 by 100 foot building and a 100-foot square main building was being erected. The college had 212 students, \$55,000 in cash and notes, and \$44,400 in real estate. Daniel Vaniman was new president of the board of directors, J. H. Peck vice-president and A. W. Vaniman secretary-treasurer. Prof. Sharp was head of the educational activities of the college.

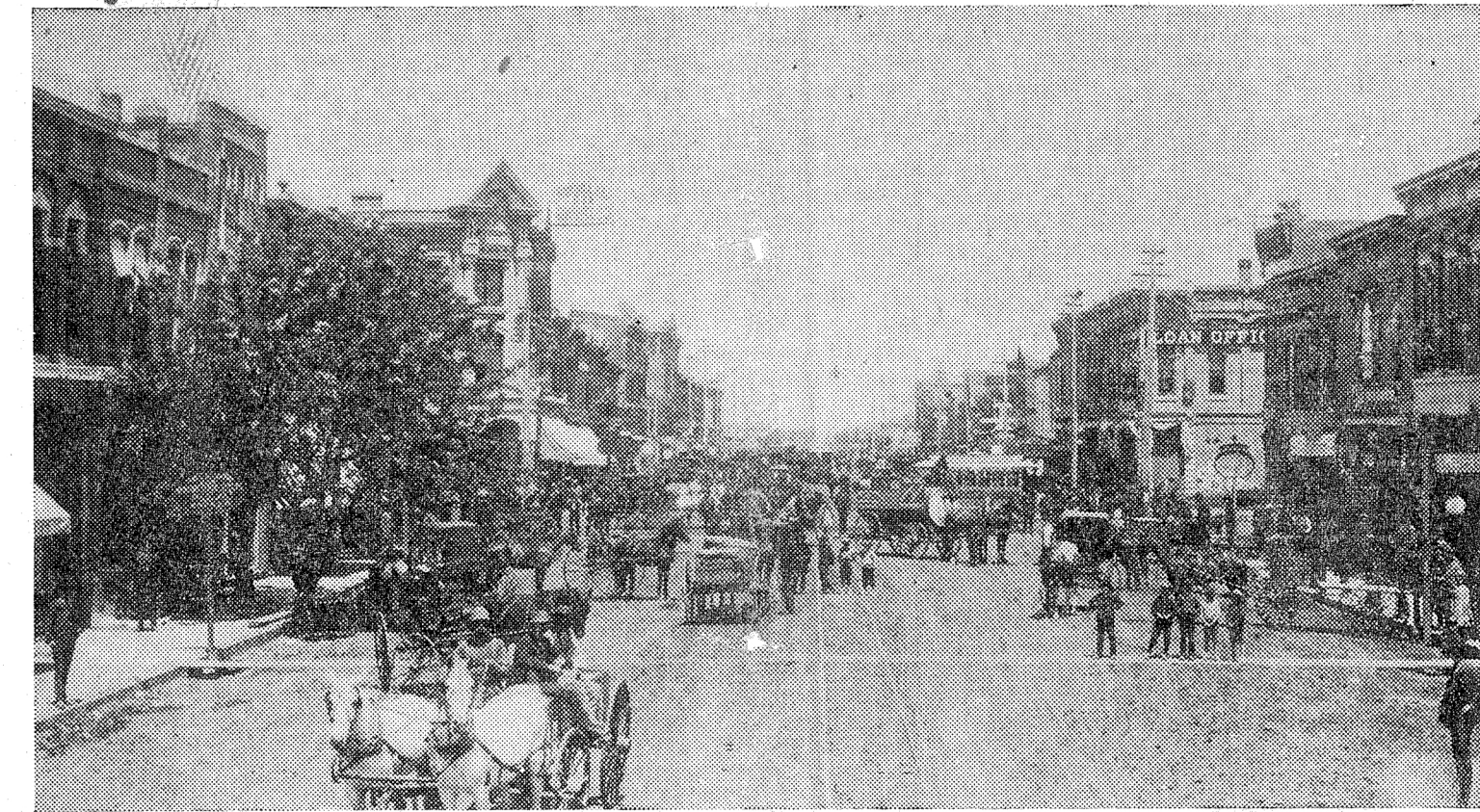
"One of the best and strongest denominational schools in the state," said The Daily Republican of McPherson College on June 21, 1889.

To The Point

From the dairy of George W. McClintick, written in 1878:

"January 3, 1874. The McPherson Coal Mining Company was organized in McPherson. . . . Joseph Finkle was elected president, H. Bowker treasurer, and M. P. Simpson secretary. "This company never accomplished anything."

Then And Now



A TREE GREW ON MAIN STREET—Trees and street cars, unfamiliar sights in McPherson today, were common on Main Street in the boom days of 1888, when this photograph was taken. It is looking south on Main Street from about Elizabeth Street. The big tree on the left is the maple tree that long was a Main Street landmark.



MAIN STREET, McPherson, 1947. This picture was taken from approximately the same position as the one above.

McPherson City Chronology

(Editor's Note: All the dates in this Chronology are as accurate as possible, but all dates are approximate and there may be some variance of a year either way.)

1872—Town staked out.

1872—First hotel, McPherson House, moved in.

1872—First building built in McPherson, H. Bowker Pioneer Store.

1872—First newspaper, the Messenger, by Yale Brothers, later became The Daily Republican.

1873—Town Hall completed at Marlin and Main.

1873—County seat moved to McPherson.

1873—C. L. Raff first McPherson postmaster.

1874—McPherson incorporated as city of third class.

1874—Sol Stevens elected first mayor, March 16.

1874—Judge B. E. Smith enlarged and opened McPherson House at Main and Kansas Avenue.

1874—Baptist built first church.

1874—First public school built at site of Junior High—is now a part of the Covenant church at Euclid and Ash.

1878—First bank, the McPherson, opened by Eli P. Williams.

1879—Marion and McPherson railroad (Santa Fe) entered McPherson in September.

1879—Salina and Southwestern railroad (Union Pacific) reached McPherson in December.

1880—E. A. Colburn and J. C. Hamilton built the Queen Bee mill.

1881—East side brick school at cost of \$12,000 took the place of the first school at the Junior High site.

1883—The great fire laid waste all of the west side of Main street from Marlin to Euclid.

1883—McPherson a city of the second class with G. L. McCourt as mayor.

1887—Missouri Pacific and Rock Island railroads completed.

1887—Street cars put into operation.

1887—Electric arc street lights on Main street.

1888—McPherson College opened.

Pioneer Queen Tells Story

By Mark Anson

In 1868, Mrs. T. J. Darrah came to McPherson County when she was four and a half years old. Her mother and father had come from Sweden, bringing seven children, four brothers older than Mrs. Darrah and two younger children.

"We lived like the other people near the Smoky in a dugout while we built a big log house. But perhaps the sod wasn't quite right, for when the fall rains came, they dripped down through the dugout like muddy gravy.

"My father and the four older brothers went out into the rain and hollowed out a hay stack that we used to feed our two oxen. Then they carried we three smaller children out to the hay stack and put us in the hollowed space beneath the hay to keep us dry.

"Even today it reminds me of a cat carrying kittens to safety.

"Our big log house was soon finished and it had a big fireplace, in which went logs which would burn all day. Father used to read us continued stories from a Swedish newspaper, tell us stories and

play with us in front of the fireplace.

"As I outgrew my clothes, as youngsters will do, father used to sit by firelight and candlelight and make me new ones.

"I'll never forget the first compliment I received. One time, all the men were out fighting one of the big prairie fires which were so common, when the dogs began to howl outside the window. We were frightened, but a few moments later several Indians walked in the house, all of them friendly ones from the encampment near us on the Smoky River.

"I was so relieved to see them, and so glad, that I made coffee for them. One of the Indians drank his coffee, then walked up to me, patted me on my head and solemnly said 'Good girl.'

"We often saw Indians in those days, all of them friendly, and my father traded with them."

Mrs. Darrah moved to McPherson when she was 17 years old and worked for several years at Bowker's store, until she married Tom Darrah. She has lived in

McPherson County Chronology

1541—Coronado discovered the Smoky mountains.

1803—Bought with Louisiana Purchase at 3c an acre

1806—Zebulon Pike crossed it to discover his Colorado peak.

1810—First freight caravan on Santa Fe Trail.

1812—Part of Missouri territory.

1825—U. S. treaty with Kaw Indians on Sora Kansas creek, now Dry Turkey near Elyria, to make The Trail safe.

1830—Part of Indian territory, the Kaws claiming McPherson as part of their hunting grounds.

1843—Don Chavez robbed and murdered on The Trail.

1854—Part of Kansas territory.

1855—Charles Fuller established his ranch and tavern on Santa Fe Trail 2½ miles south of Galva.

1856—John Corgan, later McPherson settler, drove The Trail and stopped at Fuller's Ranch.

1858—William West, later McPherson settler, drove The Trail with ox team to Colorado.

1859—Isaac Sharp settled in Harper township, the first white settler and gave Sharp's Creek its name.

1860—McPherson County was part of Peketon County, which extended to the Rocky Mountains.

1865—Part of Marion County.

1865—Wheeler built the Stone Corral on the Santa Fe Trail where it crossed the Little River between Rice County and Hayes Township.

1866—Gen. Custer and the 7th Cavalry at Stone Corral and Stockade for two years to watch the Indians.

1866—S. D. Shields opened first store in county, just northeast of Lindsborg.

1866—First settlers around Sharp's Creek, the Smoky and Gypsum Creek.

1867—Legislature established McPherson County and named it for Gen. James B. McPherson.

1868—Swedish colony settled west and south of Lindsborg.

1868—Major Holmberg opened a store at Sweadal, 1½ miles southwest of Lindsborg.

1868—Indians carried off Mrs. Bassett and baby.

1868—Mrs. T. J. Darrah crossed the Smoky in a wash tub.

1868—James Gerry ran a trading post on the Harker Trail in Turkey Creek Township.

1869—Sweadal named a postoffice.

1870—McPherson County formally organized at Sweadal.

1870—Legislature set present boundaries of county by lopping off six miles.

1870—Lindsborg incorporated as city of the third class.

1870—First school district established near Roxbury.

1871—Stone dam and mill erected at Lindsborg.

Early Settler In Windom Remembers Last Buffalo Hunt In The County

By L. E. Lindell

The last buffalo hunt in McPherson County was believed to have been staged in 1875 in the western part of the county south-east of Windom, and facts to substantiate this claim are found in a letter written by one of the early settlers in Castle Township.

This old settler was James Tudhope, who lived in Wichita at the time of his death in 1932. On April 23, 1932, from Wichita he wrote to C. E. Lindell at Windom about taking part in what he believed was the last buffalo hunt in McPherson County.

"The last buffalo showed up in a 10-acre patch of rye on the John Young homestead southeast

of Windom," Mr. Tudhope wrote in his letter. "That was in 1875. The neighbors for miles around were notified and they gathered on horses for the chase. Someone came and told me. My team was gone but an old blacksmith by the name of Spriggs was working at my place two days each week. He had an old Texas pony and I got on it and took an old Colt revolver and went after the buffalo with the others.

"The buffalo was a mile away when the hunt started and I never got within less than a half mile from the fleeing animal. I finally turned back but the others followed and he was chased east

The History Of McPherson County And Its Courthouse Makes A Dramatic Story

Thanks!

For the cooperation of dozens of people in McPherson city and county, without whose help this special edition would have been difficult at best, The Daily Republican wishes to say a special "thank you."

Mrs. H. A. Rowland, historian of the Daughters of the American Revolution who has an outstanding collection of data about the history of McPherson and the county, has been especially helpful in preparing this edition.

Mixed Group Of People Settled In McPherson County

As early as 1855, the first settlers began to make their homes in McPherson county. Probably the earliest permanent settler was Charles Fuller who established a huge ranch about two and a half miles south of the present Galva on the Santa Fe trail. Clara and Norma Noma lived with him and together they entertained travelers.

In 1856 John N. Corgan, later a resident of Delmore township, visited the ranch. In 1859, Isaac Sharp came from Pennsylvania and settled in Harper township on the creek which now bears his name. The same year a man named Peters settled on Sharps Creek and a man named Lewis settled on the Smoky near the present site of Marquette.

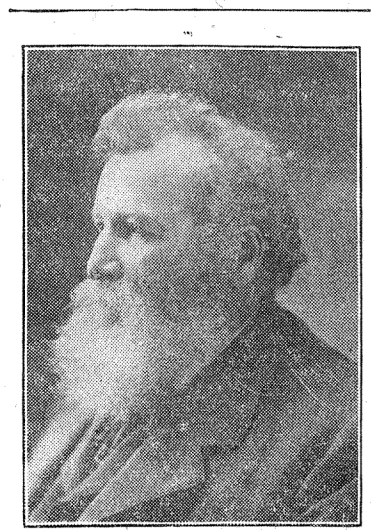
In 1866 people began flocking to the northern part of the county for homesteads. The Homestead Act had just been passed, the Civil War was over and now people wanted homes.

The Harpers, who gave Harper township its name, came that year. The Maxwells, Stephen Delano, the Stephens, J. P. Hughs, J. M. Claypool, the Mathes and a number of Swedish people settled in the region of the Smoky and Sharps Creek and the Reeces and Tolles settled on Gypsum Creek.

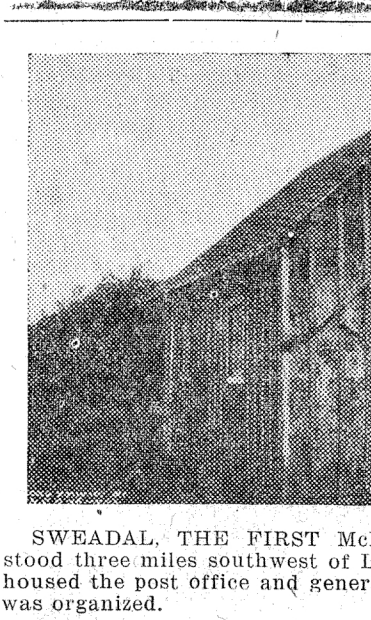
Following the organization of McPherson county in 1870, a group of Swedish people came to settle in Lindsborg. In 1874 the German Mennonites settled in the southern part of the county.

Between the two groups came Bohemians, to settle in Jackson township, the Ashtabula colony from Ohio to King City township, the Ashland Kentucky colony to eastern McPherson township, and Iowa group to western Canton township, and then a French Canadian group to southeast Meridian township.

There were others, too, who came without a colony—who came in covered wagons drawn by oxen to mingle with the others and swell the population of the county far beyond the figure of 738 recorded in 1870.



SOLOMON STEVENS, 1866—Farmer in Union, first mayor of McPherson, first state senator and later member of lower house. He received title of McPherson town-site direct from the government.



SWEADAL, THE FIRST McPherson County Courthouse, which stood three miles southwest of Lindsborg. In 1868-70, this building housed the post office and general store and here McPherson County was organized.

The First County Seat Was Sweadal, A Farm Two Miles Southwest Of City Of Lindsborg

By Ed Weilepp

The history of the McPherson County courthouse is in reality the history of McPherson County, for the life of McPherson County has been built around its courthouse, whether it be in the home of a county official or in the present building on North Maple.

And the history of that courthouse is filled with the drama of fires, elections, setbacks and events of great ceremony and pageantry.

The history of the courthouse starts on March 1, 1870, when Governor James M. Harvey answered a petition submitted by the 600 citizens of this area for the formation of a county. On that date permission was given to organize, and the first county seat was established in section 30, township 17, Range 3W and was called Sweadal.

Southwest of Lindsborg

Now Sweadal was the dream of L. N. Holmburg, a former Civil War major, who had built a house and general store on what is now known as the F. J. Swenson farm, two miles southwest of Lindsborg. Holmburg had obtained permission to open the first post office in the territory and it was his ambition to establish a town on the site.

Samuel D. Shields was elected chairman of the board of county commissioners with John W. Johnson as the other member. John Rundstrum was the first county clerk.

But the citizens of the new county of McPherson did not have the faith in Sweadal's growth which Holmburg had, and on May 2, 1870 an election was held for a new county seat. The winner was section 17, township 17, Range 3W, with 97 votes. This township is the present site of Lindsborg and the young county moved its "home" there.

Met In Homes

T. E. Simpson headed the new board of commissioners, assisted by James Weir and John Fern. On June 11, 1870, these men decided to conduct the county's business in their homes until a courthouse could be found.

George W. Shields of Lindsborg came to the rescue and on July 6, 1870, rented the county the second floor of his general merchandise store for \$4 per month for the county offices. The first meeting was held there on Sept. 5, 1870, the last meeting in Holmburg's ill-fated Sweadal having been held on July 30.

For the next three years Lindsborg continued to be the county seat, but on April 20, 1873, a petition carrying 483 names was submitted to the commissioners for an election to change the county seat. The election was scheduled for June 10.

A Building Offered

At this point a young upstart of a town in the center of the county, known as McPherson Center, made its move in the forthcoming battle for the county seat. The city leaders offered the county the use of the newly-built McPherson Town Company building, free of charge, for 10 years, and further offered the county any two squares (city blocks) in McPherson which the county officials might choose. This was on May 15.

The bait was too much to refuse and on June 10 the voters went to the polls and choose McPherson by an overwhelming majority. In the voting McPherson received 605 votes; New Gottland 325; King City 3 and Lindsborg 1. On June 14 it became official, for on that date the last county business was transacted in Lindsborg.

The county then picked squares

(Continued on Page Two)



NOT QUITE A QUARTET, but five McPherson men in their younger days made some good barbershop harmony and had a lot of fun. Do you recognize, left to right, Charlie Smith, Carl M. Anderson, Carl Grant, Peter Aurell and Arthur Phelon? The photo belongs to Smith.