

But For Fight, McPherson Might Be State Capitol Now

By Mark Anson

But for a streak of stubbornness in either the house or the senate, or a fight between the two bodies of the Kansas legislature, McPherson and not Topeka today might be capitol of Kansas.

The drive to get the state capitol moved from Topeka here was the biggest boom of the boom days of 1888 and the drive extended until 1889. For a long time, it was cut and dried that McPherson was to be the capitol.

H. B. Kelly, who was elected to the senate in 1888, was the spearhead of the drive, both before and after his election.

The drive started when the people of western Kansas became dissatisfied with a capitol in the eastern part of the state. In April, 1888, a "capitol convention" was called in Abilene and from throughout the state pressure groups poured to the meeting. A special train went from McPherson, with more than 150 boosters aboard.

At the convention, it was declared that "Topeka was a choice of necessity for capitol, but it is no longer a good place for the seat of the government." The convention debated long and loud on the merits of McPherson, Salina, Ellsworth and Abilene as new capitol and when the convention ended, it appeared that McPherson had sewed up the capitol, as the convention recommended that it be moved.

Even before his election to the senate, in 1887, Kelly had been fighting for the removal of the state capitol. Receptions for state dignitaries were frequent and even the legislature, which was also visiting Hutchinson and Wichita, was here.

The house was well represented although few senators made the trip and they missed a banquet which was served at the Union House. The menu included 50 dishes and then the legislators attended a meeting at the Opera House. Behind the speakers was a huge banner reading: "The First Session of the Legislature in McPherson."

The way was well oiled for the move of the capitol. The bill had a majority in the senate and a trade had been arranged with the house whereby the senate would pass a certain house bill if the house would pass the capitol bill.

But from there on it was pure conjecture what happened. Topeka papers referred to College Hill in McPherson as "capitol hill." Things still seemed set. But something unexpected came up.

It is likely that jealousy had a part in keeping the capitol in Topeka. As so frequently happened in those days in the legislature, a fight probably developed over some minor matter between the house and the senate. Neither would pass the other's bills. Wanting the capitol bill to pass, the senate held it, awaiting a better time to put it to a vote, a time when it would go through and the trade could be accomplished.

The days of the legislature dragged on and so did the fight. As the end of the session loomed, vital bills were rammed through. Still the capitol bill waited.

Finally, the legislature session ended, without the bill ever coming to a vote. McPherson had lost its chance for the state capitol, probably because of a petty grievance on the part of some legislator.

McPherson City Chronology

(Continued from Page One)

- 1888—First high school building erected on site of Wickersham school.
- 1888—Farmers Alliance Insurance Company founded in Jackson township.
- 1896 to 1899 Flower festivals and Main street parades.
- 1904—Balloon ascension on Main street.
- 1906—City Hall purchased.
- 1905—Free City Library established by vote.
- 1906—Walden College began—now Central College.
- 1906—County Fair began its 10-year life.
- 1907—First sewer system built.
- 1907—Town clock put in court house by popular subscription.
- 1908—City purchased water and electric plant.
- 1910—Y. M. C. A. built.
- 1910—City water and electric plant burned.
- 1910—Wickersham school built as a High School.
- 1911—Present postoffice built.
- 1911—Main street paved from Sutherland to Simpson.
- 1913—The Travelers' "Biggest Pourth of July"
- 1914—Central College took over Walden College.
- 1914—Park system started by club ladies in person cleaning street at Monument park.
- 1914—City began its commission form of government.
- 1917—"Only life size equestrian monument in Kansas" unveiled July 4.
- 1918—Present Junior High built.
- 1918—Present City Library built.
- 1923—Lincoln and Roosevelt schools built.
- 1928—Community building built.
- 1932—Dickey refinery now the BAY.
- 1933—Globe refinery now the NCRA.
- 1934—Washington school built.
- 1938—Present high school built.

McPherson County Chronology

(Continued from Page One)

- 1871—Ashtabula colony established King City.
- 1871—Roxbury laid out as Bloomingdale, later changed to Colfax and in 1875 to Roxbury.
- 1872—French Canadians settled in county.
- 1872—Kentucky colony settled east of McPherson.
- 1872—Illinois colony settled south of Galva.
- 1872—McPherson city founded.
- 1872—Daily mail stages (or buggies or horse and rider) between McPherson and Newton and Salina.
- 1873—McPherson named a postoffice.
- 1873—McPherson became the county seat.
- 1873—Bacon built a dam and mill and began Marquette.
- 1874—The Grasshopper Year.
- 1874—Mennonites from Poland settled south part of county.
- 1879—The Santa and the Union Pacific railroads completed to McPherson. Canton, Galva, Conway and Windom founded.
- 1880—Claus S. Lindell opened the Lindell House hotel at McPherson.
- 1881—Bethany College opened.
- 1886—Missouri Pacific completed to McPherson and Moundridge and Elyria founded.
- 1887—Rock Island completed through the county and Groveland and Inman founded.
- 1887—Missouri Pacific through Lindsborg from Marquette to Gypsum City.
- 1894—Present court house completed.
- 1903—Marquette tornado.
- 1905—Tested the Big Basin for oil but found only 800 feet of salt.
- 1919—County Hospital built.
- 1919—McPherson Chamber of Commerce dry hole found oil trace in the Kansas City line.
- 1926—First gas well in the county.
- 1927—First oil well in the county.
- 1927—Opening of Ritz pool.
- 1927—Opening of Voshell pool.

Pioneer Queen Tells Story Of Early Days

(Continued from Page One)

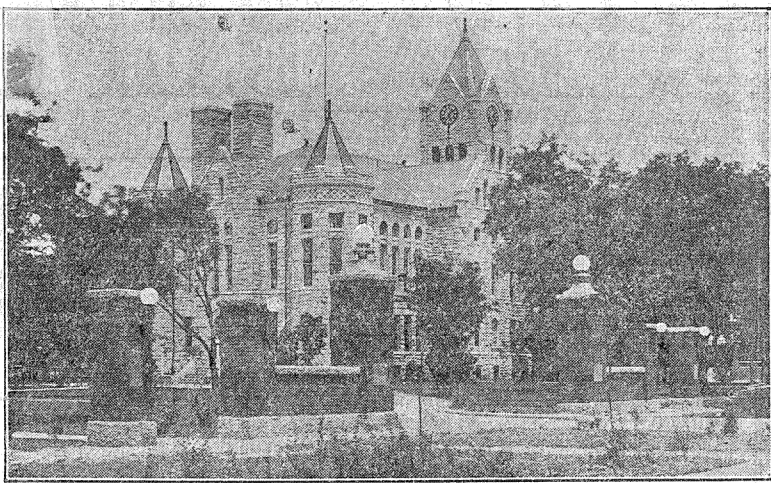
McPherson city or just outside it ever since.

But one of her proudest accomplishments is the airplane trip

she took last January, when she flew to Houston, Texas, to visit her great-grandson.

Now she contents herself at home by weaving and tending her many roses and other flowers.

Mrs. Darrah is a true pioneer queen.



THE McPHERSON COUNTY COURTHOUSE, standing on land donated to the county by the McPherson Town Company in the early 1870's. The courthouse was dedicated with great pomp and ceremony on May 1, 1894.



THIS IS THE OLD Farmers & Merchants Bank. At one time part of the county courthouse was housed in the second floor of this building. It is now occupied by the McPherson Hail Insurance Co.

Tired Group Of Men Located City After Hard Trip From Salina In 1872

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encounter any nor did they even see an antelope which they had been told were plentiful.

They bypassed Lindsborg, taking the east ford because that was nearer to Salina but likely also because they had little interest in that town of a half a dozen stores and the "court house", which they proposed to move to McPherson. From there to Salina

the "road" was discernable but not a house nor a tree broke the monotony of the vast prairie. Here and there a faint trail led to a dugout and in the distance the hills that fooled Coronado were silhouetted against the faint amber of the sun gone down.

Dreamers and planners they were but could little have expected what the next seventy-five years would do to that tired prairie.

Mrs. Charles McGiffert Recalls Early Days Of McPherson County History

Mrs. Charles S. McGiffert—then 12-year-old Della Riddell—arrived in McPherson county in February, 1874. Mrs. McGiffert was born near Pulaski, Iowa, April 12, 1861. Her father, the late Calvin Riddell, homesteaded in Jackson township in the fall of 1873, when the city of McPherson was little more than a year old. The family arrived in February of the next spring to settle on it.

The first 50 acres of the Riddell claim were broken by a neighbor for \$2.50 an acre. Corn was planted by hand, with a hatchet used to make a hole in which each grain was dropped. Vegetables also were planted and the crops grew luxuriantly in the virgin soil.

It was on a Sunday in July that the first roasting ears were picked from the green corn. As the family enjoyed its first meal from the products of McPherson county soil, Mrs. McGiffert's mother expressed concern over the sudden peculiar behavior of the chickens. It wasn't long before the family knew what caused it but even then they were unprepared for the full effects of the disaster that was about to befall. With a roar like that of an approaching storm, the air suddenly became filled with insects. The grasshopper hordes settled upon the lush field of corn and efforts of Mr. Riddell and his daughter, each riding a horse and pulling a rope between them, to frighten the insects away proved fruitless. By Tuesday only giant stumps stood where once had been a promising field of corn. The garden was stripped, the hungry grasshoppers even devouring onions in the ground. But they refused to eat the sweet potatoes and this crop escaped.

Prairie fires menaced the early settlers. Mrs. McGiffert recalling that she has stood at the old

home place and watched the flames sweep across the plains almost as far away as Little River. Her family had several narrow escapes and only the precaution of plying fire guards saved their home time and again. Spring winds swept the ashes of the prairie fires into great dark clouds—the "dusters" of the early days.

The prairies were literally teeming with prairie chicken and quail and Mrs. McGiffert can still hear in memory the booming of the prairie chickens on an early morning. Myriads of wild geese and ducks swept into that great natural refuge, the Basin, in fall and spring. The Basin was not far from the Riddell homestead and many an early settler provided his larder from the wild fowl that frequented it. In Mrs. McGiffert's opinion, the state lost one of its great natural treasures when the basin was drained to increase the acreage of farm land.

There was no school available in the community west of McPherson when Mrs. McGiffert came. Yet schools were soon built and in a few years after she came here as a girl, Mrs. McGiffert was teaching. She was one of the first teachers in the present Flora district. She helped organize Sunday school in Conway and took an active part in the church life of the community.

Mrs. McGiffert has made her home in McPherson nearly 30 years. She is still active in the Baptist church, being the oldest member in point of service in the congregation.

She is still active about her home and has a forward-looking philosophy about her that only occasionally allows her to think back over the long years since she rode in a wagon to ford the dark waters of the Smoky Hill. She has seen and been a part of an era.

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

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56 and 65 in the city of McPherson as its gift, the present site of the courthouse and the jail.

Set Up Offices

For \$10 C. T. Hilton moved the county's furniture from Lindsborg to McPherson and on July 7, 1873, the county set up offices in its new courthouse on the second floor of the McPherson Town Building, on the site of the present McCourt Hotel. At this time the present three districts were established.

For three years the courthouse remained here but on April 4, 1876, the county took over the first floor of the building and the second floor was rented as offices, principally to lawyers.

The Town Hall was built in the winter of 1872-73 but it, too, was ill-fated.

The county installed its first fireproof vault on Feb. 4, 1882, at the cost of \$500 and the old vault.

Perhaps the county commissioners had a sixth sense or were just lucky, but on Feb. 27, 1883, they decided it was time to move to larger offices.

The Courthouse Burned

It was just as well for on the night of March 3, 1883, McPherson's first big fire wiped out the entire west side of Main Street, from Marlin to Euclid, taking the courthouse with it. All of the county's records and papers, however, were saved.

On March 17, 1883, the commissioners signed a petition with E. G. Clark to rent offices in the new Clark Building which was then nearing completion. This building is the present Houghton Bakery Building. The county offices were on the first floor and the courtroom was located on the second floor. Later the courthouse spread out to include the second floor of what is now the McPherson Hail Insurance Co.

In the meantime, however, the county offices were located in whatever available office space could be found, on a "catch-as-catch-can" basis.

During the week of August 9, 1883, the Clark Building was finished and the county moved in.

Seek New Building

But the county was growing. It was becoming too big for rented offices and the courthouse fever reached the boiling point on Jan. 12, 1886, when J. M. Van Nordstrand and 270 others presented a petition for an election to subscribe \$75,000 in bonds for a new courthouse and jail.

This apparently was a little too much for the young county's blood for on Feb. 23, 1886, the proposition was defeated, 2,147 votes to 1,554.

By this time the courthouse had outgrown the Clark Building. Special offices were rented for the probate judge and the county surveyor had to have special offices in 1888, as did the county attorney in 1889.

Into Opera House

By April 24, 1889 the situation had become so bad, with the county's offices scattered all over Main Street, that the county contracted to take over the Opera House at the corner of Main and Sutherland. All three floors were rented, with the exception of the Main Hall, now occupied by the Mac Theater, at an annual rental of \$1,400. The jail was in the basement. The owners were the Opera House Co., E. G. Clark, president.

But a new courthouse was not to be denied McPherson County and on March 9, 1893, N. W. Bridgins and 57 others presented a petition calling for another bond election. This time they sought \$40,000 for a new courthouse and \$10,000 for a jail.

The Bonds Pass

The bonds squeaked by the special election on May 23, 1893, with 1,152 voting for the courthouse and 1,013 against and 1,112 voting for the jail and 981 against.

J. H. Haskell and J. F. Stanton of Topeka drew up the plans for the building and on Oct. 5, 1893, the sealed bids were opened. All were too high and were refused and Mr. Stanton was asked to revise his blueprints.

This was done and on Nov. 22, 1893, the contract for the work was awarded to James Jack of Hutchinson. Work was started immediately and on Feb. 8, 1894, A. G. Linn was appointed by the county to supervise the construction work.

Native Stone Used

Ground was broken in the fall of 1893 and the excavation for the building was completed in that year. The stone used in its construction was from the quarries near Strong City. The interior was finished in native wood. Commissioners during the erection included G. F. Byers, E. C. Tyler, George S. Bishop and J. W. Bean.

The day for the great event of laying the cornerstone was described in the McPherson Daily Republican as "perfect Kansas weather." The big parade to the new building was headed by 600 school children, followed by 22 old settlers and members of every lodge and club in the city. Thousands of people gathered from all over the county and the state.

Since the Masonic Lodge of McPherson was in charge of the laying, G. F. Grattan, then Grand Master, made the opening speech. More speeches, prayers and songs followed and the ceremony was not completed until after 1 o'clock that afternoon.

Cornerstone Filled

But the cornerstone was laid and in it were placed many interesting items including: Reports written by all Masonic Lodges in the county, by the Red Cross, the Knights of Pythias, the IOOF, the AOUW.

A copy of the petition for the organization of the county and the governor's proclamation establishing McPherson County.

A list of the old settlers.

The history of the county, its schools and its churches.

A copy of the first newspaper ever published in the county and copies of 10 McPherson County papers then published plus copies from outstanding newspapers in the nation.

The badges of all the lodges and organizations taking part.

Five 1894 coins.

Finished December 1

The courthouse was completed on Dec. 1, 1894, and five days later the county offices were moved.

Although a clock was added to the tower in 1907 and telephones in 1910, and the interior has been repainted and repapered many times, the courthouse, with the various offices located in the same rooms they now hold, stands today almost exactly as it did on that "perfect Kansas day" back in 1894.

It was G. F. Grattan who said that day:

"The entire public lay the corner stone of their courthouse. You are not only the witnesses but are the actors. You have made it historical. Your sons and daughters will count time from this event. Births, marriages and deaths will cluster about it. Sons and daughters in the years to come will tell theirs of the pomp and pageantry of this day. Let the sun, in his rising and setting ever behold a temple dedicated to law, justice, liberty and the ever living God."



E. C. CRARY, 1891—Marquette editor, probate judge, hardware merchant.

Early Windom Settler

Remembers Buffalo Hunt

(Continued from Page One)

and ran through a farmer's yard southeast of where Conway now stands. He finally came to bay in Big Basin west of McPherson. He was shot by a Mr. Gandy, of Castle Township, whose farm adjoined Mr. Young's farm.

"The meat from the buffalo was divided among all the chasers from our township. In those days buffalo meat was in most of the shops and I never saw much difference in it from common beef."

"I can't but laugh about how I could have battled the buffalo with that old-fashioned revolver. Half the hunters were riding bareback. We were a green lot, but we got our buffalo."

First Quarter Century Was Busy One For McPherson City

By W. J. Krehbiel

While the staking out of McPherson Center by the Salina men on June 4, 1872, was the first actual taking possession of the townsite, the promoters had incorporated the McPherson Town Company May 28, 1872, and had filed on the land in the government land office in Salina in the name of Solomon Stevens, who had in 1866 settled in Union township and who was to become McPherson's first mayor.

Time was short for those promoters. Events were momentous. McPherson county was soon to vote on moving the county seat from Lindsborg to the north end of the county and if McPherson Center was to become the county seat there must be a town and accommodations.

The serious threat to McPherson Center's future was the ambitious venture in town building called King City at the southwest edge of present Elyria. Those enterprising men of the Ashtabula colony, in coming to the country from Ohio in 1871, chose the King City location because it was near the Santa Fe Trail and was almost in the center of the county as shown on the map—and of course they proposed to make it the county seat.

They built hurriedly and well and King City was soon complete with a school house, a hotel, a drug store, a real estate office, a general store, et cetera—gossip has it, even a distillery. It was the end of the diagonal trail from Newton, to which the Santa Fe railroad had just been completed.

But what the Ashtabula men did not know was that the legislature had lopped a six-mile wide strip off of the south end of the county, giving two townships to Reno county and three to help form the new county of Harvey. There were bitter words that Lindsborg had conspired in the amputation so that King City would be less favorably located and not so strong a contestant against Lindsborg in the impending election for county seat. The Ashtabula pioneers were quick to support McPherson Center. William West on that memorable June 4 was conducting his King City hotel on wheels ready to move it to the site of the present Grand building, which he did that same month.

By the time West got moved, H. Bowker was putting up the first imposing building on the townsite, a story and a half frame about 24 x 40 feet for his Pioneer Store on the corner where the telephone building now is. On both sides of Main street there were hurriedly built up board

shacks, tents, and even half dug-outs, it is said, where business was setting up to capture spare dollars from the expected influx of new citizens.

Only eight years later both sides of Main Street for three blocks were almost solidly built up with substantial structures, the most imposing being the Town Company building where the Hotel McCourt now stands and which was to be the "court house." All the buildings were frame except two of stone—the McCann building at 103 South Main, which is still a part of the Daily Republican building, and the McClintick building at 204 North Main, which (I think) is a part of the present south half of the Gamble Store building.

In those eight years McPherson had laid sure foundations, outdistanced all other towns in the county, had built many homes and churches and was just ready to construct its first brick school building, which in 1918 was razed to make room for the present junior high. It had no waterworks but there were three town pumps on Main street—at Marlin, Kansas Avenue and Elizabeth.

Eight more years and McPherson was booming hard, building furiously and growing in population so fast that men of that day claimed 12,000 souls within its expanded borders. It had waterworks, an electric light plant, electric arc street lights, a college, and horse drawn street cars than ran three miles on Main Street and on Kansas Avenue from the Missouri Pacific tracks to McPherson College and the cemetery. It even had a lithographing plant which published an illustrated humorous magazine called The Vim. Four railroads had come to town and more were being projected. Little wonder the boosters found themselves in a campaign to move the Kansas capitol to McPherson. Then in the summer of 1888 the boom suddenly busted—as it did in every Kansas town of importance. Most men went about in a daze. Others frantically struggled to save a little from the financial wreck.

For the ensuing dozen years McPherson was sleeping off its drunk, beating slowly back with little to excite except the annual elections which always offered a bitter prohibition fight. At the turn of the century the men of Main Street entered the elections en masse with the slogan "Build McPherson." They captured the city government and really did build, as anyone may see from present day results.

Early Settlers Tell Of "Forests" In Early Days Here

McPherson County, far from treeless today, evidently had, in its past history, about as many trees as today, but in the years between 1825 and 1847, many have disappeared from some areas; grown in others.

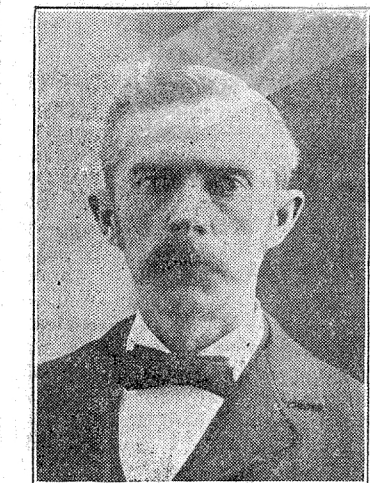
Col. Inman, in his story of the Santa Fe trail, tells how the treaty with the Kaw Indians was signed in 1825 in a "forest" on Sora Kansas Creek, now dry Turkey Creek near Elyria.

In 1866, on Gypsum Creek near North Branch were many trees, too. Sanford Reese and his younger brother, Lowell, tell of seeing buffalo lolling in the shade of trees on the creek bank. At the same time, however, early visitors to the present site of Lindsborg tell of seeing no trees "except in the forests along the river."

Two years later, Thomas Finan and Joseph Mullen "settled in an almost isolated part of the county, a timber region on Turkey Creek." According to other settlers, that timber included walnut, cottonwood and elm trees.

John Ostlund of New Gotland describes his father and other settlers building log houses in 1871, taking the logs from a wooded section on Community Creek, so called because all the settlers used the wood there. "Some of the logs were quite large . . . found a hollow log there that was possibly six feet in diameter. He cut six feet off of it and used that for a corn crib for years."

So while trees evidently flourished in parts of the country, ac-



J. W. WRIGHT, 1885—Loans, real estate and insurance.

counts of early settlers indicate there were none in the southeastern part of the county and none in Canton township. Canton settlers hauled firewood, however, from Gypsum Creek. Lone Tree township was another area with nothing in the way of trees. In fact:

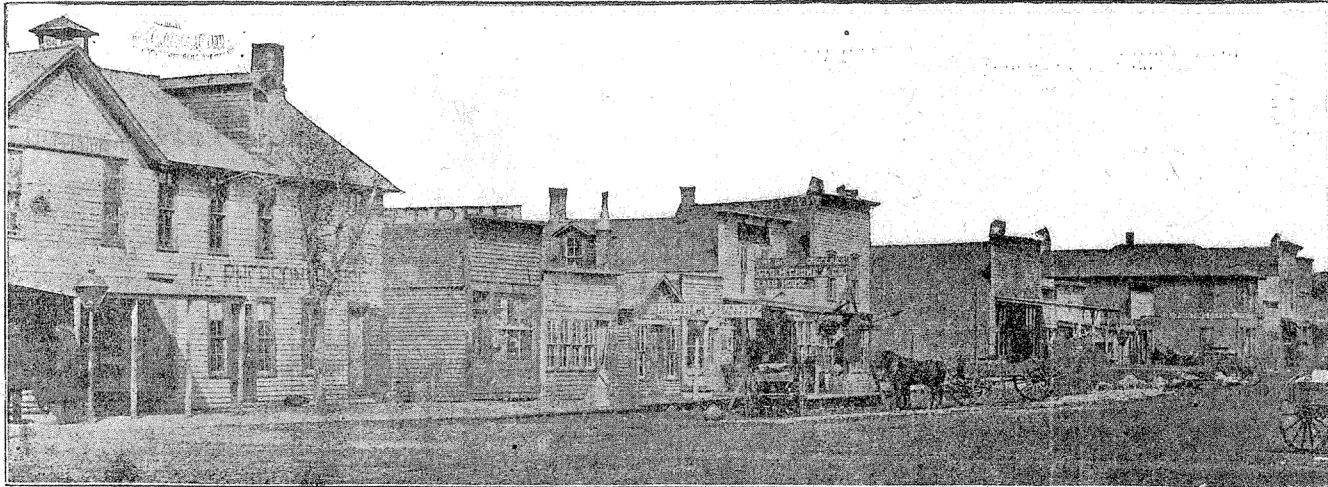
"Just west and one quarter miles west (of sw 4, sec. 22 of Lone Tree township) was Running Turkey Creek and on its banks in the northwest was a lone cottonwood tree, visible for miles over the flat plains. That tree gave Lone Tree Township its name."

And another pioneer remembers her mother crying on a trip east, because she saw trees.

Wampum, Indian word for shell-money, actually means "white," and was more formally called "wampum-peage," or "white bead."



THIS WAS McPHERSON'S Main Street back about 1880. This scene is a section of Main Street on the west side between Elizabeth and Kansas Avenue. At the far end of the block may be seen the Wheeler Building, one of the first stone buildings in the city. Much of the original material is still contained in the telephone building.



THE McPHERSON HOUSE, first hotel in the city, dominates the scene of the west side of Main Street between Kansas and Marlin taken about 1880. Notice the old style street light on the corner at the extreme left of the picture, and the tree growing in front of the McPherson House.